

LIFE ON THE KILLING FLOOR

Magazines and newspapers are jammed with information on the latest diet crazes. I'm not a vegetarian, a vegan, or a piscetarian (a vegetarian who will eat fish). I don't eat only carbohydrates or limit my diet to sucking on grapefruits. I embrace the right of the citizenry to choose what and who they eat, but some have carried this to extreme and weird levels. For example, eschewing the cooking of any food and sustaining ones self entirely upon raw fruits and vegetables. Apparently, it takes a few months for the body to adjust to this, a diet similar to that experienced by hominids before the discovery of fire. People who adopt this diet have ample health justification I'm sure, but gee, the cave men didn't have much of a life expectancy. I suppose that had more to do with sabre toothed tigers and mammoths than methods of food preparation, though. I like my meat in spite the claims of food faddists and in spite of the fact that I have toured the killing floors of meat packing plants, and cleaned my own deer, ducks, rabbit and other game.

Most people would say that to tour a factory where food is prepared, be it canned peas, cookies, jams, peanut butter, or dog kibble, would cause one to avoid that food for months or forever. I toured many factories in my old job, and I always looked forward to it. Once, on a walk through a potato chip factory, I watched the spuds be relieved of their skins, washed, sliced, immersed in hot fat, then tumble onto a conveyor belt on their way to seasoning and packaging. The V.P. Finance, who was escorting me on the tour, stated confidently that, "If I once gobbled a hot chip right off the belt, I would be forever unsatisfied with other potatoes". As he said this, he popped a large hot chip in his mouth. I was about to replicate his feat, but was somewhat hesitant to grab one off the conveyer belt like he did. I don't know why, fear of contaminating the whole batch or something. As I looked to him for reassurance, I noticed that his eyes bulged from their sockets, then he began to make pig-like grunting sounds, then noises similar to those I had heard chimps make in the zoo. "Are these chips that good?", I wondered. His knees then crumpled and as I stood rooted to the spot, a witless witness to his impending death, one of the men sprinted to the boss and began wrestling with him and thumping him powerfully on the back. This was before the invention of the Heimlich Maneuver, but apparently beating up on the boss did the trick, because he hacked up his delicious hot potato chip on the clean floor. I chose not to try one.

Well, making potato chips isn't disgusting, but plenty of other food preparations are. Starting at the start, for example, meat has to come from an animal which must be killed to convince it to part with it's protein. One of the men I hunt with, an esteemed lawyer and Queens Counsel, once took up farming in his spare time. He was, I'm sure, the precise parallel to Walt Wingfield, Dan Needles' fictional stockbroker who takes up farming in a idealistic way. As this faux farmer related the story to me, he had a steer that was ready for the table, except it was alive. The steer was very large and he realized he should have done this job many months before, but the law courts had taken precedence. He said. "I'm no dummy, there was a guy who would come around and fetch the steer, put it on a truck, and later return with butcher wrapped beef. Trouble was, he wasn't available and, while I'm expensive as a lawyer, I'm cheap as a farmer, so I figured I could do the job myself."

The first step, not surprisingly, was to kill the animal. Not having the killing instruments of an abattoir, he armed himself with a .22 caliber rifle, and led the steer into an enclosed pole corral, where he had easy access with his tractor to lift the animal once it had fallen into eternal

Continued on page 10

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