

# tpss

Co-operative Effort News

Food for People, not for Profit Since 1981

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2004



## Growing With Our Community

By Bob Atwood, General Manager

In the fall of 2000, the Board and I worked together to develop TPSS's vision for the future. We articulated this in a single statement: "We are the people's choice for food and community." From that vision statement came the mission statement to help us get there: "To promote healthful living by offering wholesome foods, high quality products, and community resources in clean, friendly, co-operative grocery stores that you can own." However, neither statement specified whether TPSS was a vegetarian establishment.

Communities constantly change, and we wanted to stay current with the needs of ours. When the Board and I reviewed our mission statement last year, we wanted to see if our mission for reaching TPSS's ultimate vision was still in tune with our community's needs. Specifically, we wanted to know if our members wanted to add the word "vegetarian" to the mission statement. To find out, last January we invited our Co-op owners and members to review our mission statement at special meetings, through the newsletter, and finally through a ballot vote.

In March 2003 the voting period ended and the results were announced: 71% of member respondents voted to keep the mission statement as it was and open to selling meat. Since then, our Co-op staff has talked with many of our member and non-member shoppers at our Takoma Park store where meat had not been included in the product mix, to get feedback regarding if, when, and how meat products would be stocked at our Co-op stores and to assist us in making purchasing decisions in keeping with the best interests of the Co-op as a whole.

Based on the results of the vote, we set in motion a process to identify and provide members and shoppers with the products

that they would like to buy at their Co-op — including meat. We are now ready to take the final step; beginning in February 2004, we will sell natural, free-range and organic meat at the Takoma Park store. We will start with frozen beef, chicken, fish, turkey, hotdogs, bacon, ham, pork and other frozen products that contain these meats. We will also carry lunchmeats and canned products such as tuna, salmon, sardines, anchovies, beef and chicken broth. We are committed to taking every precaution to make sure the items are clearly marked and segregated where needed.

### The Process of Implementing the Vote

We undertook the process of introducing new products to the Co-op with a series of small steps. The first thing we did was to bring in meat-based dog and cat food. Then at our Labor Day celebration we decided to experiment with selling chicken and sausage sandwiches along with Boca burgers and soy dogs. We sold over 100 meat sandwiches and only a few vegetarian ones. For Thanksgiving, we sold over 40 preordered turkeys. When we learned that our vendor for MOM's pies had started using lard, we posted a sign to inform shoppers that lard was added to the ingredient list. We decided to keep selling the pies with lard until we could find other vendors with the same quality pies. Over 30 pies were sold. (The lard has since been taken out.)

Since March I have personally discussed this topic with many of our members and shoppers. Some members thought the vote in March was strictly a vote on whether or not to carry meat at our Takoma Park store. Many people have asked me when meat will be available at the Co-op; others have expressed fervent opposition to the idea of carrying meat. And some members told me that, while they hoped we wouldn't sell

meat, they would continue to shop at our Co-op if we did.

### Challenges Past and Future

Our sales figures for the last three years have shown us that we are not fulfilling our vision. If we don't adjust to the community's needs, we will not be able to continue serving it to the best of our ability.

Over the past three years, the Takoma Park Co-op lost over \$600,000 dollars in sales. In order for a business to survive, sales need to contently increase to keep pace with expense increases — insurances, utilities, rent, wages, etc. We want to know why our sales have gone down, and where our shoppers have gone. Our decline in sales has shown us that we are unfortunately not serving the community as well as desired.

Since the inception of our vision and mission, the TPSS Co-op has faced many challenges. When the mission statement was written, Takoma Park sales were growing at a healthy rate. September 2001 we experienced 9/11, and later that month Whole Foods opened a 35,000 square foot store. On the plus side, our Silver Spring store opened in early 2002. In the fall of that year, however, the sniper plagued our area and sales continued to drop. In response to sales declines I made a very hard and emotional decision in December 2002 to close the deli at the Takoma Park store, since sales were not great enough to cover the costs of keeping it open.

Our sales finally started picking up in May 2003, but for the fiscal year ending June 2003 our sales were down again. We still need to make more improvements, learn from our experience, and continue to find better ways to serve our community in the future.

Several other events are looming on the horizon, and we need to weather these

while continuing to serve our owners and shoppers to the best of our ability. After this July, for example, the fire station will temporarily relocate to part of the city parking lot right next to the Takoma Park store. This will decrease our parking spaces and probably cause our sales to drop. We would like to be in a position to access this site on a more permanent basis after the fire station moves to its new location.

### What Makes a Store Successful?

When we look at what makes a super-market successful, here is what we find. According to the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), the top factors for shoppers in selecting their primary supermarket are:

*Clean, neat store*

*High-quality fruits and vegetables*

*Low prices*

*Use before/sell-by date marked*

*High-quality meat*

*A convenient location*

Also according to FMI, the overall number of weekly shopping visits by the typical shopper has remained virtually constant for the past 17 years. A typical shopper reports making 2.2 visits to a supermarket each week on average, including an average of 1.7 visits to his or her primary supermarket.

We estimate that 80% of the Co-op's members and shoppers are meat eaters. This of course means 80% of our members/shoppers are going somewhere else to buy meat. And in turn this means that our vision for being "The people's choice for food and community" is not being fulfilled. People who purchase meat are not likely to shop at two stores but will, because of time and other constraints, choose to shop at one store where more of their shopping needs can be met. Members have informed me that they shop at Whole Foods for their meat and end up buying a lot of other things, at times spending over a \$100 that they would rather spend at the Takoma Park Co-op. If we are to move towards making our vision a reality, we must continue to be successful in meeting the needs of our owners and sell the products our owners are buying.

Our Co-op has a past we can be proud of, and now it is time to look to our future. In order to be "The people's choice for food and community" we need to respond to the choices of our owners and shoppers in our community, and provide ourselves with the product choices that we want to buy from our Co-op store.

It is a co-op's nature to serve its owners and community and we are fortunate to be able to continue our work to fulfill that mission. Thank you for being engaged in a dynamic discussion and thank you for your continued support of our Co-op as we move forward together. ●

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# Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2003

(July 2002 through June 2003)

By Larry Haller, Treasurer

This financial report covers the TPSS Co-op's 2003 operating year. The Co-op keeps its books on a fiscal year basis, with an operating year that begins July 1 and ends June 30 each year. The Co-op's latest fiscal year ended June 30, 2003. Because of scheduling difficulties with our new outside accounting firm, the Co-op's year-end financial statements were not available until December.

For 2003, the Co-op had a net income of \$66,000 on total sales of about \$6,000,000, or

about 1.1 percent of sales. The Co-op's Silver Spring location ran at a net loss for the year of about \$73,000, and the Takoma Park location had a net income of about \$139,000. While the loss at the Silver Spring location was large, it was less than we had budgeted. As is the case when most new stores are opened, we projected a loss at the Silver Spring store, but the losses are smaller than planned and are diminishing more quickly than we budgeted.

