

Contents

Introduction xi

Part One: Caring for All Creatures

- 1 The Metamorphosis of a Pig Farmer 3
- 2 Eggs and the Chickens Who Lay Them 17
- 3 No Such Thing as Happy Cows 21

Part Two: What Are We Putting into Our Bodies?

- 4 Health Food or Harm Food? The Truth about Soy . 31
- 5 Does Soy Cause Alzheimer's? 60
- 6 It's Not about Size, It's about Health:
Obesity and Food Choices. 67
- 7 The Skinny on Grass-fed Beef 74
- 8 Are Factory Farms Becoming Biological
Weapons Factories? 89
- 9 Greed and Salmonella: A Deadly Duo 95
- 10 Infants Growing Breasts: The Trouble with
Hormones in Our Milk 100
- 11 Is Your Favorite Ice Cream Made with
Monsanto's Artificial Hormones? 104
- 12 The Startling Health Benefits of Dark Chocolate. . 109

Part Three: Industrial Food Production—and Other Dirty Dealings

13	No Sweetness Here: Chocolate and 21st-Century Slavery.	115
14	Bitter Beans: Why Fair Trade Coffee Matters So Much.	128
15	Pink KFC Buckets?	132
16	Super Size Me.	138
17	The Battle for Our Children	142
18	The Vitaminwater Deception	147

Part Four: Being Human in This Troubled World

19	Remembering How Much Relationships Matter .	153
20	Do Friends Let Friends Eat Junk Food?	158
21	Mike.	162
22	On Suffering	166
23	Stronger at the Broken Places	170

Further Reading and Other Resources 175

About the Author 183

John Robbins' Website 185

Introduction

IT CAN FEEL LIKE A WAR OUT THERE. Who would have guessed that First Lady Michelle Obama was doing anything offensive when, shortly after her husband became president, she planted an organic garden on the White House lawn? It seemed innocuous, much like Lady Bird Johnson's campaign to beautify the nation's cities and highways by planting wildflowers, or Laura Bush's support for childhood literacy.

But CropLife America, a trade association representing Monsanto and other makers of pesticides and genetically modified (GMO) food, was outraged. They angrily wrote the First Lady and widely broadcast their view that her organic garden was unfairly maligning chemical agriculture. They demanded that she use "crop-protection technologies," otherwise known as pesticides.

From the degree of umbrage they took, you'd have thought the Obama administration was nursing major plans to do something to challenge agribusiness as usual. But that was far from the case. In fact, the president had already appointed an ardent ally of industrial agriculture, Tom Vilsack, to head the Department of Agriculture. Vilsack's support for agrichemicals, large industrial farms, and GMO foods was so steadfast that, as the governor of Iowa, he had been the recipient of Monsanto's Governor of the Year award.

As if to make it copiously clear that he was not intending to confront the agrichemical and factory-farm conglomerates, Obama had even appointed the man most responsible

for the advancement of GMO food in the history of the U.S., Michael R. Taylor, as senior advisor to the FDA commissioner. And in case that wasn't enough, Obama then promoted Taylor to an even more powerful position as Deputy Commissioner of Foods.

This was the same Michael R. Taylor who had made it possible for Monsanto to get GMO foods approved in the U.S. without even remotely adequate testing for possible health dangers. In a classic example of the "revolving door" between agribusiness and government, Taylor was first an attorney at Monsanto, then became policy chief at the FDA, then became Monsanto's vice president and chief lobbyist, and then was appointed by Obama as America's food-safety czar.

But CropLife America, whose members include such bastions of corporate virtue as Monsanto, Syngenta, DuPont, and Dow, was still not satisfied. In what may have been the political equivalent of make-up sex, the president subsequently appointed CropLife America vice president Islam A. Siddiqui to become the nation's Chief Agricultural Negotiator. Siddiqui is not exactly what you would call a hero to the organic food movement. Nor has he made it his mission to defend future generations and the biological carrying capacity of the planet. When he oversaw the release of the National Organic Program's standards for organic food labeling, it was his bright idea to permit both irradiated and GMO foods to be labeled as organic.

