

FROM VEGAN TO BUTCHER, THE JOURNEY TOWARD

ETHICAL MEAT

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FROM VEGAN TO
BUTCHER

ETHICAL MEAT | MY JOURNEY

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME + INTENTION

Hello! Welcome.

This e-book lays the groundwork for the consciousness behind ethical meat. Because ethical food, in general, requires us to un-rig our thinking. Thank you for stepping into this work, and into a more meaningful relationship with your food, and yourself.

This short book is a testimonial from over 20 years of working on better food. During that time, I have been a farmer, restaurant owner and cook, a parent, a non-profit executive director, a consultant, an educator, and an everyday eater who is just as busy, sometimes confused, vulnerable, and yet somehow simultaneously as powerful as you are.

My mission is educating and empowering people toward food freedom through community building, hands-on re-skilling, and culture tending. This work is based on decades of study and experience and grounded in reality; never-sugar-coated. I live my mission through consulting, pop-up workshops, and meals, and in the ways I choose to show up in the world.

I observed, early in my life, that the systems we depend on and the ways of thinking that we take for granted deserve questioning and a healthy amount of criticism. As I've navigated this awareness while trying to live meaningfully and joyfully, I've also watched our planet, our health, and our communities decline. And I've seen people all over begin to notice that there are undeniable ties between the way we think and the way we eat, the way we eat and the way we feel, the way we feel and the way we behave, the way we behave and the legacy we leave. I watch person after person pose the question: could changing the way we eat, and the way we produce our food, lead to radical change that lifts all (or many) of these concerns and entrenchments?

The answer is yes. Yes, it can.

But change to food and agriculture is one of the most complex endeavors we can undertake. Because of this, it takes careful and attentive re-education, collaboration, and boundless integrity.

When it comes to the stewardship of land and bodies, does that really surprise us so much? I think not. What's more surprising is that we live and eat within a food system that is very much opposed to these ideals. It's time to shift the power balance.

I've spent enough time learning about food and agriculture to achieve expert knowledge- a telescopic understanding of how food works that sometimes feels like a curse, as well as a blessing. I've chosen to communicate this knowledge through the lens of meat because meat is an immediately controversial and delicate topic for humans, one that cuts right to the bone (pun intended) of our ethical, spiritual, dietary, ecological, and economic beliefs and archetypes.

I know this because meat used to be a very sensitive trigger for me. In fact, my earliest form of activism was veganism. I'll admit that at times I've tried to lose this part of my story, but over and over it is the thing that people ask about, come back to, and want to understand.

So. With this e-book, I will open the complexity of meat-eating and animals on the land, through a lens that you possibly haven't been given before. As I do so, I will share my story. My transformation and re-education about eating and living as a connected organism on this beautiful planet. My hope is that this book will leave you with more questions and curiosities than you started with, ready to dive into the difficult yet rewarding, complex yet approachable, fraught yet delicious work of participatory activism in the future of food.

Are you ready? Food freedom and empowerment await.



CHAPTER 1

**BIRTH +
THE EARLY-
STAGE
ECOSYSTEM**

Chapter 1: Birth, and the early-stage ecosystem

I didn't start out steeped in food tradition, or a connective food experience. I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, with my older brother and my mom. My Dad had left us when I was three, in fact, my earliest memory is of him standing on the landing of our split-level 80's home, the light shining behind him and outlining his silhouette as he was leaving. My next earliest memory is sitting on the bench seat of the U-Haul truck Dad rented, bumping up and down as we drove, looking through the strange green windshield while he told jokes about the lone ranger. And there was my mom. Sitting in the kitchen with the phone cord stretched across the room, crying, head in hands. None of this would come full circle for me until thirty years later, but the impacts came soon after. We moved from that house with the magnolia tree in the back, first to my grandparent's house, then to a small but lovely home in the protected community of St. Matthews. We could walk to school, we had friends on the block, and my mom picked up work as a pastry cook in a local restaurant.

I began to understand very early that we were lucky to be where we were. I didn't really know why, but there was lots of messaging throughout my early childhood about how fortunate we were to be living in the neighborhood where we did, that without the generosity of our landlady and our church community we would be in much worse conditions. And we had food. Good food: oven-fried chicken and moist pound cakes, homemade angel food cakes with the fluffiest icing on our birthdays, muffins from the restaurant, and homemade meals. But things changed again when the restaurant closed, and my mom was laid off. At this point I was in middle school, getting bussed to the even more comfortable part of town known as the Highlands, where I was surrounded by lots of kids who didn't have the same worries that I had at home. I remember more private tears, more time with my grandparents, and then we moved again. This time to a second-story apartment near the mall.

We were poor. This was clear. Not as poor as we could be, as I was reminded frequently, but corners had to be cut. Fast food, freezer fodder, and three grocery store cookies after dinner slowly began to become the norm, and my mom's huge recipe box sat idle more often, only to be visited at holidays. My mom was a home economics major in college for crying out loud. The woman can cook and bake. In fact, I remember her helping me craft a buche du noel, a very complicated rolled sponge cake, for my high school French class. Looking back, I'm struck at the contrast of skills and context. And I realize that as my mother's own hope and happiness declined, the quality of our food declined, and then health and happiness declined further.

The context I speak of is an underwater ongoing struggle with anxiety and depression that my mother, my primary guardian, tended secretly throughout my upbringing. We all have it: trauma. Some of us have more complicated trauma than others. It's not something I share to be cavalier or unfair. It's something I share because it had a deep impression on my understanding of the world.

The result of that context is that I grew up with a certain kind of example. I experienced my parent as sad, unconfident, nervous, joyless, and withdrawn. At the same time, I saw a person

of incredible intelligence and moral courage, with a strong religious credo for understanding herself and the world. Mixed messages confused me. Why did we speak and sing of love and joy in church, but not feel it at home? Why did we speak and sing of hope and peace at church, but learn that some people were wrongful sinners, and not welcome in our community? And if to be fully actualized and accepted was to be free from sin, why did I feel sinful sometimes? As in, angry, impatient, selfish, lazy, or resentful? Didn't other people feel this way too? Why was sadness not named sadness? Why was anger not named anger? Why were these feelings shamed when they appeared, or hidden, or denied?

My young mind struggled with this confusion. And reached an understandable conclusion: that the world would unfold according to how exceptional I was, despite suffering. Perfection, against the odds, was the key. Early on this meant preserving others' feelings and not upsetting them. (As an emotional child, I failed at this quite often.) It also meant staying inside of a strict comfort zone. A small world where challenge and adventure were limited. I remember there was persistent discomfort with certain everyday things. New situations required repetitive, detailed planning. Fun? Fun was in there, somewhere, but strained and periodic at best- mostly brought to us by outside sources and individuals from other places. Ridiculousness? Goofiness? Never. Honest conversations about the way things are and how it feels, as opposed to the way things *should* be? Spartan. I think you get the idea. The world was a dangerous place that had to be navigated and overcome. And people were likely to betray you. And joy was not acted out or lived. It existed in our vocabulary only when we sang at church about the fruits of the spirit. We certainly didn't explore that joy might be created from the simplest of means.

Now, to be clear, all of this felt very normal for a very long time. I assumed something was wrong with me when this way of computing one's way through a "dangerous" world was considered odd. To corroborate this belief of my own inadequacy or weirdo-ness, I was bullied at school. I didn't understand what kids did for fun, I didn't know all the popular cable TV shows or music, I was "ugly", pimply, awkward, insecure, and "different." I steeled myself and fought against it with my intelligence and my quick humor, but I didn't understand the role that my elaborate early wiring of nervousness, separateness, and overcoming-it-all-through-exceptional-performance was contributing to my struggle. I watched people who seemed to be less confused and inventoried their attributes. I reasoned that if I could assume some of those attributes, I could pass for normal. Really. I did this. Maybe you did too?

Messages from home life to measure success and happiness	Messages from the world to measure success and happiness
Purity/piousness/religion	Be attractive
Integrity to ultimate degree/morality	Have money
Intelligence and achievement	Do crazy stuff and make people laugh
No frivolity/ridiculousness/extra-ness	Consume the right TV and music
Work hard/help out/think before acting	Have happy/cool family
Be exceptional to beat the odds	Be better than others at something (or lots of things)

	Be MOSTLY like everyone else, but different enough to stand out. This should not be confusing.
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LOL. SO messed up. Let's funnel this down, from a child's point of view. Since I was a kid who perceived herself as *lacking*, all these messages lent themselves to A LOT of anxiety and striving. *What, I thought, do I have control over?*

Well, EVERYTHING on the left side was subjective. A built world of attained excellence. So, check all those boxes. I could control those, right?

MOST THINGS on the right side I didn't have a ton of control over:

- Attractiveness...well maybe. Maybe if I worked super hard on that, wore the clothes other people wore, did the body movements they did, worried about my weight, etc.
- Money: nope. Don't got it. Next?
- Do crazy stuff to make people laugh: I can do this. I can be a clown. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. This is a tricky one. Study hard. Do child-style risk assessments constantly. Is this a decent moment to clown around? How will this land?
- Consume the right TV/music: hmmm. Tricky. Binge-watch lots of stuff at Grandpa's house. Is MTV the thing? OK. consume lots of this.
- Have a happy/cool family: uh...what? I guess I can pretend that's the case.
- Be "better" than others: ok. This squares with the left-hand column of home-based messages. Go hard on this one.

Wow. It kind of sucks to sum this up this way. I wonder if you are doing this same inventory right now, from your childhood. What was going on? What were your messages? What did you instruct yourself to focus on?