Net sales for the Co-op for the year were \$6,000,000, compared with \$5,600,000 in

2002. Sales at Takoma Park were \$4,600,000, below budgeted sales of \$4,900,000 and below 2002's sales of \$4,800,000. Sales at Silver Spring were \$1,400,000, a little over the budget's projection of \$1,300,000, and substantially above 2002's \$800,000. Overall, the Co-op operated on a gross margin (the difference between selling price and cost of goods sold) of 30.7%. Our budget called for a margin of 34.3%. Our lower-than-expected margin was due to lower margins at both stores.

The Co-op's overall expenses (personnel, rent and related

expenses, administrative, marketing, and some small miscellaneous expenses) totaled \$1,800,000, including \$1,300,000 at Takoma Park and \$500,000 at Silver Spring. This was 29.7% of sales, a bit better than our budgeted amount of 31.2%.

I hope this snapshot of the Co-op's finances is helpful. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions to improve this column, please send them to me at [larryattpss@yahoo.com](mailto:larryattpss@yahoo.com). I may answer your questions in a future edition of the newsletter. ●



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*The content of this newsletter represents the views of individual writers and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of TPSS Co-op, Inc.*

**Next Issue:**

April/May, 2004  
Editorial Deadline: March 10, 2004

**Address Changes:**  
Lisa Ripkin, (301) 891-2667

Recorded Observations

"Mu-Shu & Franklin. Milltown, NJ. 2001-0423"

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**Animals have these advantages over man: they never hear the clock strike, they die without any idea of death, they have no theologians to instruct them, their last moments are not disturbed by unwelcome and unpleasant ceremonies, their funerals cost them nothing, and no one starts lawsuits over their wills.**

**Voltaire (1694 - 1778)**

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## Please note:

Beginning January 1, members must present their membership cards or provide their membership numbers when making purchases.

*Please remember to bring your card or remember your membership number when shopping at the Co-op!!*

## TPSS Co-op Recycling Committee Report

By Steve Albright, Recycling Committee

Recyclers should get to know the Montgomery County Transfer Station, located on the northbound side of Route 355 (Rockville Pike) just north of the Shady Grove Metro station. Montgomery County residents can recycle all kinds of materials there. For instance, they take computers. You can barely give those things away anymore, but the transfer station accepts monitors, CPUs, keyboards and more, which are mined for their metal parts.

Too embarrassed to take your out-of-date clothes to the thrift store but don't want to trash them, either? The transfer center recycles fibers. Simply dump your unwanted clothes and other fibers into a sack and drop them off at the center.

Got metal? The transfer center takes metals of all forms, shapes and sizes. As long as your object is mostly metal, the center will accept it.

Backyard mechanics can dispose of used motor oil at the transfer center, too. Of course, the transfer center also will take staple recyclable items as well, such as aluminum and bimetal cans, plastic bottles and mixed paper.

For residents who are concerned about the environment, the county provides another great service — they can help you get rid of household hazardous waste (HHW). HHW is common stuff that may be lying around your house right now that should not end up in a landfill. HHW includes items such as:

- Insecticides*
- Spent fluorescent bulbs*
- Watch batteries*
- Motor oil*
- Oil-based paints*

Several days a year, the county holds HHW collections at select locations including Silver Spring. You have to bring the hazardous stuff to the collection site, and a contractor hired by the county will take it off your hands. Contact the county to find out when and where the county will hold HHW collections in 2004.

To learn more about Montgomery County's recycling services, go to [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov), click on "Departments," then "Public Works and Transportation," and then "Recycling Information." ●

## Let us Co-operate

By Ami Ra Bevel

At a recent staff meeting for employees of the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Co-op, the question arose. Why is it important to become a member of our Co-op and how do we relay this importance to our customers? This question took my mind into a loop, because it is clear that most customers want big discounts and awards for becoming a member. Thus, I decided to take it upon myself to alert those who are really wondering about whether they should join or not on some crucial points about joining the Co-op.

Joining the TPSS Co-op means taking an ownership position. Even though we have a \$100.00 life time fee, it's important to realize that becoming an owner means giving 100% to the development and sustenance of the TPSS Co-op.

Many products, which promote disease, have settled into our local markets. More so, the remedies to the illnesses these products cause are even worse than the sickness. It appears that the producers and distributors of these mainstream products are solely in it for profit not for the health and well being of the people.

We must look closely at the makeup of every cooperative. Let us realize the challenges and hardships the farmers, producers and distributors encounter just to provide people with pure and natural products for consumption. I can imagine the battle going on between our organic farmers, herbalists and craftsmen and the big corporations of mass production. Let us recognize those who are not money hungry but are contributors thriving to make the world a better place.

We must acknowledge those working in our interest and join in co-operation with

these lovers of life, and thereby giving the cause strength. We must cooperate and insist on providing the world with what the necessity and advocate in the interest of life.

It is becoming impossible now to thrive off our own creative talents. For we turn to major industrial might for our needs, oppose to support local artists and producers. It is time that we begin helping small businesses and investing in the gifts, skills, talents and virtues of those close to us.

The TPSS Co-op serves as a market for the lingering few who are producing to benefit mankind and nature not their greedy desires. The Co-op serves as a resource center for those who are seeking alternatives from what they promote on the mainstream markets. The Co-op is for those who refuse to be victims of the game and who are committed to redeveloping a strong communal infrastructure for the protection, livelihood and development of our youth. For it is crucial that we pass down to our children the spirit of giving and loving. And it is important that we teach them to be self-sufficient and independent. Lastly, we must make sure they are not easily influenced by lies and gimmicks and that they know what is truly good for them.

Joining the Co-op is a petitioned acknowledgment that what the Co-op stand for is beneficial to you and your family. Joining comes from the realization that the products maintained in our storage houses are crucial for your family to maintain health and peace of mind. Thus, becoming an owner is a commitment to do what you can to keep the Co-op open and accessible. ●

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## Closure of Uncommon Market Offers Important Lessons

By Judith Sylvane

If members don't support their co-ops, they'll lose them, just as the members of Arlington's co-op, The Uncommon Market, lost theirs. Here's how it happened.

The Market had been running poorly for a number of years. In 1997, problems were so bad that the Board wanted to close. However, members were outraged. According to Bob Atwood, General Manager of the TPSS Co-op, "They [members] came storming out to keep the Market going." The battle, however, turned out to be an ongoing one. Membership gradually declined and the co-op had trouble meeting its rent. In December 2002, the Board wanted to close the store, but members again resisted. They bought additional shares, at \$10 a share, and boosted sales — for a while, at any rate. Yet it was primarily money from additional share purchases from members that kept the Market going, which is never a good idea. Money from operations is much more dependable and stable.

Again the Market's newfound energy didn't last. Again, membership went down. Volunteers were harder to get and to keep, and the debts became overwhelming. Finally, in November 2003, after failing to get a quorum at the membership's meeting, the Board voted to close the Market and this time the decision stuck. As the Washington Post's Keith Sinzinger wrote, "the results [of the vote] wouldn't have been different; it just would have been democratic."

