



Fruit of the Word

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I was raised by cooks. Everything was about food. We raised chickens, ducks, geese and pigs. We milked cows, raised lettuce, made butter, ran a restaurant. Food. Everything was food. Growing it, harvesting, preparing it, preserving it, serving it. Eating.

Grown, and stealing moments as a writer, the cupboard of my day is filled with difficult foods: The microwave pizza of answering endless email; the platters and platters of over-salted steak that come with finding myself in the marble halls of the state capitol; hand shakes, men and women desperate; people who know me well calling me “Senator.”

“I’m a vegetarian,” I’ve been known to whisper into the dark of statehouse supply closets. “We must have potatoes or at least apples here.” I picture couples holding hands on main streets in tiny towns, children learning kindness, schools flowing with books, with parents and businesspeople, all neighborly, all generous. “After all, this is Idaho.”

So over the years, writing my blog on a balcony in the temporary capitol or in my grand office in the Senate, writing a poem in eulogy, maybe inking lines on napkins at lobbyist receptions or in the car scribbling speeches blind so I become a hazard to the universe: I write.

Any time I’m stuck in transit, writing is like some exquisite fruit, the perfect nectarine fallen from that sickly dwarf on the south side of the house; the raspberry almost black-red and shriveled in the Boise heat, concentrated raspberry to the hundredth power. That is what allowing myself to spend hours writing has become.

Writing is not the potato, not the base of the food pyramid of my day. It is the stolen second, fingers darting through leaves and branches, reaching into a neighbor’s plum tree. It is pears found in the grass, bruised on one side but dripping and delicious. I steal the moments I write.

Airports and all that time waiting in places where no one knows me now are the ancient orchards of my year: tree after tree of peaches; endless knifey hedges of blackberries; the chance stumble into a walk-in cooler of kiwi, hairy skins falling in curls under my knife, the green fruit and seeds soft, sweet, sour, slippery, sliced so they almost fall or rise like

projectiles, sticking to the metal walls in the humming darkness, deep in the cool insulated vault of the imagination.

I have a duty to eat my green beans, to return lobbyist phone calls. I serve my country with piles of spinach carefully grown before the tomato plants must take their places in the ground. People's lives depend on the eggplant I prop with yard sign stakes, the chili peppers I water in darkness before meetings, the walls of tomatoes Carol tends so I have something to offer those who greet me in the streets with stories of tragedy, the transgressions of state government, the decay of their schools.

I dream that the sentences I write carry flesh and juice with them. I dream they nourish the despairing, that without these words on paper or screen my work in the marble hallways would be silent and useless, that it is only through the written word that something comes of my work as a lawmaker, my tiny "no" vote in the towering cruelty of state.

I dream that, beyond my utilitarian scribbling, my works of fiction will someday become the apple pie of desperate young lives, the apricot-walnut compote to action for the lost, a glimpse of ecstasy for lives filled with bonefish or gruel.

I wait for the unlikely day my doctors say, "You can eat nothing but fruit. You are allergic to everything else and it is inflaming your liver, swelling your brain, rotting your spleen." Something.

Then I will build myself a writing desk. People passing will not call me Senator, not Ms., Mrs. Miss or Honorable. My own name will carry itself on its own. And, like I did as a child, I will walk the streets, chin dripping with colored juice, hands sticky with each bawdy globe of botanical procreative perfection. I will grow unkempt, walk the streets in stained t-shirts. I will inspire beauty, revolution and kindness, spinning feasts of words, eating and eating until there is no more left to say.

Nicole LeFavour has taught writing to students from second grade through college. Her own writing spans poetry, fiction and journalism and has included performance oriented genres like Slam as well as political writing in the form of a legislative blog, Notes From the Floor. In 1990 Nicole earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of Montana. She has since earned an Idaho Press Club award and has had her short fiction and creative non-fiction published in anthologies and such places as the North American Review. She is currently completing a novel for young adults.