This is the kind of thing, frankly, that makes me upset. It's not a pretty sight to see our nation's food policies in the hands of shills for industrial food production and agrichemical companies like Monsanto. Pesticides in the food chain and in the environment are known to cause cancer, birth defects, autism, and many other ailments. The health effects of GMO foods are largely unknown because there has never

been sufficient testing, but what there has been is more frightening than reassuring. A diet based on industrial fast food is contributing mightily to escalating rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and cancer. And factory farms are contributing massively to global warming, deforestation, and species extinction.

Would it be such a terrible idea if, instead of agribusiness as usual, we were to promote sustainable local food systems as a way to rebuild rural economies and improve access to healthy food? Would it be so awful if we were to support family farms rather than factory farms?

Factory farms, also called “confined animal-feeding operations” (CAFOs), now produce almost all of the nation’s beef, pork, chicken, dairy, and eggs, but they haven’t achieved this level of prominence through rational planning, or efficiencies of scale, or market forces. The factory meat industry has come to dominate the marketplace as the result of federal farm policies that have shifted billions of dollars in environmental, health, and economic costs onto taxpayers and communities. For example, taxpayer-subsidized grain prices save feedlot operations billions of dollars a year in animal feed, while grass-fed beef operations do not benefit at all from this subsidy. The USDA similarly provides billions of our dollars to address factory-farm pollution problems, which wouldn’t exist if these operations didn’t confine tens of thousands of animals in small areas—a practice that causes great suffering to the animals involved, as well as massive pollution and well-documented health hazards to humans.

What would happen if we had food and agriculture policies that sought to benefit the environment, public health, and rural communities rather than serve industrial agribusiness? What if we made factory farms, rather than taxpayers, pay to prevent or clean up the pollution they create? What if we subsidized healthy foods rather than unhealthy ones?

The health consequences of current policies are now a matter of record. We have the distinction of having become the fattest major nation in the history of the world and, with each passing year, we are becoming noticeably fatter. In 1996, the U.S. already had the highest rate of obesity in the world, but not a single state had an obesity rate higher than 20 percent. By 2011, there was not a single state with an obesity rate lower than 20 percent.

The U.S. now spends far more on healthcare than any other nation. No one else even comes close. Per capita, we spend close to double the amount spent in countries that—other than us—spend the most (Germany, Canada, Denmark, and France).

The annual health insurance premiums paid by the average American family now exceed the gross yearly income of a full-time minimum-wage worker. Every thirty seconds, someone in the U.S. files for bankruptcy due to the costs of treating a health problem.

Healthcare spending is so far out of control that, not only individuals and families, but the entire economy is buckling under the strain. The chairman of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, says his company spends more money on insurance for its employees than it spends on coffee.

And the situation is not improving. A 2011 report found healthcare costs for a typical American family of four had doubled in fewer than nine years.

Have you noticed that in all the heated debate about healthcare reform, one basic fact is rarely discussed—the one thing that could dramatically bring down the costs of healthcare while improving the health of our people? Studies have shown that the single most effective step most people can take to improve their health is to eat a healthier diet. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 75 percent of U.S. healthcare spending goes

to treat chronic diseases, most of which are preventable and linked to the food we eat. This includes heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes, and possibly a third of all cancers.

But isn't this an issue of personal responsibility, you may ask? Isn't it true that what people eat is their own choice? This is true, and it is important. Each of us needs to be accountable for the foods we choose to buy and consume. The government has no business dictating what people should eat. But that is only half of the story. We also have to limit the power that corporations have to influence government policy, for all too often they use that power to maximize their short-term interests and to diminish or eliminate regulations that would protect workers, animals, the environment, and consumers. These same corporations, it should be noted, with all their complaints about government interference in their activities, rarely display any reluctance to benefit from subsidies and taxpayer money.

Americans today spend a smaller percentage of their income on food than any people in the history of the world, and also a smaller amount of time preparing it. We think of that as an achievement and a blessing. But it's not widely recognized that, thanks to misguided farm bills, it's primarily unhealthy foods like feedlot meat, sweetened beverages, and processed foods with added sweeteners and fats that are cheap. The price of fresh fruits and vegetables has been rising steadily for years. It's the food products that are the least healthy that are readily available and inexpensive, because these are the ones that our food policies have been subsidizing rather than healthy foods.

