BOOK REVIEW

PLENTY: ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN, AND A RAUCOUS YEAR OF EATING LOCALLY

Reviewed by Leda Meredith

Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally is a refreshing variation on the theme of how-to-save-the-planet-by-eating-righteously. This is not just another list of depressing statistics about how chemically dependent crops are shipped thousands of miles before they reach you, or one more plug for local, seasonal eating that relies on a juicy description of the difference between a supermarket tomato in January and the real thing from your garden in August. (All absolutely true and important, but I know that already, thank you. Hey, I’m a CSA member!). Plenty, written by professional journalists Alisa Smith and J. B. Mackinnon, does have its share of food related statistics. But this story is as much about how local eating changed the authors as it is about how such eating can change the world.

The book begins with their decision to spend a year eating only what is grown or raised within 100 miles of their apartment in Vancouver. They dub their experiment The 100-Mile Diet. This is the extreme sports version of local eating: even Gary Nabhan in Coming Home to Eat gave himself a 250-mile radius to source his food from. Smith and Mackinnon allow themselves a few exceptions, but for the most part stick to their self-imposed rules, which include no olive oil, no citrus, no black pepper, no sugar or other kitchen “basics” that aren’t grown in their part of the world. Their search for local sources of such staples as wheat flour and salt provides some of funniest and most touching anecdotes.

During the course of their 100 Mile Diet year they went online with the 100-Mile Diet concept and gave momentum to a growing movement of local eating organizations including their own 100milediet.org, as well as eatlocalchallenge.com and locavores.com.

I’d thought I was doing pretty well by growing some food in my garden, being a CSA member, eating seasonally and buying local whenever possible. But Plenty led me to reevaluate my kitchen and find room for improvement. For example, I was surprised to find that I had vinegars from California, Spain and Italy but none that came from anywhere within 3,000 miles of here. Five minutes online turned up a recipe for homemade vinegar and now I’m on my second batch. I noticed that there are no sources listed for the bulk organic popcorn and flour at the co-op so I did a little sleuthing and found out that the locally grown stuff is available from Wild Hive Farm at the Union Square Market. Plenty is a lively and thought-provoking read that has already inspired me to make several such unexpected (and delicious) changes. Highly recommended even if, like me, you aren’t quite ready to relinquish your olive oil.
They make that clear in the first chapter, and I found it to be a relief. It's also written in a very relaxed style and the alternating authors in each chapter provide a deeper context. The authors provide a lot of insight into what we consume and how we consume it. Although the book doesn't strive to be life changing, I have to say it is habit changing. Even if you...Â As you can see by the title, I've just finished reading Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon. Ms. Smith and Mr. MacKinnon are 2 journalists who live together in a one bedroom apartment in Vancouver, British Columbia. They decide to try the experiment of eating only local food for the year when they learn that the food a typical North American eats travels 1500 For the first time they felt connected to the people and the places that sustain them. For Smith and MacKinnon, the 100-mile diet became a journey whose destination was, simply, home. From the satisfaction of pulling their own crop of garlic out of the earth to pitched battles over canning tomatoes, Plenty is about eating locally and thinking globally. The authorsâ€™ food-focused experiment questions globalization, monoculture, the oil economy, environmental collapse, and the tattering threads of community. Thought-provoking and inspiring, Plenty offers more than a way of eating. In the end, itâ€™