### What About the TPSS Co-op?

Are there lessons to be learned from what happened to the Uncommon Market? Certainly, but the TPSS Co-op has several advantages in its favor. The Uncommon Market was located on an under-the-radar side street. In contrast, the Takoma Park store is located at a highly visible corner with very good parking, and the Silver Spring store is located in a strip mall with plenty of parking and some interesting companions

such as a bicycle shop, a sports club, and the ever-popular Parkway Deli.

In the co-op business, prices must first be set to at least break even, and preferably with a little extra left over after expenses. On the other hand, because the membership money goes to replace equipment such as refrigerated cases, a co-op must have a solid and reliable member base. Other shoppers are critical, too, because if a co-op doesn't make its money through operations — as in the case of the Uncommon Market — it's going to be in trouble.

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Co-ops must also change in response to the needs of their customers in order to survive. Currently, the Silver Spring store sells meat in response to its customers' requests. Beginning this month, the Takoma Park store will begin selling it as well (see "Growing With Our Community" on the front page of

this issue). "Probably 80% of our customers are meat eaters," said Bob.

### Know Your Neighborhood

The two neighborhoods are different, too. Takoma Park's store is an established local tradition, while Silver Spring store is just starting out though it already has a well-established local clientele. More and more people in the community supported by the Silver Spring store are getting used to its presence and learning to break their old shopping routines.

"Competition is very keen," Bob said. For example, Whole Foods, whose sales topped \$3 billion last year, also sells free-range chicken, PetGuard dog and cat food, and Kefir. "We have to run our Co-ops like a business to try to be as competitive as possible in order to survive." If the TPSS Co-op can continue to evolve in response to customer needs, it will be able to avoid the fate of the Uncommon Market. ●

Reference: K. Sinzinger, "Sadly, a Co-Op Goes Stale," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2003, page B4.

## BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

Polls closed on December 14, 2003 for the election of new members of the TPSS Co-op Board of Representatives. All five candidates who ran were elected. The new Board members are:

Elizabeth Barnes

Larry Haller

Janiece Kennedy

Joseph Klockner

Nessa Richman

## Comment Corner



By Bob Atwood, General Manager

It's time once again for my regular Comment Corner feature, where I take the opportunity address some of your suggestions, questions, and comments. As you know, we have customer comment boxes in the front of both stores, where shoppers and members can make their voices heard. We sort all comment cards and distribute them to the appropriate managers on a regular basis, and they write their responses to each of them. Then the managers file the cards, with their responses, in the customer comment logs in the front of both stores. These logs are always available for your review. They are an effective way for you to monitor how well we are addressing your needs.

Please feel free to contact me, or any department manager, at the Takoma Park store at 301-891-2667 (COOP) or at the Silver Spring store at 240-247-2667 (COOP), if you need more information or if you are seeking a more detailed answer to your questions. Or you can always e-mail me directly at [bobatwood@tpss.coop](mailto:bobatwood@tpss.coop). Remember, if you want a direct response to your concerns, please include contact information (name, phone number, e-mail address, etc.) on your comment cards.

As I'm sure you can imagine, we get many comments at both stores. We always enjoy hearing from our members and shoppers, and we try to answer everyone's comments in a timely manner, whether here or in the comment logs. I encourage you to take a moment the next time you are in the store to read some of the questions and comments and their responses.

—“I love the Co-op, but I think it would be best to keep the holiday season somewhat nondenominational (it is not the tree but the guest X-mas singer).”

When we were planning our holiday celebrations, the operative words were “festive” and “entertaining.” And instead of nondenominational, we were actually aiming for something that was very much a *multidenominational* event. The winter holiday season is, after all, shared by quite a few faiths and traditions. We wanted to celebrate and honor each of them in ways that would also spread a little good cheer along the way.

—“I love the Firehook Green Olive Bread, but I find it difficult to find at the Co-op. What gives? Am I its only fan?”

—“We live 2 hours away, but we come here every Saturday night to buy the best bread in town. However, sometimes you are out of it. That is the Oat Bran or Honey Oat Bran

*Spring Mill bread. Could you try to buy more of this kind of bread? We love it. Thanks.”*

You are definitely not the only fan of Firehook's green olive bread! Every week, we get shipments of four loaves each on Tuesday and Thursday (Wednesday and Friday we get Firehook's black olive loaf). Sherri will be happy to put in a special order for you; just leave her a note or ask her the next time you drop by the store.

We have been begging and pleading with Spring Mill for a long time to send us more of their bread, and it looks like they are finally responding. They recently increased the number of bread shipments to the Takoma Park store to four times a week. So hopefully this will meet the demand for Spring Mill's wildly popular (and really delicious) breads. Let us know if it's working, please!

We have some other “breaking bread news” too. As of January 31, the Silver Spring store will no longer be carrying New York Firehook or Bonaparte breads unless special ordered. They haven't been selling there as well as they have been at the Takoma Park store, and since we can't get credit for unsold bread we end up throwing it away. Special orders for all other fresh breads need to be placed at least the morning before, for a next-day delivery. Also, starting February 1 we'll be shipping challah to the Silver Spring store every Friday and, if the demand is steady, we'll also be delivering bagels there every other day.

—“Please carry the Stonyfield Farm fat free strawberry yogurt. You have every other flavor but never strawberry! Thank you.”

—“Dear consideration committee — is there a fat free, sugar free, organic yogurt? Thanks.”

We love getting requests like this, because it helps us identify the most popular flavors so we can adjust our ordering priorities. Stonyfield Farm offers more flavors of yogurt than we have room for on the shelves, so we rotate among them. We will switch out another flavor to make room for more strawberry. Please let us know if this works out better for you!

Fat-free organic yogurt is no problem. But as far as we've been able to determine, all natural yogurts have sugar from the natural lactose that is in it. Plain yogurt probably has less sugar than other types of yogurt, but even plain will still have some lactose sugar. The only way that we know of to get sugar free yogurt would be to use chemical

sugar substitutes like aspartame, which we wouldn't want to carry at the Co-op. If you (or another reader) knows of a brand of all-natural sugar-free yogurt, please let us know! We'll be happy to look into ordering it for the store.

—“Would you please stock Cascading Farms grapefruit juice concentrate? It is getting so hard to find grapefruit juice anywhere!”

We'll be happy to look into that. It may be harder to find that particular brand of grapefruit juice concentrate than another brand, though. But we'll try to get more in the store. The next time you are in the store, please take a moment to look through our catalogs and see if there are some additional brands that we could order for you to try. We'll be happy to special order them so that you can find one that you like.

—“The way your bulk feta is sold is wasteful to the store and frustrating to the customer, who has to hack off chunks, using tongs, leaving unsaleable crumbs. Why not pre-cut some pieces using a knife and put it back into the brine? Customers could take them without damaging the rest. The feta is excellent so it's a pity to waste it this way. Thanks for listening!”

Thanks for bringing this to our attention, and for offering a possible solution. The grocery team will discuss this at our next staff meeting. Currently, when we open a new cheese we slice it into large chunks with a knife and strain the crumbs, which we collect and sell in bags. We'll try to pre-cut more cheese, as well as make sure that at least some of the cheese is cut into smaller and more manageable chunks. Please check back after a couple of weeks, to give us time to develop and implement a method that works, and let us know if there has been an improvement.