We need to ask what is the real cost of this seemingly cheap fast food. The agricultural systems producing them are destroying rural communities, polluting our water, eroding our topsoil, causing incredible suffering to animals, emitting greenhouse gases at egregious rates, and giving most of

us toxic levels of nutritional stress. The CDC estimates that more than one out of every three children born in the U.S. today will develop diabetes as a result of the food they eat. We are paying a terrible price for our seemingly cheap food.

Fast-food companies and other advocates for industrial food production and factory farming say that they are only responding to what people want. Their products are full of sugar and unhealthy fats, they say, because that's what consumers desire. It's not industry's role, they protest, to change people's natural inclinations.

But in fact, the industrial food machine and its allies in government have for many years been at work shaping people's food desires through the way they create food products, package them, sell them, and market them. Companies like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Kraft Foods, and McDonald's spend billions of dollars a year marketing junk food to children; they cantankerously fight every effort health advocates make to put any limits whatsoever on their right to target children with ads for fast food, sugary cereals, soft drinks, hot dogs, candy, and other nutrient-deficient products.

In 2011, California Assemblyman Bill Monning proposed legislation that would impose a penny-per-fluid-ounce excise tax on beverages with significant amounts of added sweeteners, like soda pop and sports drinks. The bill would raise \$1.7 billion annually that could be used to lower the price of fresh vegetables and fruits for low-income children and families. Not surprisingly, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo aggressively fought the bill. Their representatives castigated the effort as just another attempt by "do-gooders" at "social engineering."

Similar attacks have been leveled against efforts to tax white bread and use the revenue to lower the price of whole-wheat bread, to tax pesticides and use the income to lower the price of organic food, and to tax junk food in order to lower the price of wholesome and nutritious food.

How can we break this cycle? How can we break the cultural trance and overcome the political cowardice that permits industrial fast food and factory farms so much control over both national and state food policies—and ultimately over what most of us eat? How can we obtain foods that are truly nutritious, affordable, and produced in a sustainable way? That, in a nutshell, is the subject of the essays and articles in this book. Each of the pieces in it speaks to steps you can take toward a healthier, more humane, and more Earth-friendly agriculture and cuisine.

No Happy Cows gathers together some of my most widely discussed and circulated blog posts, along with some substantial new writing. These articles cover topics like what’s fueling the rise in obesity, whether soy is healthy or harmful, the debate about grass-fed beef, the marketing of junk food to children, why we are seeing a rise in food contamination, the politics and health implications of chocolate and coffee, the perils and broken promises of GMO foods, and hormone disruption in children (and its connection to animal-based foods). There is also a section on the social realities of engaging with people whose food habits are endangering their health.

I hope you enjoy the book, and I hope you find support here for your efforts to live a healthy life. I write from the belief that we can still break through the control that companies like Monsanto have been exerting over our food systems, and bring our agriculture policies back into alignment with the greatest good of our people and the Earth. I write from the conviction that what the Constitution of the United States calls “the general welfare” is more important than the short-term profits of companies whose products are nutritional and environmental disasters.

I write from a faith that it is possible to turn things around. If more Americans stopped overeating, stopped

eating unhealthy foods, and instead ate more foods with higher nutrient densities and cancer-protective properties, we could have a more affordable, sustainable, and effective healthcare system. We'd be less dependent on insurance companies and doctors, and more dependent on our own health-giving choices.

We can make healthy choices as individuals, as families, and as a society. We can support farmers' markets, natural food stores, and organic and locally sourced restaurants. We can put restrictions on the right of junk-food companies to bombard children with ads that make them crave foods that are unhealthy for them to eat.

We can stop factory farms from breeding antibiotic-resistant bacteria by prohibiting the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in livestock. We can require factory farms to clean up their own waste, and require them to treat the animals that provide our meat, milk, and eggs with a modicum of decency and respect. It's true that this would raise the price of meat and cause some Americans to eat less, but that would be a good thing not a bad thing. It would improve the health of consumers, livestock, and the land.

