

Thought for Food

(as it appeared in the Creston Valley Advance newspaper, June 5, 2008)

Local Fare Creates a Compelling Food Story

Gail Southall

It was the cold dark of winter; snow was falling wet and heavy and the outside thermometer read a chilly -8C. A good day for curling up in front of a fire and savouring... cherries? Last summer we picked a bushel of those glorious red globes, pitted them and froze them whole. Months later, added to a bubbling pot of oatmeal, a mere mouthful brought back the sights, sounds and smells of that bright July morning when we headed up the ladders at Cherrybrook Farms and exclaimed at nature's exuberance. We laughed. We marveled. We ate cherries 'til we couldn't see. When I regaled a friend with the pleasure of eating something I'd picked myself, even (or maybe especially) in the dead of winter, she smiled knowingly and said, "You've enhanced your food story." My what? Your food story, it turns out, is the combination of the extraneous experiences you have getting your food to your plate. For most of us that means any adventure that may befall us on the drive to Overwaitea. Yawn. But throw in a few u-pick escapades, jaunts to the farmer's market, even exhausting all-night canning episodes, and suddenly an honest-to-goodness food story starts to come to life.

The characters are the farmers, orchardists, and other eaters and pickers you encounter at each stop. At the Blueberry Patch you'll chat and laugh and keep each other whistling to prove you aren't sneaking too many berries as you pick. At the Saturday Market you'll meet farmers you'll be pleased to call friends. At Eggs R Uz you'll call the chickens by name. Throughout this valley there are countless personalities just waiting to be written in to your adventure. The plot builds with every item you grow, pick, share, can, cellar, and freeze. Even gardening disasters and preserving surprises lend a bittersweet dimension to your story, adding just the right amount of tension and suspense. And the happy conclusion greets you in vivid detail every time you pop open a jar of homemade jam, add a dash of herb blend to the salad, or whip up a veggie omelette. Each one of the pleasurable memories you made gathering your food comes back to life in shining clarity. Being this close to your food source adds tremendous colour, celebration, and an almost curative property to your life experience – a sort of agrotherapy.

Our industrialized food system has driven us further and further away from the root of this most essential element of life. Along with nutrients and diversity we've lost a lot of the know-how, the satisfaction, and the sheer life-giving spirit of being deeply involved in feeding ourselves. There is more to food than calories, more to eating than what squats on our plate, more to shopping than trudging zombie-like up and down the grocery aisles. Food, and the gathering of food, can be downright profound.

So this season, try your hand at creating your own food story – discover some of the characters (see the Farm Fresh Guide at www.crestonfarmfresh.ca), thicken the plot with a few rows of veggies, add a twist or two with some freezing or canning, and watch it all come together as you share the earth's bounty with family and friends.

Gail Southall is Coordinator for the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition, a group of people dedicated to better feeding our community using local resources. For more information about the Coalition call 254-0254 or email cvfoodaction@gmail.com.