—“Please cut back on the amount of water sprayed on the produce. The water makes the produce rot a lot faster after we bring it home.”

We have recently toned down our watering significantly. Currently, we water the spinach and broccoli every 45 minutes, for example. However, recommended watering times for these vegetables (which are in accordance with the procedures used by many chain stores) are every 15 to 20 minutes. Any longer than 45 minutes between watering and we would risk ending up with produce that can't be sold. We are trying to strike a balance, and your feedback helps us to get a better idea of how we are doing. Please bear with us! ●

## FEATURED

### RAFAEL MERCHAN



“I want to be like a sponge,” says Rafael of his desire to learn as much as he can in school. Rafael approaches his job as bulk buyer at the Silver Spring Co-op the same way; he

is always interested in learning more. “There are lots of tiny things you need to know here,” he says. “There are lots of tricks to learn.” And he's been around long enough to learn most of them, he says.

Rafael joined the Silver Spring Co-op staff a week after the store opened. At the time, he was working as a waiter, but the Co-op was much closer to home. “It's very different here,” he says. “The people are so nice, and we are helping the community. We are going against the corporate culture, which is so powerful in this country.”

Rafael was recently accepted to the University of Maryland's program in agricultural and resource economics. He's looking forward to taking advantage of the program's opportunities to study abroad. The program offers field studies in France, Kenya, and Ghana.

Prior to working at the Co-op, Rafael worked for a year as a volunteer at the Washington offices of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), which conducts a wide range of climatological and environmental research in the Republic of Panama. Rafael, who is from Colombia, did translation work in support of a research project on the ecology of rainforest canopies. He also was able to do some research of his own on the side. Rafael's brother is a biologist in Bogotá, and Rafael was able to copy and send him a pile of articles to help him complete his thesis.

At the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, he was given permission to conduct research in a collection of papers from an early 19th-Century naturalist. “I never found what I was looking for,” he said, “but I got to spend two days reading through these amazing documents in their beautiful library.” It was a real high point for Rafael. “There was so much there, I could have written an article on it.” And perhaps someday he will!

## TPSS Co-op in the Vanguard for Hemp Legalization!

On January 15, Eric Steenstra of **Vote Hemp** and Adam Eidinger of the **Mintwood Media Collective** visited the Takoma Park store to film a video news release announcing a recent decision by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals preventing the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) from banning the sale of hemp foods that contain trace amounts of naturally-occurring THC.

Eric and Adam interviewed General Manager Bob Atwood and filmed a variety of the store's hemp products and the storefront too. The TPSS Co-op has been an active supporter of hemp legalization efforts,

and has worked with Vote Hemp on many previous occasions. Eric and Adam provided the Co-op with a variety of free educational materials for customers to take with them, including brochures, copies of Vote Hemp's latest newsletter, and free samples of yummy hemp snack bars.

The video news release will be available on Vote Hemp's Website, <http://www.vote-hemp.org>, as well as through satellite uplink. Visit the Vote Hemp Website for more information. Be sure to let us know how your Co-op looks on the big (small) screen!

## Save a Tree the Easy Way!

### Get the TPSS Co-operative Effort News ELECTRONICALLY!

Each issue of the *TPSS Co-operative Effort News* is available in PDF (Portable Document Format) on the Co-op's Website at <http://www.tpss.coop>. In addition, selected features from each new issue are also posted on the Website for easy reading online.

By choosing the electronic option, you will be helping the Co-op save valuable \$\$\$ on printing and mailing.

Contact Lisa Ripkin or Bob Atwood at the Takoma Park store, (301) 891-2667, to exempt your address from mailed newsletter copies.

*Suggestions and comments for improving the newsletter's online services are always welcome!*

Contact Editor Paul Lagasse at: [editor@tpss.coop](mailto:editor@tpss.coop).

## EMPLOYEES FEATURED EMPLOYEES FEATURED

## STACY MARDERS



Stacy joined the Co-op back in 1997, when it was still located on Sligo Avenue. She is the Co-op's resident computer expert for both the Takoma Park and

Silver Spring stores. Her day is spent troubleshooting problems, installing new hardware, and training staff — among many other duties! “I handle all things computer,” she says. “The last time I was given a formal title, years ago, it was ‘POS (point-of-sale) Facilitator.’ Maybe it's been changed since then!”

Stacy's assistant, Robert Colburn, keeps the Co-op's databases current. “It's beyond the point of a one-person job,” Stacy says. “It's a tight squeeze sometimes.” But since computers are also one of Stacy's hobbies, the workload does not weigh her down. She has even built her

own computers in her spare time.

Aside from computers, hiking and reading are Stacy's other passions. She grew up in South Mountain, Pennsylvania, near Gettysburg. Her family had a second home in the mountains, and she spent summers and weekends hiking all over the area. “Nature and forests are in my blood, in my spirit,” she says. She tries to go hiking at least once a month, usually in Pennsylvania because of her love for the area. Stacy also hiked the Appalachian Trail from Shenandoah to Northeast Pennsylvania in a series of day hikes. Stacy enjoys collecting and reading science fiction and fantasy books by woman writers, such as Ursula K. LeGuin, which she has been reading since high school. Her interest in science fiction was sparked by one of those events worthy of a science fiction story in its own right. One day Stacy was out hiking along a road in Pennsylvania when she heard a motorcycle approach. As it sped by, she noticed something fall off and bounce to the side of the road. She thought nothing of it at first,

and turned off into the woods to continue her hike. On the return leg, she emerged from the woods and noticed that the fallen object was still there. Curious, she picked it up and discovered it was a copy of the famous science fiction novel *The Mote in God's Eye* by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. “I devoured it,” Stacy recalls. “Then I got a library card and started devouring more books.” A passion was born!

Lately, Stacy has been focusing more on fantasy books. “I used to dislike fantasy,” Stacy says, “but I got tired of ‘technologized’ settings. I like natural settings more now.” She expects that she'll return to science fiction someday, “I'm going to let it rest for another five or 10 years,” she says with a laugh. Since college, Stacy has been involved in activism on a number of issues, though less so in recent years. “I have a love of political activism,” she says. “I've been itching to get back to it.” Stacy's also looking forward to building her next computer, though she says that may still be two or three years down the road!

## MAUD APPIAH



“Maud's da bomb!” says Pauline, and it's easy to see why. Maud, a shift coordinator at the Silver Spring Co-op, always has a smile and a warm greeting for her customers and her co-workers. “I'm just a happy person!” she says.

“As a shift coordinator, I do a little bit of everything,” Maud says. “I address problems, help customers, and take care of front-end issues like filling in when we're short.” Maud says she enjoys working weekends at the Silver Spring Co-op. “The managers here are friendly and easy going,” she says. “Everybody here works as a team. We're like a family.” Maud has worked part time at the Co-op since shortly after it opened. “I had never heard of organic food and products before I came here,” she says. “But I've learned a lot about it since then, and I learn new things every day.”