If we are going to subsidize any foods, why not make it healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, nuts, and whole grains, rather than high-fructose corn syrup and cattle feeds made from GMO soy and corn? If we are going to subsidize a type of agriculture, why not support family farmers who have a long-term commitment to the land, who are stewards of the Earth, rather than corporate farms that view the land as simply another commodity to be exploited?

Despite the efforts of big agribusinesses, organic produce is already the fastest-growing and most profitable segment of American agriculture, and the number of farmers' markets in the U.S. has more than doubled in the past eight years. Despite the clout of Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, many school

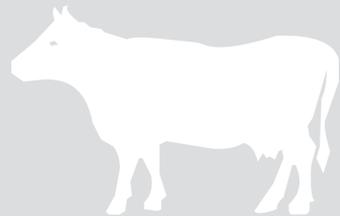
districts throughout the country are already banning sodas and junk foods. Despite the belligerence of the livestock industry and farm bureaus, states are increasingly passing referenda on behalf of animal welfare. Despite untold billions being spent promoting fast food and junk food, a large and ever-growing number of people are choosing to eat local, natural, and wholesome foods.

I write to support those of us who are working to build a healthier way of life and a healthier world. I write to support us all in demanding that the companies who produce our food be held accountable for their impact on our Earth, our health, and our future.

You deserve to know the truth about what you eat, where it comes from, and what its impact is on your life and on the world. The more you know, the more power you will have to take effective and meaningful action. The more you know, the better able you will be to bring your food choices into alignment with your purpose and your passion. Your mind will be clearer, your heart will be more at peace, and your body will thank you for the rest of your life.

PART ONE

Caring for All Creatures



1

The Metamorphosis of a Pig Farmer

This story, which I first told in The Food Revolution, has generated such enthusiastic response that I decided to include an updated version of it here.

ONE DAY IN IOWA, I met a particular gentleman—and I use that term, gentleman, frankly, only because I am trying to be polite, for that is certainly not how I saw him at the time. He owned and ran what he called a “pork production facility.” I, on the other hand, would have called it a pig Auschwitz.

The conditions were brutal. The pigs were confined in cages that were barely larger than their own bodies, with the cages stacked on top of each other in tiers, three high. The sides and bottoms of the cages were steel slats, so that excrement from the animals in the upper and middle tiers dropped through the slats onto the animals below.

The aforementioned owner of this nightmare weighed, I am sure, at least 240 pounds, but what was even more impressive about his appearance was that he seemed to be made out of concrete. His movements had all the fluidity and grace of a brick wall.

What made him even less appealing was that his language seemed to consist mainly of grunts, many of which sounded alike to me, and none of which were particularly pleasant to hear. Seeing how rigid he was and sensing the overall quality of his presence, I—rather brilliantly, I thought—concluded that his difficulties had not arisen merely because he hadn't had time, that particular morning, to finish his entire daily yoga routine.

But I wasn't about to divulge my opinions of him or his operation, for I was undercover, visiting slaughterhouses and feedlots to learn what I could about modern meat production. There were no bumper stickers on my car, and my clothes and hairstyle were carefully chosen to give no indication that I might have philosophical leanings other than those that were common in the area. I told the farmer matter-of-factly that I was a researcher writing about animal agriculture, and asked if he'd mind speaking with me for a few minutes so that I could have the benefit of his knowledge. In response, he grunted a few words that I could not decipher, but that I gathered meant I could ask him questions and he would show me around.

I was, at this point, not very happy about the situation, and this feeling did not improve when we entered one of the warehouses that housed his pigs. In fact, my distress increased, for I was immediately struck by what I can only call an overpowering olfactory experience. The place reeked in a way you would not believe of ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and other noxious gases that were the products of the animals' wastes. These, unfortunately, seemed to have been piling up inside the building for far too long.

As nauseating as the stench was for me, I wondered what it must be like for the animals. The cells that detect scent are known as ethmoidal cells. Pigs, like dogs, have nearly 200 times the concentration of these cells in their noses as

humans do. In a natural setting, they are able, while rooting around in the dirt, to detect the scent of an edible root through the earth itself.