With all of that in mind, what I want to zero in on now is that moment in middle school when that early-age wiring of me against the odds began to collide with an awareness of the larger world. My concerns ballooned from family, home, and my peers to the broader injustices in the world outside of school, the Highlands, and the state of Kentucky. And as you can imagine, the patterns I saw were very alarming to me. But I was ready for it. I was armed with the drive and the intelligence to be a force for good. After all, I was raised to strive.

I had a teacher who was very worldly and interesting. He gathered certain students into a club we called Ubuntu, which is a Nguni Bantu (from Southern Africa) word that can't really be described in English because it embodies an idea of living. Roughly, it represents community care and describes the idea that care for the community and care for self is inextricable.

The Ubuntu club was about social and political awareness, community service, and critical thinking. I don't remember a ton about what we did. The thing that I remember the most was watching those PETA videos. (PETA stands for "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals", for those of you who aren't familiar). One day at the club gathering, we watched videos of

industrial meat production facilities, which depicted cruelty to animals, anguished and angry humans, and deplorable environmental conditions...all in all a world of suffering. My reaction was horror. My conclusion was vegetarianism. This vegetarianism lasted throughout high school and carried me to college, where it morphed into veganism. I wore the mantle proudly, truly believing that not eating meat was the single most powerful thing I could do to make a statement and affect change. It felt radical. It felt immediate. It was also, to my young mind, a way of becoming more perfect, exceptional, and good. And I believed it was better for my health. I believed all of this, and shared this opinion widely, for about 8 years.

I didn't see that my veganism was mostly affecting me, exonerating me in my own eyes, or feeding my anxious tinkering with the table of messages that I had received throughout my life. I wasn't educated about the systemic issues that plague the entire food supply chain, issues that aren't even specific to meat. And so, I thought I was doing something radical and helpful. I also thought I was doing some rag-tag version of healing, according to my upbringing: do less harm, be better, and all will be better. It turns out I wasn't doing anything radical or helpful, and I wasn't healing myself.

What you'll find next is the non-linear and messy story of my re-education, my actual healing, and my transformation from a child who felt outside of the world and separate from it, who chose to galvanize that identity through angst and vegan fundamentalism....to an empowered woman with a passion for facilitating mindful connection in the world.

But before we do that, an interlude. Let's examine my attitudes toward land, animals, health, and ecosystems at this stage in my own journey. We will do this together a few times as I unfold my journey for you. I believe this will achieve two things: it will communicate that context is everything, and that our beliefs about fundamental concepts that drive our decisions are rooted in and informed by circumstances and our responses to them. This is a very, very important concept in ethical meat activism. Second, it shows change over time, as context changes, as consciousness changes. It shows the living nature of everything, which is, ahem...the point of this whole book.

Land: Let's be real: I had ZERO consciousness of land at this point in my journey. Truly. For the first two decades of my life, land was not on my radar. I think if I was asked about land, I would have said, "what do you mean... like, nature?" And nature I would have equated with the woods that we visited at Bernheim Forest or Girl Scout Camp. If you've already read my full book, you know that experiences in nature had a formative effect on me. But when we really question young Meredith's concept of "land" it's non-existent. It certainly isn't something young Meredith is in conversation with. It is the dark forest between the tent and the latrine and she has no flashlight. It is the upness of the hill to hike, the mesmerizing otherness of the waterfall crashing over the rocks. It is not where food comes from. Food comes from the freezer, from the grocery, and from the restaurant. Recall that I lived in an apartment. I didn't even have a "yard." So, "land" was not a concept or physical entity that I interacted with or presumed needed conceptualization. It was either wild, or it was "the environment" that needed to be "saved".

Animals: Animals were either cute or terrifying. When I was very young, I was deathly afraid of large dogs and fiercely protective of small things like birds and chipmunks. Later, we got a pet dog (medium-sized, fluffy), and did a horrible job of caring for her, to be honest. Animals were pets or squirrels and things. Bigger animals lived in zoos or were wild on other continents. And cows and pigs were a wretched lot that we kept in cages and mistreated, and their poop was messing up “the environment” and it took xx gallons of water to feed xx numbers of animals and all the parts and pieces were confounding and wasteful. But for sure, what’s important to note here is that young Meredith had no premonition about what animals were for, and why they existed. Therefore, I did not articulate any kind of position on *how* humans should (or should not) be in relationship with animals, other than... I guess.. to leave them alone... over there...wherever they were.

Ecosystems: Ecosystems were rainforests and oceans and forests. “Wild” places where humans shouldn’t be messing around. Ecosystems were somewhere else, away from cities, farms, families, etc. They needed to be protected and saved. I had posters.

Health: My earliest concept of health was very messy. Health was being skinny, basically. Exercise and extreme dieting fought with my relatively normal teenage appetite to create a fraught relationship with food. My mother, who struggled with her weight and her health, contributed to this narrative. Despite what I did, health seemed to be a situation of good genes and good luck, neither of which I believed I had.

See? I was a low-income city kid. I wasn’t popular at school. I ate whatever stressed my mom out the least. I was dissatisfied with the world. I was angry at it. I was angry at people. I needed something radical and bold. Veganism was it. I want you to see that I bring you all these thoughts amidst an ongoing journey. I don’t want you to think I arrived at ethical meat neatly, quickly, or gracefully. It’s been a long and weird road.



CHAPTER 2

GROWTH + ORGANIZATION

Chapter 2: Growth and Organization

I was into art and environmentalism, and through Ubuntu and other outlets, I did a lot of community service. This got me on a track, so to speak, with my education. Remember, the mantra was achievement, integrity, and perfection to beat the odds. Achieve and you will lift yourself from poverty. Achieve and you will thwart the bullies. Achieve and you will go somewhere. So, I achieved, dangit. I wrote essays and got myself into schools other than my district school. And, according to my mother's instructions, when I first crossed the threshold of high school, I believed that achievement over the next four years would be the only thing that would save me. And so, I excelled. College was non-negotiable, and the only way it would happen was with a scholarship. Soccer, elite choir, grades, creative writing, art, work, rowing, advanced classes, mock UN, go, go. Go. When the time came to go to college, I had a few soccer offers, and one community service scholarship from a little school in the mountains of North Carolina called Warren Wilson College.

A few kids from my high school had recently gone to Warren Wilson, so it wasn't totally off my radar. It's a small liberal arts school with a history in farming, nestled in the mountains of western North Carolina. In my mind, it was a hippie school, a place where other good misfits go. This was appealing. Also, it wasn't in Kentucky. It was out of state! A frightening yet promising escape. Then, I went to visit, and let me tell you: when young apartment-complex living Meredith first found herself carving around the turns on I-40 through the Smokey Mountains--something opened.

The blueness of the sky. The greenness and closeness of the hills. The wildness of the rivers and hollers and peaks. Everything in my body said yes to it. And looking back, I realize that what called to me was the land. I realize now that I decided to go to Warren Wilson College for lots of reasons, but none more so than because of the way I felt in the lap of the land here, where I still make my home. We'll come back to this. At this point- I didn't know that in my bones. I just said yes, packed up, and moved to North Carolina.

And guess what? That mess was HARD. I hated it at first. I was a very homesick, very uncertain, very insecure college freshman. But I didn't really want to go back, so I stuck with it. I leaned into achievement, finding peace and acceptance in my creative writing program, where I excelled. Finding solid footing in community service trips and work. At Warren Wilson, students were required to do work on campus, on an assigned crew which could range from auto shop to cleaning, farming on the campus farm to providing campus security.

Once I was settled in, with a solid core group of friends for security and my writing studies to "master", I coasted for a bit. But it didn't take long for that to prove itself as shallow as it was. Something wasn't right. I became disillusioned with the writing program, which was based on British and American literature only (when my interest was in World Literature), and I became very upset by the social scene at the college, which was quite brutal and hierarchical based on the "status" of the student work crew that one was on. Crews like farming and forestry and landscaping were elite. Crews like cleaning or library or community service (where I worked),

were not. In this structure, the horrors of my childhood were played out in a new language. And it didn't compute with my achievement-based solution framework, my overcome-it mentality. I pivoted between a dark and angry depression and a false I-don't-give-a-shit front. It was messy.

Then, I got a call. A teacher at a nearby local high school for youths who had dropped out or been kicked out of their district high school needed volunteers. He was creating a garden for the youth in the former baseball field of the school, needed help, and figured Warren Wilson would be a good place to start. I assured him it was. I agreed to help organize groups of students to work with the garden, and (probably in my own repressed desire to "fit in" at my college, where the cool kids were the dirtiest), I agreed to take an internship giving dedicated help to the project.

The outcome of this was transformational in my life. First, I got into the soil. This happened by accident, but my initiation to gardening and farming, through my work with those high school kids was life-changing. I saw a ball field that one couldn't sink a shovel into at the beginning of that season. By the end, after cover cropping and composting (entirely new terms for me related to concepts I had never even considered), one could sink the shovel's head all the way into the ground. This! This was what I wanted to write *about*. This healing of the ground, the magical production of plump and wondrous food from tiny seeds, this mimicry of the lushness of the mountains in the ground at my feet... was the most real thing I had ever encountered. It brought the allure of the forest into a digestible, tangible lifeway. It was a way of marrying that wild and free way I felt "in nature" to my everyday livelihood. As I write in my book *Pure Charcuterie*, it seemed to me, in farming, that 2+2 made 90. It was everything. I was hooked.

After a steady amount of time volunteering in that school garden, I made a drastic change. I switched my major from English and Creative Writing to Environmental Studies and Sustainable Agriculture. It was the last semester of my sophomore year. I drank joyfully from the firehose of completely new classes and information: chemistry and agriculture classes instead of Shakespeare and Literature of the Queen Ann Period.