Maud likes to read mystery novels and listen to music. “I'm a music fanatic,” she confesses. “I listen to lots of music. Soft rock, R&B, you name it — and music from my country, Ghana, too.”

Maud recently graduated from Bowie State University with a degree in Finance and Accounting. She has a full-time accounting job during the week. Why accounting? “I've always loved it,” she says. “I'm really good with numbers.” Maud says that the profession's unpopular reputation is totally undeserved. “Accounting is *not* a boring job!” she says with conviction.

## Correction

In last issue's profile of Ami Ra Bevel, we erroneously reported that Ami Ra had finished her book of essays and poetry. Ami Ra wrote in to say that she is still in the process of writing her book. We apologize for the error. Hopefully the inadvertent advance publicity will only increase people's interest in reading the completed book!

## Unwrapping Valentine's Day

By Adeena Reitberger

Every year on February 14th, Valentine's Day, we are bombarded with images that are reminiscent of love. In preparation for Valentine's Day stores set up elaborate displays reminding us to buy chocolates, chocolate hearts, flowers, plastic flowers, chocolate flowers, candy wrapped in pink and red foil, cards, and singing stuffed animals to show our significant others that we love them. Television and radio commercials advise us to display our affections through extravagant gifts of diamonds and cars. Every object you can think of comes out in a Valentine's Day version: socks, underwear, mugs, t-shirts, pillows, necklaces, towels — the list goes on.

When I began writing this article, I initially tried to find these picturesque Valentine's Days that people had actually experienced. But as I began interviewing TPSS shoppers I realized that Valentine's Day means different things to different people. For some it is about romance, but for others it is about family, loss, loneliness, and some even find the day to be silly.

Most of the people I spoke with celebrate Valentine's Day with a fancy dinner, at home or at a restaurant. One co-op shopper, Gwen, told me that to her Valentine's Day means love, “Not just with your significant other but with family and friends. I usually celebrate it with my family at a candle light dinner at home.”

Many others agreed with Gwen and consider Valentine's Day to be more of a family holiday. Eileen, who was looking at tomatoes when I spoke to her said, “My daughters are my valentines. I think about them first and I always send them flowers. That's what it is now, a family holiday.”

Six-year-old Olwenn, who was shopping with her father, told me that on Valentine's Day she tells her family and friends that she loves them, “At school I make cards for my mom, my dad, and my friends. It's fun!”

Six-year-old Sanu agrees, “I like making pictures for my mom and dad.” When I asked him if he was going to make a card this year for any specific girl he looked at me with a face that appeared to have swallowed a million sour jellybeans. I guessed his answer was “No.”

For Daryl, who was standing by the registers when I spoke to him, remembered his past Valentine's Days being about friends. “I like holidays and I like to celebrate holidays. One time I bought a bunch of kid Valentine's Day cards and passed them out to my graduate social work class. It's a holiday to share with everybody.”

When I asked others what Valentine's Day meant to them they smiled before they said anything. A young woman, Shaya, giggled before answering and then said, “It represents love. It's a day to come together and love each other. My last year at school my boyfriend sent me a singing telegram. The person came up to me while I was in a group of people. It was embarrassing but so sweet.”

Shaya's Valentine's Day was the most storybook-like one that I heard throughout all the interviews. Sherri, a divorced woman, had a story just as touching but without as happy an ending. She remembered a time that her husband had bought her a tennis bracelet for Valentine's Day. “I got the gift during a very hard time in our relationship to show that he cared about me and we could make it work. It was very touching,

Now I don't do anything unless the kids are having a celebration at school.”

Valentine's Day can change for people depending on how different factors have changed in their lives. Anna, a woman standing near the avocados said, “I used to think about Valentine's Day in strictly romantic terms. I don't really celebrate it anymore. The last guy I broke up with was on Valentine's Day. I guess on Valentine's Day whatever is wrong with your relationship just glares at you. It's like New Year's — it's best not to make too much of it. Now it's about my grandchildren and family.” And then with a smile she added, “That's not to say I've given up on romance.”

One individual who chose to remain anonymous had a similar experience. “I think about my old Valentine's Days — they were disasters. I broke up with someone on Valentine's Day a few years ago and a year after that I went through a breakup a month before Valentine's Day. Years ago I had good ones, but today I'm kind of a Grinch about it.”

Bob remembers his past Valentine's Days fondly, but the most recent one's have been about loss. “My wife died six years ago, so today Valentine's Day doesn't mean a lot to me. We would always give each other things. You love every day, but it's one day that you make sure to do something special.”

For others Valentine's Day is not as memorable. Sue, a single woman, doesn't think much of Valentine's Day. “It's a made-up holiday for businesses and card companies to make money. It's nice for people who are in a relationship but it makes a lot of people feel bad.” Sue didn't seem to feel that

bad though. When I asked her how she celebrated she said with a smile, “Chocolate hearts, candy, especially the day after Valentine's Day because then they're on sale.”

Others celebrate Valentine's Day a lot more miserably. I approached Chelsea about Valentine's Day as she was eyeing a loaf of bread and she laughed. “I used to wear black on Valentine's Day. I didn't have a boyfriend then. I think I did it half out of bitterness and half because I didn't like the holiday.”

One of the biggest problems that hindered people from completely embracing Valentine's Day was the way it is portrayed by businesses. David seemed to want to be able to enjoy Valentine's Day more than he did. “I think Valentine's Day is a wonderful opportunity to say ‘I love you’ to someone special. I think everyday is Valentine's Day, but it's such a consumer holiday.”

Susanne agreed, but with a little more cynicism, “I think it's kind of silly. It's contrived by Hallmark. It's certainly nice spending it with someone special but I don't like buying into the hype. Usually we just go out to dinner.”

In my search for the quintessential romantic story I did find romance, but there was a lot more that I didn't expect. One layer of the wrapping paper is about romance; another layer might be about family, the next possibly about the lack thereof. The next layer might be about not wanting wrapping paper to be involved at all. But after all this wrapping paper is undone what lies inside is something intangible, a collage of emotions, sweet and sour, that — if kept wrapped up too long — might burst. ●

## Book Review:

# Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats

By Sally Fallon, with Mary G. Enig, Ph.D.  
NewTrends Publishing, 2001;  
\$25.00 softcover; 674 pages

Reviewed by Judith Sylvane

*Whatever the father of illness,  
The mother is wrong food.*

[Chinese proverb]

**A**re you willing to have second thoughts about those low-fat, low-carb, low-calorie diets? Are you prepared to spend a little more time planning your meals? Then you're ready for *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats*.