Given any kind of a chance, pigs will never soil their own nests, for they are actually quite clean animals, despite the reputation we have unfairly given them. But here they had no contact with the earth, and their noses were beset by the unceasing odor of their own urine and feces multiplied 1,000 times by the accumulated wastes of the other pigs unfortunate enough to be caged in that warehouse. I was in the building for only a few minutes, and the longer I remained there, the more desperately I wanted to leave. But the pigs were prisoners there, barely able to take a single step, forced to endure this stench, and almost completely immobile, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and with no time off, I can assure you, for holidays.

The man who ran the place was—I'll give him this—kind enough to answer my questions, which were mainly about the drugs he used to handle the problems that are fairly common in factory pigs today. But my sentiments about him and his farm were not becoming any warmer. It didn't help when, in response to a particularly loud squealing from one of the pigs, he delivered a sudden and threatening kick to the bars of its cage, causing a loud "clang" to reverberate through the warehouse and leading to screaming from many of the pigs.

Because I found it increasingly difficult to hide my distress, it crossed my mind that I should tell the man what I thought of the conditions in which he kept his pigs, but then I thought better of it. This was a man, it was obvious, with whom there was no point in arguing.

After perhaps fifteen minutes, I'd had enough and was preparing to leave. Moreover, I felt sure he was looking forward to getting rid of me. But then something happened, something that changed my life forever—and, as it turns out,

his too. It began when his wife came out from the farmhouse and cordially invited me to stay for dinner.

The pig farmer grimaced when his wife spoke, but he dutifully turned to me and announced: “The wife would like you to stay for dinner.” He always called her “the wife,” by the way, which led me to deduce that he was not, apparently, on the leading edge of feminist thought in the country today.

I don’t know whether you have ever done something without having a clue why, and to this day I couldn’t tell you what prompted me to do it, but I said “Yes, I’d be delighted.” And stay for dinner I did, although I didn’t eat the pork they served. The excuse I gave was that my doctor was worried about my cholesterol. I didn’t say that I was a vegetarian, or that my cholesterol was 125.

I tried to be a polite and appropriate dinner guest. I didn’t want to say anything that might lead to any kind of disagreement. The couple (and their two sons, who were also at the table) were, I could see, being nice to me, giving me dinner and all, and it was gradually becoming clear to me that, along with all the rest of it, they could be, in their way, somewhat decent people. I asked myself whether, if they were traveling in my town and I had chanced to meet them, I would have invited them to dinner. Not likely, I knew—not likely at all. Yet here they were, being as hospitable to me as they could. Yes, I had to admit it. Much as I detested how the pigs were treated, this pig farmer wasn’t actually the reincarnation of Adolph Hitler. At least, not at the dinner table.

Of course, I still knew that, if we were to scratch the surface, we’d no doubt find ourselves in great conflict and, because that was not a direction in which I wanted to go, as the meal went along I sought to keep things on an even and consistent keel. Perhaps they sensed it too, for among us, we managed to see that the conversation remained completely and resolutely shallow.

We talked about the weather, about the Little League games in which their two sons played, and then, of course, about how the weather might affect the Little League games. We were actually doing rather well at keeping the conversation superficial and far from any topic around which conflict might occur. Or so I thought. But then suddenly, out of nowhere, the man pointed at me forcefully with his finger, and snarled in a voice that I must say truly frightened me: “Sometimes I wish you animal rights people would just drop dead.”

How on Earth he knew I had any affinity to animal rights I will never know—I had painstakingly avoided any mention of any such thing—but I do know that my stomach tightened immediately into a knot. To make matters worse, at that moment his two sons leapt from the table, tore into the den, slammed the door behind them, and turned on the TV, cranking up the volume presumably to drown out what was to follow. At the same instant, his wife nervously picked up some dishes and scurried into the kitchen. As I watched the door close behind her and heard the water begin to run, I had a sinking sensation. They had—there was no mistaking it—left me alone with him.

I was, to put it bluntly, terrified. Under the circumstances, a wrong move now could be disastrous. Trying to center myself, I tried to find some semblance of inner calm by watching my breath, but this I could not do—for the very simple reason that there wasn’t any to watch.