The other major thing was that I fell in love with the high school gardening teacher. I had never been in love before. I had not even had very many relationships. We became engaged in my junior year of college. I was only 20 years old. In addition to the gardening that we were doing at the school, we were also doing food production at our homes. We decided we wanted to farm. By my junior year, we had tomatoes in the backyard of his rental, and a plan to sell them at the local farmer's market. Soon after our wedding, we bought a house in nearby Old Fort, North Carolina, and were leasing land down the road for a market garden.

So. Right out of college, at the age of 22, I started a farm. And soon after, a family. It was fast and furious. While my peers were trekking the globe, couch chilling, partying, or earnestly job hunting while working service jobs, I was pushing out babies and planting seeds, starting a farmer's cooperative, building greenhouses, applying for grants, hungrily learning everything I could to make my business a success. Looking back, I'm absolutely floored by how quickly I tried to scoop up the whole world and put it into our life and business. In many ways, I see now that

it was the same earnest, anxious, scared yet hopeful energy to achieve that I had carried, unhealed, my whole life.

At first, we were raising A-Z vegetables using organic practices, marketing through a CSA, and weekend farmers' markets. At one point we sold at 4 farmer's markets every week.

In many ways, we were successful. We were early on a wave of new interest in local food. We were well connected in the community because of the work at the school. He (my now ex-husband) was and is a very entrepreneurial and enterprising guy. And I was, and am, very smart and decisive. We were a good team, in a lot of ways. As some who knew us might say, a "power couple" in the movement for good food. But there is always the other side of the story, isn't there? You, dear reader, already have some of the inside track on that story: that I was going too fast, carrying unhealed trauma, and operating from a distorted mindset that sought to check the right boxes:

- Be good, be innocent (be vegan)
- Gain Acceptance by Achievement (excel in business, start a family)
- Overcome (push past it, perfect yourself and it won't matter)

Now, aside from the shakiness of the above manifesto, the other thing cracking at my foundation during all this is a pure fact: farming is hard! It's risky, emotional, and physically as well as financially demanding to farm as a means of activism and community participation. Farming is risky emotional and physical labor that is financially and physically demanding even if you're *not* running a farm business as a means of activism and community participation. Let's visit how that work and its lessons were changing my attitudes toward land, animals, ecosystems, and health.

Land: At this point, I had a strong conceptualization of land. In contrast to my younger self, land was now at the root of everything: how we ate, what supported our homes, and what supported our vital waterways. The land was everything. Our interactions with it, as humans, deserved deep and critical review. The dominant paradigms for farming: monocultures (vast plantings of just one crop), heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers, diversion of water resources, transgenic seeds, and water pollution were ruining land everywhere, and poisoning food. Animal agriculture was still the root of all evil, the ultimate example of our relationship-with-the-earth-gone-wrong.

Animals: Animals were a part of agriculture, which was now within my realm of understanding. Food did not come from the grocery, the freezer, or the restaurant, but from agriculture. My lifeway and manifesto became better agriculture, and the pursuit of forms of agriculture that were more sustainable for land, water, and healthy food. Animals were not part of this equation and existed in a separate and noxious form of agriculture that needed to be eradicated. Still, there was no examination of the purpose of animals in environmental systems, and no consideration of whether humans had an obligation toward a reciprocal relationship

with animals. We needed better agriculture, better soil, and higher quantities of vegetables. Animals were not a part of this vision for me.

Ecosystems: Ecosystems were now everywhere. A farm is an ecosystem, just as a forest or an ocean is an ecosystem. But now, my consciousness included “good” parts and pieces of ecosystems and “bad” parts and pieces of ecosystems. “Good” parts included plants, bees and butterflies as well as other pollinators, and humans practicing sustainable agriculture. “Bad” parts and pieces of ecosystems included livestock, people practicing problematic agriculture, fast food joints, and industrial food (especially meat!).

Health: My concept of health entered an entirely new realm. Health was now based on the *choice* to eat whole plant-based foods and support local agriculture. And in my mind, it was as simple as that.

In early-stage ecosystems, there is a frenzy of activity. The first organisms to establish are bacteria, insects, and other organisms that can reproduce quickly and *make fast use of scant resources*. This lays the groundwork for higher forms of life. Hopefully, as I lay out my story, the components of my consciousness and the pattern of my journey are starting to track like a developing ecosystem. You can probably reflect on these same patterns in your own life, too. Thus far, I think you’ll agree with me that everything I’ve laid out for you so far is pretty earnest, unhoneed, and simplistic. While there has been some development in my thinking about the world and my place in it by now, there’s a complexity that’s missing. And similarly, as ecosystems evolve, they become ever more and more complex.



CHAPTER 3

COMPLEXITY

Chapter 3: Complexity

I'd have to track the moment that I began to embrace complexity to a small rural village in the north of Vietnam. I had the opportunity to visit Vietnam with a college group in 2004, (before my marriage, and before my kids). While I didn't grasp it fully at the time, my experience in Vietnam was another pivotal and life-changing one along my journey.

I spent most of my time in Vietnam in the city of Hanoi, and while I was farming at the time of my visit, I wasn't necessarily visiting to learn about agriculture. I just went to experience whatever I could. Fortunately, some of the time that I spent there was in a rural village in Hai Duong province in the north, helping to build a school brick-by-brick, and being hosted by a female farmer named Loi.

Loi raised vegetable crops and rice in cooperation with water buffalo. She and her children regarded the water buffalo as pets, in a way, but they also used them for work. They rode the buffalo, used them to till the soil, milked them, slaughtered them, and ate their meat. One day, after working to mix limestone for mortaring bricks, side by side with Loi and several other hardworking women who continued to push me from the mortaring pit, and discourage me from assisting, I was feeling particularly worn out and angry. Loi sensed my distress, found a translator, and approached me. She put her hand on my shoulder while speaking to the translator, who nodded and conveyed her message to me:

"She wants you to know that the limestone will burn your skin. The women are trying to keep you safe. She says they find you very beautiful and they do not want you to become hurt."

Her message left me floored. Not only did my anger completely dissolve and re-animate into awe and appreciation for all that I had not understood, but I began to see things that I hadn't seen before. For example, all day these women had worked in the limestone pits *barefoot*. They had been insisting that I use gloves and a mask, yet they remained bare-handed and maskless themselves. Lastly, this perception of beauty absolutely rocked me to my core. To me and my peers, the Vietnamese women were beautiful and "exotic." But to them, we were the same. I don't remember how I responded to Loi, but I remember that a fast friendship formed. Later that evening, as the sky began to darken, we gathered closely with the other women, and Loi began to sing a song. It was beautiful, and I still remember it to this day.

"What does it mean?" I asked her.

Again, she went to find a translator. He came to me and said,

"Her song is about all the people in the world living in the same house and speaking the same language."

The next day, I went to Loi's house for lunch. I toured her farm, met her water buffalo, and sat in her kitchen on the dirt floor while she cooked. In Vietnam, it is a gesture of friendship to place food in another person's bowl. So, when Loi suddenly extended her spoon toward me and placed a stringy piece of water buffalo into my dish, I faced an immediate and complex decision. I was, after all, vegan. But I knew in my gut at that moment, that to reject this food would not only be scoffing at a friendship but also at the lifeway of my new friend.

So I ate it. And in that quiet, wordless moment, a spark ignited. I believe that moment was the ground zero in my pursuit of a meaningful relationship with meat.

I'd be lying if I told you that the lessons Loi taught me all clicked into place at once. They didn't. That's not how these journeys go. But what I know now is that Loi and her water buffalo planted a few seeds in me that would incubate until they had the right materials to sprout in my life.

One of those materials was a meat enterprise on our farm. That's right. Some years after my trip to Vietnam, we got chickens. This was mostly spurred by my then-husband, and by a real need for some fertility on the farm that we wouldn't have to buy in bags. After the success of the poultry enterprise, we got cows. And then we got pigs. And the farm that started as a veggie-centric endeavor quickly became more focused on pastured meats.

This is where it gets interesting. We chose to begin specializing in meats because we were making higher margins on the meat products, reducing the time required for the very labor-intensive endeavor of market vegetable production and getting the amazing benefit of the animal's inputs to the farm ecosystem: saliva, dung, and urine.

However, we were turning over half of our gross profits to the slaughter facility that was slaughtering and processing our animals. After much research and thought, we decided to open a butcher shop. This would allow us to pay the slaughterhouse to slaughter the animals under USDA inspection (a requirement for meat re-sale), but then we would take the animals whole and process them ourselves, into fresh cuts, sausages, and other products like bacon and deli meats. Not only did this change the way we organized overhead costs, but it also gave us more control, more choice, and more flexibility in our business.

The mission of the butcher shop was to make the best use of the whole animal, and to revive whole animal eating by selling only whole animal products, both from our farm and from other local farms to a hyper-local, walk-in customer base. We reasoned that the changes to some key parts of our model would make selling the whole animal easier than it was at farmers' markets, where we most easily moved steaks, ground beef, and roasts in the wintertime, leaving cuts like flap meat (from the flank), side meat and plate meat (from the belly and ribs), shanks, fat, and feet languishing in our freezers. These key changes were:

- 1) Consistent retail hours where we could have reliable and ongoing face-to-face contact with our customers

- 2) The ability to offer fresh cuts, as opposed to strictly frozen meats
- 3) The ability to create new and unique recipes such as smoked and cured meats, and generally offer a much more vibrant and diverse base of products.
- 4) A small restaurant space attached to the shop would allow us to get rid of waste from the butcher cases and cook and serve what we could not sell fresh.