Author Sally Fallon believes that, like traditional people who eat locally available foods, Americans actually would be healthier if they ate diets rich in unprocessed, fermented, unpasteurized foods. She lists a number of studies and surveys that compare today's diet and those of traditional populations—studies that seem to contradict the directives of the Food and Drug Administration, American Medical Association, and American Heart Association. The researcher she mentions most often is Dr. Weston Price, a dentist who studied the diets of fourteen traditional populations in the 1930s. He found that these diets had a number of things in common: fats, meats (including organ meats), fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole unrefined grains. Price also found that the people who ate these diets “enjoyed superb health ... free of chronic disease, dental decay and mental illness.” Thus, Fallon's book is rich in recipes that use butter (yes, the real stuff), whole milk, red meat, and even—if you can handle it—lard.

The discussion of fats is by far the largest section of the Introduction. Fallon

also discusses carbohydrates, milk and milk products, protein, vitamins, minerals, and enzymes. Raw, enzyme-rich foods, for example, also make up a large part of the diets of traditional populations. Foods in this section are as widely diverse as the semi-rancid raw fish eaten by Eskimos and fermented cooked soybeans (AKA miso etc.) which Asians have eaten for 2,000 years.

The next chapter, *Mastering the Basics*, includes discussions of cultured dairy products, stocks, sprouted grains, and, my favorite, fermented vegetables. Sauerkraut came to Europe by way of the Chinese. Captain Cook started with 60 barrels of sauerkraut on his second round-the-world voyage and the last barrel, opened 27 months later, was still good. Like many Marylanders, I serve sauerkraut with my holiday turkey.

Recipes are divided into ten sections: Great Beginnings, The Main Course, A Catalog of Vegetables, Luncheon & Supper Foods, Grains & Legumes, Snacks & Finger Foods, Desserts, Beverages, Feeding Babies, and Tonics & Superfoods. Choosing a recipe to include with this article wasn't easy, because the sidebars on each page are so distracting: “Beets were developed by German gardeners in the Middle Ages.” “Strawberries lead the list of the 13 most contaminated fruits and vegetables sold in American supermarkets ... [they're] sprayed with 500 pounds of pesticides per acre.” “Used in moderation, fermented foods satisfy the palate and fulfill a real physiological need....”

What recipe would be a good example of what's in this book? Soup, perhaps? There's Coconut Fish Soup, Mexican Soup, and Oxtail Barley Soup. Or poultry, which includes Moroccan Style Chicken, Spiced

Chicken Breasts, and even Coconut Turkey Soup. Among the vegetables, Butternut Squash Purée with Pecans, Winter Root Medley, and Gourmet Succatash are examples of mouth-watering reads. Other tempting concoctions are Quail Masala, Equadorian Quinoa Casserole, Red Pepper Quiche, Yorkshire Pudding, and Salmon with Sorrel Sauce. The number of choices is a bit overwhelming.

Some of the *Nourishing Traditions* recipes seem to need more preparation time that we're used to these days. Some appear easy to prepare, but they use ingredients that we don't usually have in our pantries, such as piima cream, raw milk, fish sauce, and lard. And some have a simple list of ingredients and uncomplicated instructions. It all depends on your taste-of-the-day.

As many recipes as there are in this book, there are almost as many interesting facts, some of which were new to me, such as “Always skim foam off stock, sauces, soups, legumes and stews. Many impurities rise to the top with the foam,” and brussel sprouts were “first planted in America by Thomas Jefferson.”

Don't be put off by the unusual flavors or ingredients in this book. Use them or ignore them according to your own and your family's tastes. The author is very clear on this: “We must not lose sight of the fact that the fundamental requirement of the food we eat is that we like it. The healthiest food in the world does us no good if we must gag it down because it tastes bad.”

My thanks to Janiece, manager of the Silver Spring Co-op, who recommended *Nourishing Traditions* to me and who thus introduced me to an old way of thinking about food. ●

### Algerian Wedding Rice With Crispy Almonds

*This wonderful combination of rice, apricots, almonds, and pine nuts really appealed to me — Judith*

#### Rice

3 cups basic brown rice  
1 cup dried apricots, cut into bits, soaked in filtered water about 1 hour and drained  
1/2 cup crispy almost slivers, toasted  
1/2 cup crispy pine nuts  
2 bunches green onions, chopped  
4 tablespoons butter, softened  
Sea salt and pepper  
*Toss the cooked rice with remaining ingredients. Season to taste. Place in a buttered casserole and bake at 250 degrees for about 30 minutes.*

#### Almonds

4 cups slivered almonds  
1 tablespoon sea salt  
Filtered water  
*Mix nuts with salt and filtered water and leave in a warm place for at least 7 hours or overnight. Drain in a colander. Spread on a stainless steel baking pan and place in a warm oven (no more than 150 degrees) for 12 to 24 hours, stirring occasionally, until completely dry and crisp. Store in an airtight container. (Make 4 cups of pine nuts using the same directions.)*

### Red Cabbage with Orange

*I'm very fond of red cabbage, and I would never have thought of combining with it with oranges and honey — Judith*

1 medium red cabbage  
1 small onion, peeled and chopped  
Grated rind of two oranges  
Juice of two oranges, strained  
1 teaspoon sea salt  
1 clove garlic, peeled and finely chopped  
1 tablespoon raw honey  
3 tablespoons whey or raw wine vinegar  
4 tablespoons butter  
*Shred cabbage. Combine onion, orange rind, orange juice, garlic, salt, honey, and whey or vinegar. Pour over the cabbage and toss well. Marinate overnight, tossing occasionally. Melt butter in a large saucepan or frying pan. Add cabbage mixture and cook gently for about 1 hour, uncovered, until cabbage is tender and liquid has evaporated.*

## Seed Catalog Time

By Michael Tabor

**T**his is the time of year that farmers, trying to sit back and relax and recover from a long and trying season, get inundated with seed catalogs. And like it or not, we get sucked into the next season. So, I might as well give those of you out there some ideas from some interesting catalogs and information on how to get them. All are family-owned operations.

There are two seed catalogs I love to review and order from myself. The first is *Stokes*. I've visited their Canadian operation as well as their research facility and couldn't be more impressed! Their catalog features hordes of pictures, many of the latest varieties, even a few heirlooms. Stokes specializes in commercial growers and serious gardeners. They're still family owned and the catalog is free. Call (800) 263-7233.

*Johnny's* was started in 1973 by Rob Johnny Jr. and he's still in the business. I like the fact that he's always acknowledged his wonderful staff in pictures and credit. They stress organic and untreated seeds and don't knowingly buy or sell genetically engineered ones. Usually, his prices are highly competitive. Again, a beautifully illustrated catalog with loads of pictures. *Johnny's* is my favorite seed company. Call (800) 854-2580 for a catalog.

Then there's the *Fedco* catalogs. There's nothing like them anywhere. I just received my 2004 seed catalog. But, there are others for Trees and Bulbs, Tubers, and Organic Growers Supply. And, they are the most imaginative of any out there. What also gives it a special character is the fact that it's a co-op owned 60% by customers and worker owned by 40%. It originated in 1978 as a

project of the Maine Federation of Co-operatives. If you're a strong co-op supporter, this one's for you! (By the way, the last few pages of the catalog list some great books too!) Call (207) 873-7333 for a copy.