“What are they saying that’s so upsetting to you?” I said finally, pronouncing the words carefully and distinctly, trying not to show my terror. I was trying very hard at that moment to disassociate myself from the animal rights movement, a force in our society of which he, evidently, was not overly fond.

“They accuse me of mistreating my stock,” he growled.

“Why would they say a thing like that?” I answered, knowing full well, of course, why they would, but thinking mostly about my own survival. His reply, to my surprise, while angry, was actually quite articulate. He told me precisely what animal rights groups were saying about operations like his, and exactly why they were opposed to his way of doing things. Then, without pausing, he launched into a tirade about how he didn’t like being called cruel, and they didn’t know anything about the business he was in, and why couldn’t they mind their own business.

As he spoke, the knot in my stomach relaxed, because it was becoming clear—and I was glad of it—that he meant me no harm, but just needed to vent. Part of his frustration, it seemed, was that, even though he didn’t like doing some of the things he did to the animals—cooping them up in such small cages, using so many drugs, taking the babies away from their mothers so quickly after their births—he didn’t see that he had any choice. He would be at a disadvantage and unable to compete economically if he didn’t do things that way. This is how it’s done today, he told me, and he had to do it too. He didn’t like it, but he liked even less being blamed for doing what he had to do in order to feed his family.

As it happened, I had, just the week before, been at a much larger hog operation, where I learned that it was part of their business strategy to try to put people like my host out of business by going full-tilt into the mass production of assembly-line pigs so that small farmers wouldn’t be able to keep up. What I had heard corroborated everything he was saying.

Almost despite myself, I began to grasp the poignancy of this man’s human predicament. I was in his home because he and his wife had invited me to be there. And looking around, it was obvious that they were having a hard time making ends meet. Things were threadbare. This family was on the edge.

Raising pigs, apparently, was the only way the farmer knew to make a living, so he did it even though, as was becoming evident the more we talked, he didn't like one bit the direction hog farming was going. At times, as he spoke about how much he hated the modern factory methods of pork production, he reminded me of the very animal rights people who, a few minutes before, he had said he wished would drop dead.

As the conversation progressed, I actually began to develop some sense of respect for this man whom I had earlier judged so harshly. There was decency in him. There was something within him that meant well. But as I began to sense a spirit of goodness in him, I could only wonder all the more how he could treat his pigs the way he did. Little did I know that I was about to find out.

As we talk, he suddenly looks troubled. He slumps over, his head in his hands. He looks broken, and there is a sense of something awful having happened.

Has he had a heart attack? A stroke? I'm finding it hard to breathe, and hard to think clearly. "What's happening?" I ask.

It takes him awhile to answer, but finally he does. I am relieved that he is able to speak, although what he says hardly brings any clarity to the situation. "It doesn't matter," he says, "and I don't want to talk about it." As he speaks, he makes a motion with his hand, as if he were pushing something away.

For the next several minutes, we continue to converse, but I'm quite uneasy. Things seem incomplete and confusing. Something dark has entered the room, and I don't know what it is or how to deal with it.

Then, as we are speaking, it happens again. Once again a look of despondency comes over him. Sitting there, I know I'm in the presence of something bleak and oppressive. I try to be present with what's happening, but it's not easy. Again, I'm finding it hard to breathe.

Finally, he looks at me and I notice his eyes are teary. “You’re right,” he says. I, of course, always like to be told that I am right, but in this instance, I don’t have the slightest idea what he’s talking about.

He continues. “No animal,” he says, “should be treated like that. Especially hogs. Do you know that they’re intelligent animals? They’re even friendly, if you treat ’em right. But I don’t.”

There are tears welling up in his eyes. And he tells me that he has just had a memory come back of something that happened in his childhood, something he hasn’t thought of for many years. It’s come back in stages, he says.

He grew up, he tells me, on a small farm in rural Missouri, the old-fashioned kind where animals ran around, with barnyards and pastures, and where the animals all had names. I learn, too, that he was an only child, the son of a powerful father who ran things with an iron fist. With no brothers or sisters, he often felt lonely, but found companionship among the animals on the farm, particularly several dogs that were like friends to him. And, he tells me—and this I am quite surprised to hear—he had a pet pig.