These changes were positive. But there were other things I did not foresee. The following list is a brief (and by no means exhaustive) overview of the problems I faced in making the shop successful. Many of these obstacles I could only see in hindsight and could only in hindsight understand the extent to which they were limiting business. Now, I recall them in my consulting and teaching and analyze them with clients. In this way, they have become gifts to the cause. They are:

- 1) Inconsistency in the meat we offered, due to inconsistencies at the production level on our own farm, and due to offering meats from other farms with different production practices. Systemic issues touching this are degraded animal genetics and degraded land.
- 2) Inexperience and insecurity in managing retail and restaurant employees. I had employees stealing from me, undermining me with family members, colleagues and vendors, and a lot of difficulties establishing a good workplace culture through effective leadership.
- 3) The high cost of food for the scale of the restaurant operation we were running. In order to have enough fresh produce and side items to accompany the meat, we had to maintain a list of vendors for those items, and our demand for ready-to-eat meals and lunches was not large enough to qualify for many order minimums.
- 4) Our failure to secure enough operating capital at the get-go, so that when our initial start-up investment ran out, we had to very quickly “have it all figured out” in order to keep up inventory and maintain terms with our vendors.
- 5) The persistent lack of education at the customer level, such that even though we now could prepare the whole animal for our shoppers, they were still only prepared to buy steaks, tenderloin, ground beef, sausages, and sliced deli meat.
- 6) Impending disaster at a personal level. As it turns out, my family wasn’t doing so well. Amid trying to run several businesses, we did not take care of our relationships.

Land: My conceptualization of land was growing and becoming more complex. I was fascinated to see the land and its memories reflected in each animal that came into the shop. I was able to see that each animal told a story, about the bounty of the land and the scars upon it, the difficulty entailed in trying to raise animals naturally after so many years of indoor, confinement production had been normalized. Because I was specializing in meat, I was also being introduced to a community of people who specialized in animal agriculture. Their story was that land needed animals, a story that was all new to me but had been backed up by my experiences with Loi. I began to learn about managed grazing, the impacts of forage on soil and animals, and other intricacies of farming systems that used animals as an integral part of the farm

ecosystem. It became crystal clear to me that the dominant story of “land” was not the whole story. Again, my conceptualization, based on perspective, evolved.

Animals: As my understanding of the land evolved, so too did my understanding of livestock. No longer were domesticated livestock a definite scourge to land. Their scourge was actually a matter of how they were managed in confinement by industrial agriculture corporations. If managed differently, they were dynamic players with which humans are in a complex relationship. I could see, in the carcasses that came through our loading dock, that this relationship was ancient and new all at once. Some animals are genetically predisposed to muscle problems, some animals put on fat differently and have different characteristics based on how they have been bred to grow and mature by humans. Some animals bore the signs of stress or mistreatment during life or at slaughter. Some animals cannot even reproduce on their own because of the legacy of industrial agriculture, and their shape, texture, and taste tell that story. I began to see that the “problem” of animals was one of human creation. It was a problem that spanned generations (a few human generations, and MANY, MANY animal generations), and involved genetics, ecology, and economics. Somehow, I knew that this complex relationship was of grave proportion, colossally misunderstood by most humans, and strangely moving for me, the former vegan. I didn’t know then how pivotal this understanding would be for me, eventually.

Ecosystems: Ecosystems finally included livestock animals at this point. I saw clearly that cows, sheep, and goats were ruminant herbivores who could eat grass and forbs that humans can’t eat and convert them to food. I saw clearly that monogastric livestock like chickens and pigs were dynamic recyclers, playing their role in the farm ecosystem to turn waste into food. I saw for myself on the farm, and learned through science, that ecosystems that have these animals incorporated are more diverse at all levels- from the microorganisms in the soil to the above-ground plants, birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. I saw that removing these animals from farm ecosystems had a winnowing effect on the overall healthy function of those systems.

Health: Health was evolving rapidly for me. As I began to understand the importance of well-raised animals on farm soils, waterways, and plants, I began to learn about the impact of well-raised meat and fat in the diet, and its impact on brain growth, digestion, DNA, and overall health. I raised my children on an omnivorous diet, rich in animal fats, organ meats, milk, and eggs. I had reached a full-scale reversal of my prior beliefs about food, land, and health. I believed then that lack of information was the single greatest obstacle to people’s health. If only everyone knew what I now knew, they would want this food, too.

As systems reach complexity there is a level of organization that *seems* inevitable and final. Both in natural environments and in our bodies and lives, our consciousness tricks us into believing there is an absolute design over which we have control. But nature is always continuing, building complexities, and crushing them to chaos all at once. Death is inherent. Required. Inevitable. Death is part of life, as we will very soon see in my journey.



CHAPTER 4

COLLAPSE

Chapter 4: Collapse

This is a difficult chapter to write. I'm about to give you a very honest, very controversial, and very surprising piece of my truth. Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for listening. What follows is the story of my first death.

Before I do that, I need to assert that physical and mental health is tied intrinsically to food activism. I hinted at this in the very beginning of this e-book, when I spoke about how my family trauma impacted the environment in which I was raised, and how the environment in which I was raised impacted my beliefs about the world and the way I responded. It feels important to return to it now, before we dive into the details of how my farm and my family failed. While the experience you are about to read is very specific and may at first seem unrelated to the food movement, business, and farming perspectives I have woven for you thus far, it is a very important part of this story as it relates to *healthy systems stewardship* (which is what ethical meat is all about). As I write this, over a decade after it happened to me, I also reflect on the many farm families I have counseled and consulted for who have had impending emotional and/or mental health crises at the center of their business conundrums. As of this writing, farmers consider suicide more than almost any other social group. And, suicide claims more lives globally every year than other causes of human death. Even wars and violence. Even if suicidal ideation is not at the forefront of farmers' consideration, poor quality of life, maxed-out mental and emotional capacity, high risk, despair, climate anxiety, and other stressors plague the food movement from top to bottom. So what I am about to share is a vulnerable confession of my own spiritual divide.

Community and spiritual well-being *must* be a part of our conversation about business, economy, sustainability, and ethics. Especially in alternative movements that seek better systems to the status quo. Here is my story about what happened when well-being fell by the wayside in my own life and business endeavors.

As we were doing all the work of managing our farm, butcher shop and restaurant, my husband and my best friend came to me with a proposition. And it was a big one. It is probably going to surprise you. It may make some people want to stop reading. But I urge you to stay with the trouble. In fact, being able to face discomfort and ugliness is what this chapter is all about.

So, what was their request? They wanted to join our families. They wanted to enter a polyamorous relationship involving me and my husband and my best friend and her husband. In this relationship, we would share partners. I would be in a relationship with both my husband and my best friend's husband, and she would be in a relationship with both her husband and my husband. We had been very close, as families, for some time. Her kids saw me as a second mother. My kids saw her as a second mother. We were in community. Why not tear down all the walls and make one big loving family?

If polyamory is something that is new to you, I know how this sounds. It sounded that way to me, too. Heck, I grew up in a super religious family. I was doing everything I could to "be good,"

“be perfect,” “innocent,” and “right.” Remember? So needless to say, I was terrified, and in many ways not excited about the idea. At the same time, the child within me who had struggled with so many mixed messages about the way the world feels versus the way the world is, something about polyamory appealed to me. It felt revolutionary. After all, the meaning of it is “loving many.” That felt natural and invitational. Instead of isolating self and family, polyamory offered a way to go back to the village, to be helped. To hold more and be held by community.

Even within the prospect of these offerings, I was very conflicted about their proposal. I avoided it for a while. Then, it kept coming up. I aired my concerns with my husband, that while it seemed revolutionary and radical and cool, it felt dangerous. I feared it would lead to our demise, that we may not be able to trust everyone. That I didn’t want to be in a relationship with her husband. He assured me that our relationship would always come first, and that he was trustable. He asked whether I wanted to be a part of something different, radical, and more loving and connective. I did, but I had doubts. To those, he said, “Nothing can come between you and me. You are my #1.”

Looking back, I know now that I was immediately in crisis when that conversation happened. But at that time, when it was happening, I did not necessarily see that. I saw a clear dilemma: If I say yes to this, I risk everything because I open my life and energy to other people, who have their own desires and traumas. If I say yes to this I also take a chance at working toward a radical way of living and loving. If I say no to this, I don’t get to make a crack at revolutionary family and love. And if I say no to this, I risk everything because I admit that I don’t trust the people closest to me, and I risk their resentment and their blame throughout the rest of our relationship. Or the risk that they will seek each other out regardless, if in fact their motive is simply to be with each other, rather than to be “loving many.”

I said yes.

One of the conditions, or ground rules, was that if it wasn’t going well, anyone could voice a concern and it would stop. I said yes partly because of this rule. I said yes partly because I thought the risks of being the naysayer at the outset were greater than the risks of putting everything on the line. Humbly I can also confess that I said yes partly because very simply: they wanted me to.

Now. We could go down a huge rabbit hole about what I have learned about intuition, trusting my own opinion and voice, and making empowered decisions since this moment. But we will do that slowly throughout the rest of this story. What we can hopefully agree on now is that I was making this decision for the wrong reasons. Ignoring the voice inside of me to fulfill some half-baked idea of what was possible even without any facts to support it. *Ignoring the worst-case scenario to please people whom I felt I needed in order to be safe, loved, and worthy.*

Just writing that truth makes me tear up for my old self. There is such deep compassion I have for her now.