Finally, there's the non-profit *Seed Saver's Exchange* and catalog. This is a grassroots network of farmers and plant collectors who distribute and save a huge amount and variety of seeds (4,100 tomatoes varieties alone!). The annual membership is only \$35. Send it to: Seed Savers Exchange, 3076 North Winn Road, Decorah, Iowa 52101. Well worth joining for its various publications alone!

There's also an alternative for those of you who enjoy laying your hands and eyes on real seeds and talking with a salesperson about their preferences. That's the Meyers Seed Company on South Caroline Street in

Baltimore, MD. Their new catalog hasn't come out yet. However, you can call (800) 458-7333 and put your name on their mailing list. Nothing special about the catalog though. The real opportunity is that the store only about 45 minutes away and has all the gardening tools you could ever want plus quite a few organic pesticide alternatives to boot. While you're there, check out nearby Fells Point and its restaurants, bars and funky stores. ●

*Michael Tabor is currently interviewing potential full-time workers for his farm. He also offers an opportunity for folks interested in spending as little as 2 weeks or so. If you are interested, get in touch at [esiegel2@igc.org](mailto:esiegel2@igc.org).*

# Warning: This Diet is Not for Everyone Atkins Diet Could Be Dangerous for Individuals — and Almost Certainly Is for Planet Earth

By Marty Bender and Stan Cox, Prairie Writers Circle

**“Lose That Extra Weight . . .  
While Eating the Foods You Love!”**

For decades, such headlines were fixtures of supermarket checkout lanes, to be taken no more seriously than claims of alien abduction. But times have changed. High-protein, low-carbohydrate diets have become wildly popular because they help adherents lose dozens of pounds without having to gnaw on rice cakes.

It seems too good to be true, and some critics say it is. The debate over the long-term health effects of Atkins and similar weight-loss plans might grind on for years with no satisfactory conclusion. But it is possible to predict some ecological consequences if more of us adopt high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets, forcing the earth and sea to produce more of the “foods we love.”

Let's start with the Worldwatch Institute's estimate that 1 billion of Earth's inhabitants are overweight. Assume that on average they each eat 56 grams of animal protein a day. That is the average in Western countries, and most overweight people eat Western diets.

If all those people went on an Atkins-style diet, their requirement for animal protein would rise to about 100 grams. A billion dieters each eating an extra 44 grams could not easily be satisfied by giving them a bigger share of current animal protein production. As it is, humans worldwide average only 28 grams per day. Instead, by our calculations, the meat, dairy, poultry and seafood industries would have to increase output by 25 percent.

The dieters would no longer get much of their protein from plants, so less cropland would be required for that. Still, the net result of their big switch to animal protein would require almost 250 million more acres for corn, soybeans and other feed grains. That's because feeding grain to animals and then eating the meat, milk, eggs or farm-raised fish is much less efficient than eating plant products directly. The dieters could not expect to get more from the oceans: the global catch has fallen since the mid-1980s, from overfishing.

Finding a quarter-billion acres for adequate feed grain harvests would mean at least a 7 percent increase in cropland worldwide at a time when farmers are already using most of the better land. Much of the

newly plowed acreage would likely be marginal, subject to greater erosion and requiring extra generous applications of fertilizer and pesticides.

Furthermore, feeding that grain to all those extra animals would lead to greater pollution from feedlots, poultry and hog confinement operations, and slaughterhouses.

And that's not all. Cattle and other ruminant animals, whose numbers would have to rise by 25 percent to supply our dieters, get a large share of their food from pasture and rangeland. If most of the additional animals were raised on current range and pasture that are already fully stocked, the result would be overgrazing and degradation.

If new pastures were to be created for, say, half of the additional animals, a billion more acres would have to be found. Most of this would probably be obtained by deforestation, meaning that 10 percent of Earth's remaining forests would have to go.

It's unlikely that all 1 billion of the world's overweight people will have the desire or the means to make the move to expensive animal-based food. Nevertheless, the kind of ecological damage we have described will occur in direct proportion to

the number of people who do adopt the diet.

Already, industry analysts give much of the credit for this fall's sharply higher beef and egg prices to high-protein, low-carb dieters. Stepped-up production is sure to follow.

While it's true that overconsumption in America doesn't exactly qualify as “breaking news,” we're now seeing a new twist to an old story. The obesity epidemic, caused largely by excess food consumption, has proven to be one of our society's most vexing problems. The diets now in vogue may be a breakthrough in curbing obesity, but their success entails even greater consumption of global resources. ●

*Marty Bender and Stan Cox are scientists at the Land Institute in Salina, Kan., and members of the institute's Prairie Writers Circle.*

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*Posted At WorkingForChange.com, December 11, 2003, at <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?itemid=16134>. Reproduced with permission of the authors. TPSS Co-operative Effort News thanks Co-op employee Stacy Marders for suggesting this article and securing permission to reprint it.*

## At The Writer's Center

**“Eat Your Words: Writing about Food in Cookbooks and Other Venues”**

*The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD 20815*

This workshop is devoted to the wide range of food writing-cookbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and reflective personal essays. The workshop will provide a series of assignments, so that participants can try their hand in a variety of formats. Participants' own writing will be the main focus, supplemented by examples from a variety of contemporary and classical sources. Participants should be prepared to have their work distributed among the group and discussed in an open, constructive workshop setting.

**Minimum eight participants, maximum 14.**

**Time:** Mon., 7:30 to 10 p.m. **Date:** February 2, six sessions. **Tuition:** \$128; \$113 members. For additional information e-mail [postmaster@writer.org](mailto:postmaster@writer.org) or call 301-654-8664.

Instructor Barbara A. Hill, Ph.D., is a veteran instructor of “Eat Your Words” at The Writer's Center. She will have essays forthcoming in *The Oxford Companion to American Food*, 2nd edition. Her extensive cookbook collection covers all continents, except Antarctica, and contains first editions of Marion Harland's *Common Sense in the Household: A Manual of Practical Housewifery* (1872) and the works of Elizabeth David, M.F.K. Fisher, and Julia Child.

## MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAYS

Mark your calendar with these important dates! To thank you for your support of the TPSS Co-op, one day a month is set aside as **MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAY**.

Shop at the Co-op and receive a 5% discount on your purchases! Just our way of saying thanks!

*(Discount does not apply to special orders)*

### UPCOMING MEMBERSHIP APPRECIATION DAYS:

**2004**

*February 15*

*March 22*

*April 21*

*May 20*

*June 25*

# Free Yourself

## from Debilitating Emotions, Thoughts and Feelings

This article is a continued examination of what it means to be healthy according to the 13 “pearls” for healthy living. This article focuses on Pearl #8, which is: “Closely examine debilitating emotions, thoughts and feelings that you are holding on to. Become a spiritual warrior in order to obtain the courage to let them go.”

By Robin Anderson, Holistic Health Practitioner



Of the thirteen health pearls that I am writing about, this one is the hardest for me to discuss. At first, I considered not addressing this pearl. Then I thought I could address it superficially by simply providing easy steps for letting go of the old anger, hurt, depression, sadness, and other crippling emotions that stifle our ability to experience the fullness of life. But then I thought this would not be fair to myself or to you, Beloved.