As he tells me about this pig, it is as if he becomes a different person. Before, he had spoken primarily in a monotone; now, his voice grows lively. His body language, which until this point seemed to speak primarily of long suffering, now becomes animated. There is something fresh taking place.

In the summer, he tells me, he slept in the barn. It was cooler there than in the house, and the pig often came over to sleep beside him, asking fondly to have her belly rubbed, which he was glad to do.

There was a pond on their property, he goes on, and he liked to swim in it when the weather was hot, but one of the dogs always got excited when he did and ruined things, jumping into the water and swimming up on top of him, scratching

him with her paws and making things miserable for him. He was about to give up on swimming, but then, as fate would have it, the pig, of all creatures, stepped in and saved the day.

Evidently the pig could swim, for she plopped herself into the water, swam out to where the dog was bothering him, and inserted herself between them. She stayed between the dog and the boy, keeping the dog at bay. She was, as best I could make out, functioning in the situation something like a lifeguard—or in this case, perhaps more of a life-pig.

As I listen to this hog farmer tell me these stories about his pet pig, I'm thoroughly enjoying both myself and him, and am rather astounded at how things are transpiring. Then, it happens again—a look of defeat sweeps across the man's face and I sense the presence of something very sad. Something in him, I know, is struggling to make its way toward life through anguish and pain, but I don't know what it is or how, indeed, to help him.

“What happened to your pig?” I ask.

He sighs, and it's as if the whole world's pain is contained in that sigh. Then, slowly, he speaks. “My father made me butcher it.”

“Did you?” I ask.

“I ran away, but I couldn't hide. They found me.”

“What happened?”

“My father gave me a choice.”

“What was that?”

“He told me, ‘You either slaughter that animal or you're no longer my son.’”

Some choice, I think, feeling the weight of how fathers have so often trained their sons not to care, to be what they call brave and strong, but what so often turns out to be callous and closed-hearted.

“So I did it,” he says, and now his tears begin to flow, making their way down his cheeks. I am touched and humbled.

This man, whom I had judged to be without human feeling, is weeping in front of me, a stranger. This man, whom I had seen as callous and even heartless, is actually someone who cares, and deeply. How wrong, how profoundly and terribly wrong, I had been.

In the minutes that follow, it becomes clear to me what has been happening. The pig farmer has remembered something that was so painful, that was such a profound trauma, that he had not been able to cope with it when it happened. Something had shut down then. It was just too much to bear.

Somewhere in his young, formative psyche, he made a resolution never to be that hurt again, never to be that vulnerable again. And he built a wall around the place where the pain had occurred, the place where his love and attachment to that pig was located—his heart. And now here he was, slaughtering pigs for a living—still, I imagined, seeking his father’s approval. God, what we men will do, I thought, to get our fathers’ acceptance.

I had thought he was a cold and closed human being, but now I saw the truth. His rigidity was not the result of a lack of feeling, as I had thought it was. Quite the opposite: it was a sign of how sensitive he was underneath. For if he had not been so sensitive, he would not have been that hurt, and he would not have needed to put up so massive a wall. The tension in his body that had been so apparent to me upon first meeting him, the body armor that he carried, bespoke how hurt he had been and how much capacity for feeling he carried still, beneath it all.

I had judged him, and had done so, to be honest, mercilessly. But for the rest of the evening I sat with him, humbled and grateful for whatever it was in him that had been strong enough to force this long-buried and deeply painful memory to the surface. And I was glad, too, that I had not stayed stuck in my judgments of him; for if I had, I would not have

provided an environment in which his remembering could have occurred.

We talked that night, for hours, about many things. I was, after all that had happened, concerned for him. The gap between his feelings and his lifestyle seemed so tragically vast. What could he do? This was all he knew. He did not have a high school diploma. He was only partially literate. Who would hire him if he tried to do something else? Who would invest in him and train him at his age?