Well...the worst-case scenario happened. All the ground rules were broken. What followed was ten months of insanity-inducing trauma. From the very moment it all started, I was shamed, ignored, lied to, gaslighted, and left to manage the unstable energy of my friend's husband, who was in despair over what was happening. I was told that my frustrations and anger over being abandoned by my husband emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually were temporary and for me to get over, my fault for being jealous and possessive. I was told that my frustration over the ground rules not being honored was irritating and unrealistic. I was told that my concern over the impacts of the arrangement on our children was negated by the fact that I was crazy, over-emotional, and negative. I was told that because I was indeed in a relationship with two men, I had no right to feel uneasy about it. I was told that because I had some days where I didn't bring it up or told them I was OK with it, then the days I wasn't OK with it didn't count. I was told that because I had initially agreed, nothing could be done to help me. I was told that no matter how much I explained my feelings, I was not coherent or understood. I was told that because I agreed to polyamory, I deserved whatever outcome developed. I was asked, "You had to have known that this might have happened, right?" as if polyamory was to blame, and not the people who were behaving badly. When I asked specific questions about their intentions, I was given vague answers, or a flat-out "I don't know."

Recall my upbringing, and you will understand that I saw this as a crisis that I needed to handle. All of my training to be more perfect, to be in my highest integrity: now was the test. If I could just keep my eye on these people that I loved, and withstand the storm of the mistreatment, all would work out. If I could help heal the unstable energies of this other man (my friend's husband), we would all benefit. This was on me. I had to persevere, and I had to prevail.

But, this mentality was a form of self-torture. This weird, twisted game I was playing in my consciousness wherein I had to withstand this unloving behavior in the name of love and openness was crackpot. It didn't lead to good things. It built itself on old wounds of inadequacy and trauma. It suffocated me. I lost weight. I had daily panic attacks. I was losing myself, and I knew it. And I was losing myself privately, in a toxic hole of isolation. The only people I was talking to were the people who were also losing themselves.

One night, when I was left by my husband on the side of the road in the dark and in a snowstorm, walking the half-mile up a hill toward the man I was not married to and did not want to be with, while my kids were at my house with my "best friend," waiting for my husband to return to her, I surrendered. I sort of exited my body, and looked down upon myself, trudging up that hill, with a backpack on my back and a pair of shoes in my hand. A group of volunteer firefighters were on the other side of the road, pulling someone's car from the snowy ditch. They stopped to watch me go by, as if to say,

"Where the heck is she going?"

Where was I going? It was an excellent question.

I left my life several days later, after calling and confessing everything to my mother. My mother whom I had kept everything from because I was deathly afraid of her judgment over the polyamory aspect. But instead of judging me for consenting to polyamory, she simply said into my ear: "Meredith I am so sorry that your husband has betrayed you. I am so sorry that your best friend has betrayed you. I do not think this is going to work out for you. You need to gather up your boys and come home to your family. I am so sorry, but your life is falling apart."

"But what if that's just it, mom? What if this is it for my home and my work and my family? My life. And if I leave, I cinch it? If I say goodbye to everything then I guarantee the end."

I was physically ill at this point. I was on the couch, attempting to breastfeed my youngest, with a fever and whole-body pain, and a dark, bottomless feeling in my soul.

"You can't maintain a life with someone who doesn't want to have a life with you. You're not the one leaving. He has already left you. It has already ended. It has already fallen apart. But do you know what? We are going to pick it back up again. We are going to gather the army and we are going to fight."

Now, my reader. If you have ever in your life been in deep despair, deep trauma where you did not know up from down, left from right, or what day it was or whether you were dead or alive, you will believe me when I tell you that this conversation felt like the sun coming out after a long winter and it felt like the end of the world, all at the same time. That's the only way I know how to describe it. The deep, dark, foreboding KNOWING that I had carried in my body for ten months was brought out into the air and the light. My mother was saying OUT LOUD all the things that I had known in the depths of my soul since that very first, doubtful conversation with my husband.

I left with my boys and spent a week in Kentucky with my family. My brother, who is an attorney, flew from New York to Asheville to meet me when I got back. He took me to a lawyer. He helped me find a house. The next year unfolded in a blur: learning to be a single parent, giving up my butcher shop, my farm, my home, many of my friends, and my marriage. Paying rent in town while paying farm debt, crying myself to sleep every night in self-hatred and misery. Blaming my killers, then turning everything over and blaming myself. Then, waking up and making the bed and forcing the sound of laughter to erupt from my body, just so my boys could hear it. Willing myself to get up off the floor and take them to the creek, the woods, the potluck... just so we could survive.

The only way to describe the next couple of years is surreal. I spent endless hours grieving, writing, sleeping, staring into the floor or the windows, turning over every single nightmare and memory a thousand and one times, and looking for clues. Crying with gratitude for the support I received from the few brave members of my community who were not afraid to talk about what happened and give me kindnesses. Spending hours and hours with my sweet boys, who both did and did not understand what was happening at ages 5 and 18 months. We built a sacred bond over those two years that I will never, ever trade or try to name.

I became obsessed with vultures during that time because there was a wake of them that would rest in the tree outside my house, with their wings open to the sun. I started researching them and other carrion, these great recyclers of the earth, who are revered by some native peoples for their fierce mothering and their scrappy use of what was dead.

I came to realize that I was the dead and the carrion. I had died and lay sleeping and silent, only to become slowly more alive as the detritus of my old life decomposed, and the new sprigs of something different began to sprout. It was painful. It was ugly. It was exhausting and exhilarating. I did this labor intensely for two long years, and I do small and manageable pieces of it every single day, still. I often wonder if I will never fully recover from what happened. But what I know for sure is that the woman I am now: the mother, advocate, activist, writer, teacher, friend, sister, daughter, wife, and community member would never have been born if it weren't for that death.

One of the things that helped me grieve and formulate the new woman I would become was writing. I wrote every day, sometimes multiple times each day, sorting my beliefs about what happened, what I had done wrong, and what had been done by others. Writing and grieving allowed me to see that my relationships were unhealthy all on their own. That polyamory or not, those relationships may have ended anyway, because we weren't doing relational work. Polyamory did create a container for people to escape relationships they no longer valued in a cowardly way, but that was not on polyamory. That was on individuals' lack of capacity and bravery. And the reasons those relationships, particularly the one between me and my husband, were unhealthy was because we did not help each other or do the work to acknowledge or repair damages.

I saw how the trauma of this horrible end to my marriage and friendship was a continuation of my trauma from childhood. I realized, about halfway through the process of grieving and loss, all the reasons my mother had felt so afraid and victimized. I understood how easy it would be to stay in the space of hurt, to claim that suffering as the end of joy. But, I also knew from my own childhood that that didn't serve. If I was to live again, truly, and even someday thrive, I needed to go down deep into all of the ugly, uncomfortable suffering and really feel it in order to be crystal clear about what had happened, and I needed to also find a way to heal and be joyful. And my boys needed that from me, too.

More than anything, reader, I want that to be the takeaway from this chapter: That I stood in the death. I faced it. Not just the betrayal and hurt but also my own culpability in relationships, my own projections of trauma, my own poor communication, and my own mistakes. All the other details are important to see the death for what it was, but at the end of the day they don't matter as much *as the way that they made me feel*.

What's pivotal is that I took the time that it took to decide about what had happened and how it made me feel, until I believed myself, and until believing myself was enough. *Only when I 100% believed myself--and had no need for anyone else to understand or validate what I had*

experienced and felt—only then was I ready for true healing. Healing means being able to change the way you behave and live as a result of the way you feel so that you are truly working on excellence, and feeling excellence too!

As a first part of my healing, I began to write *The Ethical Meat Handbook*. It felt like the right time to put together my thoughts on everything I had experienced.

Land: In nature, death and chaos happen all the time. Many times, the more people are removed from the concept of land, the more idealized nature becomes. Nature comes across as pretty, polite, and serene. But that's not the case. Farmers know that there is a chaotic balance in nature, of both beauty and collapse. Death is a part of life. And in nature, death is always assimilated, used, and accounted for. Dead plant material feeds mushrooms and microbes to make soil. Dead animals feed carrion and maggots and other animals to sustain more life. Death and destruction are not avoidable or wasteful in natural ecosystems. How, I wondered, could I ensure that my death was the same? How, I wondered, was it possible for the death of livestock to be the same? What happens to our understanding of the world, our concept of "self," and our ability to heal, when we hide from the facts of sadness, suffering, death, and collapse? The parallels between what happens in nature, and what was happening in the ecosystem of my heart were uncanny. I sought to capture it all.

Animals: "Animals don't want to die!" This was a refrain I was very familiar with, coming from the dogma space of veganism. Having just experienced my own death (which did not come from any want, either) I began to examine this. Firstly: it became super apparent to me that humans were constructing the wants and needs of animals based on their own needs. We don't want to die, and so it must be that neither do they. But- death is unavoidable and necessary for both humans and more-than-human animals, so what if it made more sense to focus on well-being in life, and ensure a mindful death that is re-assimilated and accounted for? What would this look like, what would it take, and most importantly of all, what was leading to the human need to avoid, ignore, and associate all death with violence and badness? And what animal behaviors might need to be paid attention to as a way of understanding whether animals really were projections of human bodies and desires? Was it possible that humans were simply trotting out their own traumas when it came to their understanding of animals?

Health: My concept of health now gained by leaps and bounds, as I began to see that mental health was paramount to the health equation, and that stuffing trauma down and away, pretending it didn't exist while striving to "overcome" it, or painting a life of happiness and achievement would not make grief, collapse, calamity, or suffering avoidable, they would just make these things taboo so that grief or death could not happen in a healthy way. And in fact, was the general failure to acknowledge discomfort, chaos, hurt, grief, and collapse part of a giant ongoing mental health problem in our culture? Was the denial of a grieving process that allowed one to dive all the way into their mistakes, their hurt, and their feelings also connected to our fear of death and our projection of that fear onto animals? How was the dominant emotional conditioning contributing to our ideas of health and our ideas about food?

