

# MEAT OF GOOD FAITH

Standing before a dusty pile of pig testicles on a hot April morning, I realized that my life had come to a place from which it will never return.

After a boozy and beautiful Easter Sunday in Richmond, Virginia, with Tanya Cauthen of Belmont Butchery, I had hightailed to Polyface Farms in Swoope to meet Joel Salatin. When I arrived, I headed to a tent, where two people were quietly inventorying chest freezers filled with Cryovac bags of meat.

Something about the giant farmhouse—tilting into the earth with age—the solemnity of the employees, and the earnestness of my respect for Joel Salatin gives my memory of the afternoon a certain Dust Bowl glamour.

“Is Mr. Salatin here?”

“He expecting you? He’s up there.”

“Up where?”

“You’ll see.”

If that isn’t just how every fairytale begins.

“Follow that path, young lady, the one with the destination just out of sight.”

Sure enough, once I took a few steps I heard the visceral, gut-wrenching sound of a pig screaming. When I came around the corner, I watched this hero of mine, bent over, with a helper (so dirty from his physical work that he had mud on his teeth), castrating a young pig. Once Joel noticed me, he came right over, dropped a steaming set of testes at my feet, gave me the biggest shit-eating grin east of the Mississippi, and put out a hand. And I shook that hand without the slightest flinch.

There’s a flea-bitten old saw that says you should never meet a hero. If you think that seeing Joel emasculate a pig proves that to be true, well then, you just don’t know me at all. I was utterly charmed that after a flight from New York that morning, he had gotten right back into the grubby, squealing labor of being a farmer. Salatin is one of the great thinkers and mouthpieces of the good food movement, and the integrity of his opinions comes from the deep well of his hard work.

Joel Salatin, like every single butcher in this book is a mirror for me. Eating is a daily prayer, an act of care that passes from the earth into our every cell. Those that spend their lives in devotion to righteous food are my people. Every butcher in *Primal Cuts* is different, which is why I selected them, but we all share a mission to make food that is meaningful and that respects the earth and nourishes its inhabitants.

I run a meat plant in Sonoma County, California. The job of my company, Sonoma Direct, is to butcher whole animals from ranches in our community. Some of these animals, we sell to restaurants and grocery stores; others, we simply “cut and wrap” for farmers who sell their own meat. My work, as commander of this bandsaw brigade, gives me a front-row seat to the food system. From discussing weather and watersheds with producers to hanging out in the kitchens of my customers while the stock fortifies, I see the whole parade. I have the privilege, or thankless mandate, depending on the day, of being a collaborator with everyone.

I want so much to share with you the great creativity and commitment of these butchers as much as I want to share their delicious recipes. I hope you get even a fraction of the inspiration that I did from their stories and knowledge. I have taken a bellows to the definition of a butcher. These are not all men who work behind

a counter in a shop, cutting meat all day. Some of them are. A new meat system is cropping up outside the centralized infrastructure and the butchers in *Primal Cuts* have found all sorts of deeply particular and inspired solutions to bring great meat to you. There are butchers in this book whom you might only find at a farmer's market, or on their farm, or in the kitchen of a café. It is my hope that this expanded view of the role of the butcher will urge you to keep your eyes peeled for those hidden meat mavens in your own community.

The recipes in this book are of one spirit but not of one kitchen. Some are simple home-cooking favorites from meat cutters and others are the work of Michelin star chefs. I have taken care to give you recipes from every primal of beef, lamb, goat, venison, and chicken, and to offer varied cooking techniques for every season and mood. Whatever is in your fridge or takes your fancy, I think you will find a recipe in these pages.

I spent my day with Joel walking his property under the spring sun. It was the day after Easter and no one was missing the metaphor. Every blade of grass was in ascension. Polyface Farm pastures were starkly greener and more abundant than their neighbors, the property lines defying another old saw. We sat at Joel's kitchen table and he shared his story, as so many other butchers had and would on my trip around the country to make this book.

"Have a glass of water. We have good water here."

He had been a journalist and had come back to the farm. He writes, still, books of protest and testimony and blueprints of a world in his image.

Writing about meat is, for me, about as sweet as it gets. I have been a writer since I've been anything, really, and I've never met a subject that talked back to me nearly so much as meat. I love meat. I love it in that uncomplicated, bacon-in-a-pan-on-Sunday-morning kind of way. But much more, I love the way weaving through an animal's life takes us through so many homes and habits and ecosystems. I love the traditions and the ceremony. I love the metaphors and the moral dignity it requires to eat meat in good faith, with a full heart.

—MARISSA GUGGIANA

