

## Are We Ready to Face The Challenge? 2-27-09

President Obama asks a question reminiscent of JFK's famous quote about asking ourselves what we can do for our country. Obama asks us to participate in the democratic process. He not only invites us to do so, he tells us with confidence that we can. We can make a difference.

Making a difference in our own personal lives and in our community is one of the most powerful capabilities we share as humans. I may not know how to play a musical instrument. You may not know how to re-wire that old lamp. However, we all can make decisions that will benefit our lives. We can do more than avoid hurtful decisions; those are obvious and it is not enough. We need to participate in good things and become more aware of what is harmful.

Believe it or not, it was thinking about food that got me to thinking about the importance of intentions, awareness and involvement. While writing about plant sources of protein last week and enjoying my spicy lentils, I was thinking of those great quotes by Michael Pollan, such as "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants". (*In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*) Now, talk about ability; Pollan can be succinct and intriguing like nobody's business! He advises, "Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food." He provokes me to think when he says, "You are what what you eat eats." Oh. Oh, yeah. I don't want to think about that but I need to. We all do. We need to be aware.

It is not easy to be aware at the supermarket. There, we are faced with a gazillion options when it comes to most anything. Isn't that a sign of our freedom?

When I take the time to look past the packaging and the sort of but not really claims about "real", "good" and "natural" and I read the fine print, I am reminded again of Michael Pollan when he tells us, "The sheer novelty and glamour of the Western diet, with its seventeen thousand new food products every year and the marketing power - thirty-two billion dollars a year - used to sell us those products, has overwhelmed the force of tradition and left us where we now find ourselves: relying on science and journalism and government and marketing to help us decide what to eat." (also from *Eater's Manifesto*) What is the intention of the "food chain" of people and corporations who create and market the food? Surely, it is not to make sure we are healthy. Surely, it is only to sell, sell, \$ell.

We live in a country with a capable and powerful government. We live in a country rich with natural resources. We live in the land of liberty. Yet, we are actually absconding our freedom to choose by blindly following fashions every time we don't read the ingredients, every time we let somebody else prepare, season and package our heat-n-serve food. We eat chemicals, hormones, colors and preservatives when we could be eating food; whole foods recognizable, even by our great-grandmothers.

In search of good food inspiration and attempting to rediscover how to eat a diet that is healthy, affordable, beneficial to the planet and delicious, I was recently re-reading my original paperback copy of *Diet for A Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé. In the forward she tells us, that, "Here, step by step, is how you, the individual, can improve your own style of life and at the same time help your very small planet." Looking at the recipes and the wealth of information on quality protein from plant, egg

and dairy sources, I wondered why I had strayed away from her teachings and fell victim to the notion that meat has to be the center of a meal.

I also wondered how Frances Moore Lappé was doing. What was she up to? What did she look like? Does she have children? If so, what did they think of their mother's ideas and ideals?

What a delight it was to go online and see her talking about her recent book, *Getting A Grip*. There she was, inspiring people to get involved, to take a good look at where their food comes from, who controls it, what's in it and what we can do differently to participate in determining the quality of our own lives. She is to saving the planet by making better food choices, what Annie Leonard is to saving the planet by reducing waste.

Frances Moore Lappé shares an interest and investment with Willie Nelson, Dave Matthews, John Mellancamp and Neil Young. Do you know what that interest is? They all help local farming by supporting The Food Project. According to their website, The Food Project "aims to create personal and social change through sustainable agriculture."

And what do these current celebrities share with Jonathan Winters, Jerry Lewis, Phil Silvers, Peter Falk and Buddy Hackett? They all know that it's a mad, mad world and we need to do something about it.

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