Ecosystems: Ecosystems expanded further during this time to include the heart, the mental health, and the emotional framework from which beliefs were arising and leading to decisions and actions. Ecosystems now opened their death aspects to me. Where before I may have seen richness only in the alive things within ecosystems, now I saw deep meaning, vitality, beauty, and purpose within the dead parts of ecosystems. And so, the new inquiry became: What would it take to bring all parts of ecosystems into their full expression?



CHAPTER 5

**RE-BIRTH +
REGENERATION
(HEALING)**

Chapter 5: Re-birth and Regeneration (Healing)

Disaster and cataclysm bring systems to a reset point. The structures, perspectives, beliefs, and truths that patterned the system are dashed. A forest fire leaves ashes. A tornado leaves ruin. A heavy footstep crushes the tiny life below it. This is devastating if the system is your life, your beliefs, your understandings. But it is also an opportunity. And some components always endure. Land remembers. And people, who are of the land, we remember too.

I began to observe nature and how it rebuilds itself. I became particularly fascinated with spiders. Did you know that spiders are some of the first animals to inhabit places after disasters? After volcanic eruptions, spiders are found building webs. All the time, spider webs are being destroyed, and knocked down, after the spider painstakingly and intricately builds that world for herself. And what does she do? She begins again if she survives. She pulls out the silk and builds. Not according to some instruction book that came from outside of her. But from an inner knowing and a deep truth and guide INSIDE of her.

Does she know that her world might be knocked down again? Maybe not. But maybe so. Maybe she knows. Maybe the ants know their hill will be collapsed. Maybe the bees know their hive will be invaded. Maybe the trees know they will eventually fall. Do they stop building? Putting on layers of complexity? Following a deep pattern that seems pre-ordained by nature? No. They don't. They build.

As I looked to the magic of the natural world, reading the beauty of its death and its living, I knew that the instruction books I had assembled, from my family and from the people around me were not going to be the ticket. *I am, after all, an animal.* There was a guidebook, somewhere deep in my soul, somewhere in my primal, animal instinct. And I had to find it. This was the only thing that made sense. All my life I had built and strived according to other people's codes and actions. Now it was time to find my own way.

And, what the spider taught me, is that it is not a game of me against the world. It is me within the world. A part of it. And so I asked: What is a connected way of living, and what if that is more serving than a separated, detached way of living? What if I am part of the world exactly as I am, instead of only belonging if I achieve some checklist of attributes and qualities that mean I am "more perfect?"

So I started asking: *What do I desire?*

Now. This probably feels kind of silly. I mean, desire is the same as want, right? Well, sort of. But I realized that because I had been thus far living my life according to some messages from outside of myself, I had never actually cultivated a sense of what I wanted. And furthermore, not having personal wants made me equate the word "want" with frivolity or a faraway dream. "Want" was a thought project. It was what I had employed to try to check off all the boxes on the checklist of codes and messages I had ciphered from others.

But *desire*. That was something deeper. It was embodied. It equated to sensuality, and in that way, it felt almost taboo. What does my body want? What do my senses want? What do I inescapably feel would be fulfilling to my full sensory desire?

Try it. I dare you. It will really help you. Especially if your framework was or is religious to the degree that desire is equated with wrongness, if you grew up in a household where your parent's feelings were more important than yours, or if you are in a relationship where you are tending to others more than self. Stop for a moment, drop down into your body, and ask what you desire.

In my time of re-birth, I found that I desired some things that initially felt very wacky.

For example: I desired to run very fast. I desired to feel the sun on my skin, like...a lot. I desired to jump into cold water at every chance I could find. I desired to stop working and lie down in the grass. I desired, sometimes suddenly, a tall glass of ice-cold water or a hot cup of tea. I desired silence. I desired to be alone. I desired to get into my car and drive to another state to have breakfast. I desired music.

I also began to desire very specific foods. I discovered that these desires corresponded directly with the senses. Spicy, sweet, salty, sour. Umami. In a sense, my body went back to basics, sending me primal signals of what I needed and wanted. And from my experience, I knew exactly how to give those things to myself. Salt. Fat. Cream. Meat. Earthy foods like mushrooms. Fermented vegetables and cheeses. Fresh and crunchy vegetables and fruits.

Lastly, I began to desire creative pursuits again. I wanted to make things. Anything. For you, that may be wooden benches or oil paintings. For me, a desire to create usually manifests in writing or cooking. Or both. It helped to have a butchery and cookbook to write, which was forcing me to ask all those deep and difficult questions that my death, as well as the experiences and challenges of my businesses had left on the table.

All those obstacles to the success of our butcher shop and farm that I listed earlier? Yep, I didn't see all of them until I was in the re-birth space, reflecting on desire, finding my voice, and trying to determine how to make my death into the richest, most delicious, and most powerfully generative space I could. All the opportunities we realized by starting the shop and restaurant: did I think they were still important? Would I recommend someone else doing the same? If so, what solutions could I offer that served both the people who want better meat on their plates AND the people trying to provide it?

It became very clear to me that what was missing was a HOLISTIC discussion...about everything. But especially when it came to meat. Someone needed to explain to everyday eaters the economics and efficiencies of mainstream meat supply chains and put that side by side with what is going on in niche or value-added, non-mainstream meat supply chains such as "local," "grass-fed", and other specialty meat businesses. There needed to be a personable, approachable resource that elucidated the differences and the similarities between these ways

of raising animals, slaughtering them, butchering them, and even eating their meat. Someone needed to examine the way we eat meat and whether it makes any sense, and then tease out all the considerations of doing it in a way that supports farmers being able to give animals better well-being. And someone needed to honor the fact that our disconnection from ourselves, natural cycles of life and death, and our desires was programming us to fumble around in this non-sensical system. And if we weren't content to do that, we were disconnected enough to think that opting out through veganism was the proper way to handle land, animals, ecosystems, and health.

What I knew from being an insider farmer, butcher, cook, and mother, was that people are very confused about meat. Not only do they struggle with guilt and other ideological issues around consuming meat in the first place, but the way that meat has been marketed, priced, and "valued" by the dietary institution in the US, and historically, was not in line with what needed to happen to deliver healthful nourishing meat to market. And it is also not in line with the primal, embodied desire that humans feel when they begin to connect to the natural world.

It was time to buckle down, armed with my new knowing, and a whole bunch of stuff I did NOT know.

This might be a good place to talk about imposter syndrome. Man, did I have a big case of *that*. Every day, nagging questions disturbed my work and contemplation: Was I worthy to write this book? Did I know enough? Did the struggle of my butcher shop make me a failure, and therefore not an appropriate voice? Besides, even if my butcher shop was a screaming success, I was not, by ANY means, the best butcher I knew. In fact, I didn't even consider myself a butcher at that point. I had owned a butcher shop, that employed butchers, but my own time cutting in that shop was very limited. I had been through a lot of training, so I certainly knew more than the average Jane, but I needed help and major skilling up to be able to write about butchery in the way that I wanted to.

It's also important to note, here, that butchery is a very male-dominated field. Not only were many of the "notable" butchers I was aware of male, but I was also extremely intimidated by the pushback I would receive in being the bearer of butchery information, as a non-male person. I was in a community with other female butchers who told me, flat-out, that I would be ignored, as they had been. I wondered: what's the use? But I kept coming back to that little voice inside of me, the one I had learned to trust. And she knew, which means I knew, that the reasons to get into this conversation were MUCH bigger than me. The conversation about eating animals is an ancient one. The topic I took up is older than me, bigger than me. In truth, I was able to write when I realized that *it's not about me*.

And furthermore, the practice I had been doing around desire had stirred up another realization for me. I began to understand that when I felt like I didn't want to do something, I needed to do some deeper inquiry. It's not that I don't desire to write a book (it had been a life-long dream, as a writer.) It's that I desire to do this very thing, I just *don't* desire to do it with a

ton of doubt, fear, and self-loathing on my back every day. So...what was I going to do about the doubt, fear, and self-loathing instead of avoiding the actual thing of writing a book?!?

Aha!

The other thing that imposter syndrome and this re-connecting with primal desire gave me was a truthfulness with myself. Where was the doubt, fear, and self-loathing coming from? Mostly, from my fear of not knowing enough. So, what did I not know? And how would I use that to make the book authentic and rich? My conclusions were to

- a) Seek out, learn from, and lift up the people who DID know, by featuring them in the book
- b) LEARN it myself. By doing this, I would be utterly authentic to literally millions of readers who might also be learning it for themselves as they went.

Having to face all these questions and overcome the doubt, fear, and self-loathing that I did not desire to get to the thing I *did* desire led to three huge aspects of my regeneration and rebirth:

1. Butchering, cooking, and preserving food as a process of deep sustenance, inquiry, learning, grieving, and empowerment (food is SO metaphorical...let it in).
2. Connecting with others to understand different angles and create radical community across the supply chain
3. Learning self-trust by *doing* what felt scary, and repeatedly doing self-inquiry to really feel into fear, doubt, and self-loathing so I could finally CLEAVE that shit, and move into living.