When finally I left that evening, these questions were very much on my mind, and I had no answers to them. Somewhat flippantly, I tried to joke about it. "Maybe," I said, "you'll grow broccoli or something." He stared at me, clearly not comprehending what I could be talking about. It occurred to me, briefly, that possibly he might not know what broccoli was.

We parted that night as friends and, although we rarely saw each other, we remained friends as the years passed. I carry him in my heart and think of him, in fact, as a hero. Because, as you will soon see, impressed as I was by the courage it had taken for him to allow such painful memories to come to the surface, I had not yet seen the extent of his bravery.

When I wrote *Diet for a New America*, I quoted him and summarized what he had told me, but I was quite brief and did not mention his name. I thought that, living as he did among other pig farmers in Iowa, it would not be to his benefit to be associated with me.

When the book came out, I sent him a copy, saying I hoped he was comfortable with how I wrote of the evening we had shared, and directing him to the pages that contained my discussion of our time together.

Several weeks later, I received a letter from him. "Dear Mr. Robbins," it began. "Thank you for the book. When I saw it, I got a migraine headache."

Now, as an author, you do want to have an impact on your readers. This, however, was not what I had had in mind.

He went on, however, to explain that the headaches had gotten so bad that, as he put it, “the wife” suggested that perhaps he should read the book. She thought there might be some kind of connection between the headaches and the book. He told me that this hadn’t made much sense to him, but that he had done it because “the wife” was often right about these things.

“You write good,” he told me, and I can tell you that these three words of his meant more to me than when the *New York Times* praised the book profusely. He then went on to say that reading the book was very hard for him, because the light it shone on what he was doing made it clear to him that it was wrong to continue. The headaches, meanwhile, kept getting worse. Then that very morning, when he had finished the book after having stayed up all night reading, he went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror. “I decided, right then,” he said, “that I would sell my herd and get out of this business. I don’t know what I will do, though. Maybe I will, like you said, grow broccoli.”

As it happened, he did sell his operation in Iowa and move back to Missouri, where he bought a small farm. He began growing vegetables organically—including, I am sure, broccoli—and selling them at a local farmers’ market. He still had pigs, all right, but only about ten of them, and he didn’t cage or kill them. Instead, he signed a contract with local schools; they brought children out in buses on field trips to his farm for his “Pet-a-Pig” program. He showed them how intelligent pigs are and how friendly they can be if you treat them right, which he was now doing. He arranged it so that each child got a chance to give a pig a belly rub. He became nearly a vegetarian himself, lost most of his excess weight, and improved his health substantially. And, thank goodness,

he actually did better financially than he had been doing before.

He and I corresponded every so often after that. I was very sad to learn, a few years ago, that he had passed away.

Do you see why I still carry this man with me in my heart? Do you see why he is such a hero to me? He dared to leap, to risk everything, to leave what was killing his spirit even though he didn't know what was next. He left behind a way of life that he knew was wrong, and he found one that he knew was right.

When I look at many of the things happening in our world, I sometimes fear we won't make it. But when I remember this man and the power of his spirit, and when I remember that there are many others whose hearts beat to the same quickening pulse, I think we will.

I can get tricked into thinking there aren't enough of us to turn the tide, but then I remember how wrong I was about the pig farmer when I first met him, and I realize that there are heroes everywhere. It's just that I can't recognize them because I think they are supposed to look or act a certain way. How blinded I can be by my own beliefs.

The man is one of my heroes because his example reminds me that we can depart from the cages we build for ourselves and for each other, and become something much better. When I first met him, I would not have thought it possible that I would ever say the things I am saying here. But this only goes to show how amazing life can be, and how you never really know what to expect. This pig farmer has become, for me, a reminder never to underestimate the power of the human heart.

I consider myself privileged to have spent that day with him, and I am grateful that I was allowed to be a catalyst for the unfolding of his spirit. I know my presence served him in some way, but I also know, and know full well, that I received far more than I gave.

To me, this is grace—to have the veils lifted from our eyes so that we can recognize and serve the goodness in each other. Others may wish for great riches, psychic powers, or for ecstatic journeys to mystical planes, but to me, this is the true magic of human life.