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The Food’s on You

Take a minute and think: how does that meat in the supermarket get there? As essayist Makenna Goodman writes in her piece, “Ever Wonder If You Could Kill What You Eat? We Did the Other Night,” the meat we buy “does not simply fall from the sky, packaged on a shelf in a supermarket; it comes from a living, breathing being” (1). This means our food gets there thanks to the person who dealt with the process of killing an animal for consumption. Without this person doing the dirty work, would the average American be able to kill what he or she eats?

When I was six, my family decided on a two-year trip to Mexico to visit my grandparents’ farm. Every day, life on that farm was something else; something I was not used to. A day came when my grandfather came up to me with a chicken and a big smile. At first I thought, “Oh, it’s gonna be my first pet!” but I was terribly wrong. He said (in Spanish), “Son, I want you to kill this animal and not shed a tear; food’s on you tonight!” At first, I didn’t have the courage to do it. I sat there looking at the knife, not wanting to do it. Finally, I broke the chicken’s neck as fast as I could and then started chopping it into edible pieces, showered in my own tears. After a few weeks went by, I would kill little chickens without even thinking about it. It’s a hard process but it’s something you get accustomed to and eventually learn to do for a living.

Then came another day I won’t soon forget. My grandfather brought me up to the slaughter room one early morning and said, “Son, I’m very proud of what you have done. I think you’re brave enough to handle something even larger now.” I thought that it must just be a larger chicken or something of that nature; once again, I was wrong. I heard a few snorts, as if someone was snoring. Then it hit me—the animal that was about to meet its fate was a pig. Because the pig was almost the same size as me, I had the impression that I was killing more than an animal, something almost human. So many thoughts started racing through my head, but in the end I had to do what was necessary for the family. I killed the pig. It wasn’t an easy task. By then, killing chickens was fairly simple for me because I didn’t have to hear their moans of death;
with a simple, quick twist of the neck, the chicken was out of its misery. With the pig it was much harder. I had to strike the pig down with a large sledgehammer-like object, which not only made the pig suffer great pain, but made me suffer as well.

Being accustomed to American life, most of the stuff I saw in Mexico looked really disturbing and abnormal to me. What I know now is that it’s all part of life; farmers like my grandparents don’t do this for fun. They are doing it to provide decent meals for the family and to make a decent living.

Of course, most Americans know where the food comes from, but most don’t really know about the process of killing an animal. It’s something most consumers don’t think about. Most Americans go through an entire lifetime without having to kill an animal to eat. Many may think it’s an easy process, when it’s really not. Having the courage to strike down an animal is one thing, but having to deal with the guilt that follows is another.

Later, in high school, I was involved with my school’s urban-farming program. The class was fairly simple. We planted flowers and vegetables, watched a couple of farming movies, and at the end of every other month, we would harvest what we grew and make a meal. Although we didn’t actually kill an animal, I felt that if we were given the chance to, any one of the students in that class would have been able to do it without hesitation. What I took from that class was that I can rely on myself for food. Children should learn exactly where their foods are coming from and exactly how they got there. In the end, it’s an experience that only benefits us.

Work Cited