I cooked, butchered, and made sausages constantly, as a way of grieving, and opening myself to the processes I was writing about. Subsequently, this opened me to the world. Why did people from certain regions dry meat as opposed to smoking it? Why do other charcuterie books not explain the reason for extra ingredients like nitrite and dry milk powder? What kinds of fundamental culinary arts had I never tried before? What could I do with the most meager resources possible as I climbed my way out of debt and labored over a book that I still didn't know what shape it would take? Also, it meant that my boys and I ate more conscientiously and joyfully than we ever had before. Sure, we ate nourishing, healthful foods because that was important to re-birth. We also ate insanely decadent treats that I made by hand. Because what were we after? Joy. Comfort. Love. Smiling. The health and life that comes from just plain deliciousness. The kitchen became a space of deeper wonder and escape, more than ever before, both for me, and my youngest son.

As I went, The Ethical Meat Handbook came together. And for those who haven't read it, what the heck is "ethical" meat anyway? How was I going to wrap all these elements of well-being and joy in life, usefulness and mindfulness in death, and intentionality into a book about butchery?

In sum, Ethical Meat is meat from animals that had a good life, a good death, a good butcher, and a good cook.

Exploration of ethical meat is an exploration of buying and sourcing meat differently, cooking meat differently, and eating meat differently. A re-education, if you will, about how to participate from wherever you are, as a connected whole-ecosystem being in the ecosystem of our planet. Here are a few fundamentals:

1. Veganism and vegetarianism have moved many individuals to opt out of meat-eating to reduce demand on industrial meat systems, yet the same systems of confined animal feeding operations, oppressive work infrastructure, and falsely cheap meat continue. Ethical Meat asserts that a more effective movement is one for people who DO eat meat. Ethical Meat maintains that the people who EAT meat have more impact on the lives and deaths of animals and the fate of land used for animal agriculture than the people who DON'T eat meat.
For the bulk of the last half-century, there had been essentially two main options available to Americans who were omnivores and were not supportive of the industrial meat system: pretend not to care or feel overwhelmed by systemic problems and go to McDonalds, or go vegan. But as I knew from my work in farming where animals were healthy for the land, and in my own life where animal products were healthy for my family, the book needed to explore the rich middle space in between these two extremes, and make visible all the people and animals who were part of it, and make accessible avenues for pursuing a mindful omnivory in that middle ground.
2. From playing all the roles in the supply chain: farmer, butcher/processor, chef, and eater, I felt that the two sectors that could make the biggest gains, carry the most influence, and benefit from the most de-mythification, were consumers who had the privilege to choose their food source, and chefs, particularly celebrity chefs who influenced public opinion. I also knew that the sector holding most of the emotional, physical, and financial stress for making ethical meat work was the farmers.
3. From my experience with the butcher shop, it was clear to me that butchers were indispensable to a functioning ethical meat supply chain- otherwise, all the education that needed to happen and all the processing that needed to happen was going to fall on the farmers. Ethical meat encourages more butchery, either professionally or in the home kitchen. This not only alleviates bottlenecks in processing but also provides more options for accessing ethical meat. Buying more whole from farmers and processors saves money on the front end and puts more meat in the home freezer at the back end.
4. All the training I had been to around butchery was stressing whole animal use. After a generation of corn-fed steaks and filet mignon, it was time to re-introduce to the world to the whole animal- including the feet, the fat, the sinew, the organs, and the tougher cuts. But people needed major re-education to do so. As of this writing, this is still a major struggle for good meat supply chains, though it has gotten better.
5. From trying to sell whole animals in my butcher shop, I knew that some level of preservation was needed to really value the whole animal. Charcuterie (the French term

for all different kinds of meat preservation) needed to be more accessible to people so that it would be easier to consume the whole animal, and more delicious to boot.

As I went about the process of building a book around these concepts, I came alive again. I formed connections with trusted allies in the industry who would help and guide me (THEY are the amazing folks featured and mentioned in the book), and I made a promise to myself to do one thing every day that scared me. Some days, that might have been just picking up the phone to call my lawyer about whatever aspect of divorce was unfolding. On another day, it might have been butchering a hog in front of 300 people at the Mother Earth News Fair, and taking the risk of messing it up. I reasoned that I only knew what I knew, I only desired what I desired, and if I was honest about that and curious about other people, connections would form. I was right.

All of these acts were acts of creation. As I created meals, recipes, book chapters, new friends, fermentation projects, a deeper and more holistic connection to myself, and safe joyful nourishing spaces for my kids, I simultaneously recreated myself. One day I looked up from my morning meditation and said hello to myself for the first time. And suddenly, all the things that had happened and been hard to bear didn't stop my day from happening anymore.

Was I perfectly enlightened? Perfectly healed? Did I have all the answers? Did I forget all the horrible things that happened and the way they made me feel? Did I never again hurt when I drove past my old butcher shop and saw that I had swiftly been utterly erased? Was I magically unafraid of judgment or dying again or getting things wrong? No. But I was living proof that even though death is a fact, and horrible things are true, life finds a way. I am LIVING PROOF that death sucks and won't ever stop being a hard and inevitable truth, but death is not a final word. It is a reset, a door, an invitation. A redistribution of energy. A dispersion of the community that makes up the illusion of an individual. And always, it is an initiation of more life.

Oh, and one more thing. I came to realize that all the things I doubted about my voice made me the most perfect author of this book than anyone in the world. Other butcher books were all about making butchery super-specialized and fancy. Some books were about showing off a chef or a restaurant and all their expert tricks. Why on earth had I ever believed that THAT was the only way to write a book?

Happily, I was (and am) just a regular person. I was (and am) someone who has also struggled with the idea of eating meat. I was someone who couldn't always afford the most local, ideal option at the market. I was now writing a book in hindsight about owning a restaurant and shop, but not trying to show off that restaurant and shop. I was a free agent. I was someone who was skilling up and learning to share and collaborate with others. I was someone who had tried brave things, and even if I didn't get them right, what I learned along the way was still important for people to know so that collectively, we all have a better chance. Do you see how important this is? Ethical meat, and ethical food in general, is not a perfect, pre-packaged, shiny, mass-produced gourmet product. I am not interested in how perfect you are or how

chef-like you can be. I am interested in the movement succeeding, for the health of land, animals, and people. Ethical Meat is a movement and an ethos. It is not a neat and tidy answer to major systemic problems in the food system. It is a holistic approach to creating the world we want through relationships, behaviors, new knowledge, better information, and brave but imperfect action. It's about participation in planetary life and the pursuit of food with integrity.

Land: Sometime during this genesis, I made up a word. The word is rurality. Rurality is the quality that land has, of bearing all manner of mistreatment and harshness and fact, but blooming and continuing all the same. In science I think it's called autopoiesis—the capacity of living systems to self-create and organize. Rurality is the metaphorical capture of this process in the land over time, our witness of it, and our impact on it. What could it teach us? How could it change us for the better, as we continue to self-create?

Animals: As my community grew, I had a very stark realization about animals. They don't care so much about individuality as we do. In fact, many livestock animals move in herds, and if you study herd behavior, you begin to understand that the health of the herd or community is valued over the health of individuals. As I studied the rumens of sheep, cows, and goats by lamplight in the early mornings, I saw the concentric patterning of community value again, in that animals themselves are not strictly individuals, because they depend on trillions of tiny microbes in their gut and elsewhere in their bodies in order to maintain homeostasis, and fulfill the role in ecosystems. As I studied fermentation in more detail, I saw the concentric patterning in that humans are the same. How was our obsession with individualism screwing with our consciousness and making our food choices so deeply fraught with guilt and disconnection from the earth? What could herd animals, and their resident microorganisms, and fermentation and digestion in our own foodways and bodies teach us about being in right relationship with animals and the land?

Ecosystems: EVERYTHING is an ecosystem! A termite. A fermenting salami. The stomach of a cow. You. Me. Breathtaking, starry constellations of microbes literally power and produce our world. The concept of ecosystem or community is EVERYTHING. Not just that it takes collectivity to make the illusion of an individual, but also the interactions between all the elements in systems create *synergy* that each element of a system cannot create on its own. AHA! The answer is to steward community relationships and whole ecosystem health. NOT to continue taking systems apart and honing or hating the pieces, either to create more profit on a corporate level, or to make a political statement. Integration, synergy, all of it. The good and the bad. Everything, everything, everything.

Health: Health is conscientiously stewarded ecosystems. It is community health. (Ubuntu!) It is about choice, yes, but it is also about systems outside of the "individual" that create context, which impacts that choice. Context is rife! It is environmental, social, historical, economic, spiritual, emotional, mental, and biological. It is not a one size fits all deal. EVER. Health is a complex, nuanced, fraught, magical, radical, difficult, and sacred endeavor. From the soil to the gut. That it has been reduced to superfoods and supplements and cardio bibles and t-shirts and gurus is bogus! Health requires that we reconnect to the source of self and our desires. As

natural beings, our desire leads us to the Earth. The sun. The soil. The concentric patterns of planetary life... including animals.



CHAPTER 6

THRIVING + RE-
ORGANIZING

Chapter 6: Thriving/Reorganizing

Life and living are a dance of stewarding, grappling with, and inviting in the infinite feedback loop of *diversity and synergy* that is natural, including the “ugly” bits like fear, doubt, self-loathing, and even death.

How does this relate to food? If our choices are impacted by the system and our context, but our choices simultaneously impact our context and the system, what can we do?

People tend to come at this question in stages. These stages are as follows:

1. Replacing factory-processed, lab-grown, synthetic foods with whole real foods.
2. Ensuring that these whole real foods are free from chemicals and drugs that interfere with natural processes, in the Earth and in animal bodies (including ours!)
3. Creating the capacity for those whole foods to be produced in diverse and synergistic farming systems: from soil teeming with life and death and the grass and plants that grow from it, nurtured by the life-giving sun, and nourished with clean water. Subsequently, these foods are more nutrient-dense and life-giving for humans and the human gut.
4. Eventually, paving a path so that each human can eat in a way that is cognizant of the microbiome-- that starry and amazing ecosystem in your gut that is foundational to healthy immunity, mental stability, physical health, energy, digestion, fertility, and so much more.

By now you are surely aware of how complex all of this is! And how it cannot and will not happen in a neat, linear, fast way. And it cannot and will not be given to any of us by the institutions or the powers that be. It involves plugging in and participating. It is about remembering the power you have and grabbing hold of it in service of health. Where do you start? With your deepest embodied yet connected desire. Then, through an assessment of what is possible, within your personal context. Everyone has different beliefs, traumas, experiences, access, priorities, and privileges that impact their entry points into participation.

For example, since the book was published, my own context has changed. I have re-married and have been gifted more children to care for and love. I am busier with work and family than ever before, and my family situation involves the sacred work of interrupting generational trauma and abuse. This care labor consumes an exorbitant amount of my energy. Also, contexts have grown heavier politically and economically. COVID, political and social dis-ease, and global economic disorder deeper and more diverse demands on everyday people when it comes to determining their food and other basic needs priorities. My work evolves and strives to remain aware of all these factors.

I have also become more educated, since the book's release, about indigenous traditions at the foundation of Ethical Meat. These concepts of whole ecosystem farming, cooking, eating, and living are not new. They are modern re-iterations and rediscoveries of ancient wisdom, which

humans have cyclically adopted and practiced since the dawn of our species. Diving into indigenous culinary wisdom, de-colonized thinking, social justice work, and ancient spiritual stories that embody an understanding of relational living are as important as technical re-skilling in cooking, butchery, and farming. The socio-ecological underpinnings of ethical meat are endless, and inspiring, and humbling. I say this because I know there are readers out there who continue to struggle with their place in the food chain, with eating meat and participating imperfectly in these complex systems. If you are one of those readers, I say to you: keep going. As you do this inquiry into what it means to be an awake, embodied, desirous, and integrous participant in the planetary ecosystem, you will find layer upon layer of evidence from the beginning of time to the ground under your feet that there is a path for you that is enlivening and delicious. If you look to the ancestors, you will find solace, humility, knowledge, and empowerment from drinking in their perspectives and beliefs about this. Ultimately, it is healing, invigorating work.

Are you ready to come alive again? Are you already feeling into your desire, and determining your first steps toward a re-organizing and thriving that is tailored for you?

If so, I am deeply, deeply excited for you.

Looking Toward the Horizon: What's Next?

So, as you have just read: I have lived, died, and lived again. I have no idea how many times I will go through that cycle in this lifetime. This e-book has just painted the picture of one of them. And there's a horizon beyond it that is still taking shape.

Maybe you have lived, died, and lived again, too. Perhaps more than once! Maybe you can map yourself into a specific part of the birth → growth and organization → complexity → collapse/death → regeneration/rebirth → reorganization cycle right this very second. No matter which part of the cycle you find yourself in, I hope you can see that your decisions and actions are impacted by it, including the decision about what to eat, and eating is the most high-contact participation that you have with the ongoing life/death/life cycle that is within you and all around you every single day.

Are you awake to it?

If not, do you want to be more awake?

Maybe you want to improve your health and feel better. Maybe you want to heal soil through farming. Maybe you just want to learn to make sausage and see what happens from there. Maybe you want to just be more alive, more centered, and surer of your decisions and your impact.

These are all perfect desires, and I am so glad that you took the time to read my story.

The next steps I wish for you are:

1. Radical forgiveness and compassion for yourself
2. Willingness to re-wire thinking and beliefs to become liberated
3. Re-skilling and re-culturing toward holistic participation

Next steps for me:

What you've just read (thank you!) is the cellular-level story of my journey from fiery vegan to fiery whole-systems omnivore. That journey taught me so much, and after the publication of *The Ethical Meat Handbook*, I began a new journey: teaching butchery, charcuterie, and land management within the ethical meat ethos via community workshops and consulting. I've traveled extensively in the US and abroad over the last seven years, and have been gifted deepening knowledge and spiritual guidance by the land, animals, and people. I am so endlessly grateful. I'm also sensing a new emerging future for myself, a way of evolving my work to become more useful. As such, I am in a period of rest, reflection and learning, and have paused my travels and in-person workshops and consults to pursue the questions living inside of me.

What are they? Well, they are complex and tangled for sure, but they have to do with the very things this little e-book has grappled with: The ecological divide, the social divide, and the spiritual divide within mainstream, dominant culture that many of us are born into, and struggle to address. Sometimes we address it in ways that don't serve us or anyone else. I certainly did. Over the last almost-decade of teaching and consulting I have witnessed two things that have had a deep impression on me:

- 1) The work I have done with people around re-skilling in butchery, farming, fermentation and charcuterie has allowed me to witness the amazing awakening that these practices invoke in people. They may come to me looking for specific technical skills, but in the best cases, the journey that we go through as those skills are translated and learned sparks a multi-faceted transformation in people that begins to permeate their whole world. I want to go deeper into this phenomenon. I want to explore this more, not losing the avenue that traditional ancestral skills provide in sparking transformation, but also asking- what are other ways this awakening can be sparked in human consciousness?
- 2) The work I have done with people and with systems over the last decade has shown me what incredible capacity we are lacking, collectively, to move toward a better future. Even if tons of individuals find a way to transform and thrive, tons of others still struggle under oppression. Tons of people are foreign to themselves, ignorant to or hostile of other humans and to the Earth and the more-than-human world. And what's equally concerning to me is that individuals and families who have awakened to self and Earth and others, who are strong parts of the movements for justice and better food report to me that they feel lonely, burned out, and hopeless. So how can the individual transformation that I have experienced and witnessed be replicated for almost any

human in their context? And then how can personal transformation be intentionally and mindfully stewarded toward collective transformation so that we feel it together, understand that the power to change is everywhere all the time, and begin to feel that we are united in forging it?

While I am leaning into these questions, and stretching toward this new horizon that is still emerging, I am focusing my career on *capacity building and facilitation of collectives and networks* as a radical, on-the-ground strategy for healing. I am doing this work in the context of climate action, working for a nonprofit, broadening my focus from food and agriculture to sustainable systems as a whole. The mission is the same, however: to open complex issues and our beliefs and actions and culture around those issues. To ask: how have we been trained to produce limited results, and even results that no one wants? Do we call things solutions that are in truth, part of the problem? Why? I strive to do this in a relational way that also allows people to incorporate practices and begin participating from their unique personal contexts. I also continue to support the teaching of fermentation and food preservation through [The Fermentation School](#) as a way of re-skilling communally and opening to ideas for living, eating, and dying that have been forgotten, intentionally erased, or exist outside of the mainstream. I believe that our liberated approach to living lies not just in technical skills, but in re-education and a re-culturing that extends beyond business structures, how-to manuals, and status quo institutions.

Because of everything I have experienced, and the level of inquiry I am committed to, I seek to bring wholeness to discussions of food, agriculture, and living that I believe is sorely missing from the popular dialogue. My work has taught me to make technical and even uncomfortable things approachable and accessible, but also be willing to talk about the emotional, social, cultural, mental, spiritual, political, and economic implications of the practices and how they feel.

Resources and Ways to Stay in Touch:

Stay in touch via my email list. [My Substack](#) is a free and fun space that I plan to curate on a wildly irregular basis! When I do write, I will strive to share writing that helps us all un-rig our thinking together and apply intentional and holistic analysis in our everyday lives.

[The Ethical Meat Handbook: Mindful Meat Eating for the Modern Omnivore](#) is a 30,000-foot view of the meat supply chain from production to consumption that helps you understand the way the meat system works and how you would like to participate in it conscientiously. It contains information on raising your own animals, sourcing and buying tips if you do not want to or cannot raise your own animals, butchery, recipes for cooking lesser-known or lesser-used cuts, and basic meat curing how-to.

[Pure Charcuterie: The Craft and Poetry of Curing Meat at Home](#) is a deeper dive into meat curing through sausage making, whole muscle curing, fermentation, and smoking. Each of these practices is examined technically as well as metaphorically.

Online Flagship Charcuterie Course: At your own pace, discover butchery and meat curing as informed by the ethical meat ethos in a totally virtual experience.

[How to Make Charcuterie: The Art of Meat Preservation](#) is my full online technical training course.

Your membership in the online intensive never expires, and you have access to all new material that I add in the future. This comprehensive course includes all of the technical skills from in-person intensives, plus additional courses that we usually do not have time to cover in live classes, such as koji charcuterie and more specific sausages like semi-dry sausages and hot dogs.

Other online courses: Any of the shorter courses within the intensive online flagship can be purchased and taken on their own. These shorter courses include:

[Making Bacon](#)

[Whole Hog Butchery](#)

[How to Make Fresh Sausage](#)

[How to Make Fermented Sausages](#)

[Semi-Dry Sausages](#)

[Dry Curing Meats](#)

[How Fermentation and Curing Works](#)

[Koji Charcuterie](#)

[How to Make Garum](#)

[How to Make Meats](#)

[Smoking Meats](#)

[Making Confit, Rillettes and Terrines](#)

In-person classes are on hold for me indefinitely as I skill up in capacity-building and community resilience and resistance facilitation. I urge you to follow Anica Wu (@anicawu on Instagram, or [click here to join her Substack](#)) for in-person butchery education.

OR, Feel free to just reach out: I'd love to hear from you! mereleighfood@gmail.com

Thank you for reading!