How can one provide “simple steps” to releasing a traumatic experience that may be buried deep within the heart, soul and spirit for 30 years or more? This Such a traumatic event is so imbedded within that it has become part of one’s cell structure, with the ability to recreate itself as cells continue to be born, die, and sloth slough off, and then new cells appear are born again. These new memory and heart cells have the uncanny ability to recall and experience painful and traumatic events as if they happened yesterday. Reciting simple steps for letting go past hurt would not do for this article. One cannot fool these heart or memory cells. In order for me to express how one can work through emotional pain that is physically disabling and dis-easing the body, I must recount my own struggles and small triumphs in this area. This is hard but necessary for the pearl to be shared correctly...

It is three days before Christmas and I am spending my week of vacation at my mother’s house in the country. She is literally surrounded by woods with no neighbors to see or reckon with. It is a beautiful place. A place I love to come to when my mind needs a complete rest. I live in the heart of Washington, D.C. so coming to this special place is like coming home for my soul and spirit. I feel my bones relaxing as I drive up to her intimate cottage deep in the woods. She has a sunroom, all walls made of glass. There is one chair, lots of plants, a fan, a heater and a table in this sunroom. That’s it. It is a place that I go to when it is time for me to retreat. My mom completely understands and leaves me alone so I can rest, meditate, journal and reflect on my life.

Our lives have not always been so pleasant, so peaceful. As a matter of fact, when I was a child, our lives were quite dramatic, sad and downright frightening at times. I consider the day I was born until I left for college at 18, the dark period of my life.

My grandmother lives in a bigger house about a five-minute walk from my mom’s cottage. Woods too surround her home along with a lovely pond for fishing. Grandma always wanted a place in the country. So one of her daughters found this old house in the woods and bought it for her about 20 years ago. On the day my grandmother and step-grandfather were to move to this country house, my step-granddad refused to go. Even after the moving van was fully loaded with all of their belongings, my step-granddad remained in the city. This brought my grandmother to tears as she boarded the moving van alone to live in the country.

My mother moved to the country after she retired about five years ago to take care of grandma.

This morning I awoke and walked over to pay my grandmother a visit. We started looking at her photos. She pointed to a young man and woman in one photo. It is her and my granddad. She told me that he was a very jealous, mean man that would beat her every chance he got. On the day she left him, my grandmother was holding the hand of my mother who was about 4 years old and also my grandmother was carrying her newborn baby in her arms. My grandfather would follow behind her pushing and hitting her as she took her slow steps to freedom. Every few precious steps, my grandmother would lay her newborn baby down on the cold winter ground and swing back at my grandfather.

This violent procession continued down the street until a neighbor called my grandmother’s uncle who came to the rescue. This incident must have happened more than 60 years ago. But as my grandmother recalls it, the pain is still fresh in her eyes. This is a woman who has since remarried (to my step-grandfather, the man who refused to move to the country with her), had seven more children, 40 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. This is a woman who can not remember to turn off her own oven, but can recall that traumatic event with such detail that one would think this event occurred just yesterday. It’s funny how some situations have that affect on the mind – leaving a gigantic psychological footprint.

As my grandmother recalled that story for me, I thought about my mother, the little four-year old girl that clutched her mother’s hand as they stepped together towards their freedom. What a traumatic event for this little girl! Did she cry the entire time? What was she thinking as her parents were fist fighting? When I asked my mother these questions, she said that she has no memory of this situation. I beg to differ. Somewhere embedded in my mother’s memory cell and heart, she remembers. So much so, that she recreated what she knew as part of the script for being in a relationship by leaving my abusive alcoholic father some 30 years later.

I spent the first 18 years of my life in a horrifying, abusive household. The abuse was physical, emotional, and psychological. After I left for college, thus physically leaving this household, I was plagued with the monumental task of mentally clearing and releasing heart-wrenching memories and ways of behaving learned from an alcoholic family. How was I going to let go all of the anger, hurt and disappointment I had experienced? Most importantly, how was I going to be one of the ones in my family that created a new healthy relationship pattern for future generations to follow? You see, all of my grandmother’s children entered into abusive relationships and all of her grandchildren entered into abusive relationships. It was simply maddening.

It’s funny, if one physically survives a traumatic event and is able to function in the world by holding a job, paying bills on time, socializing, having a family, then one believes that they have successfully escaped their dark creepy past. But a closer look at this life could reveal indicators that the past has not been escaped at all but simply has taken up residency in a beloved sacred pure soul. The two are not the same. We are not born angry, confused, sad or lonely. We must never identify ourselves with these emotions or any past traumatic event. We truly are gifts to this planet and have

the ability to release ourselves from debilitating emotions that bind us. Just like taking off a pair of jeans that are too tight and thus having the ability to breathe again. Or walking down the street on the first warm Spring day without an overcoat. We must remember that no matter how painful an event, how crippling, how demoralizing, we are not that event. It does not characterize us or have to become us. We should view it as a life lesson to be dissected and examined in order to create a more spiritually attuned, stronger, wiser individual. When we have properly worked through a traumatic experience in therapy, twelve-steps programs, prayer, meditation, journaling, etc. and have learned the lesson behind the event, we are then able to release it if we choose to. The choice is always ours. Whether to hold on to an event, and thus creating diseases in the body, or to let it go after we have learned the its life lesson.

I had no idea that I was carrying the vision, perception, vocabulary, and thought process of an alcoholic family. I had left home at 18. Left the alcoholic family at 18. But I learned some 20 years later, that I never left the alcoholic home psychologically and emotionally. That I learned that in every situation I found myself in, I recreated this home. Whether, I was at work, at church, at the grocery store, or interacting in my personal life, all these situations contained the elements and traces of an abusive alcoholic world.

I kept repeating these unhealthy habits in all aspects of my life and thus producing negative consequences until one day I simply through threw up my hands and said, “enough.” Enough! I visited my first therapist about 5 years ago. I walked into her office ready to sound off about the ills of the world and the people in it. Everyone was ruthless and crazy but little old me. It was this therapist that pointed out that I was viewing the world through the abused vision from a child of an alcoholic. This was one of those turning point statements for me: “Viewing the world through the abused vision from a child of an alcoholic.” This meant that I had taken on unhealthy behavior traits and ways of coping from my family. That there were other more healthy ways to relate to people once I learned all of the powerful lesson of having grown up in such an environment and then allowing myself to hug that hurt little girl within and letting her go.

Gosh, Beloved! I wish I could end this story by saying I am totally free of my childhood anger and unhealthy ways of behaving. I wish I could hold up my triumph flag and wave it wild and free. But for me, after five years of being conscious of what I am bringing to the table, I am still marching as a true spiritual warrior in my personal quest to be totally emotionally free from a crippling reactive thought process. Oh yes, I have had my little triumphs and victories on the battlefield. They are in the form of developing healthy ways of relating to people by taking numerous relationship classes, trying to listen to what I am feeling and expressing this in a non-confrontational manner, listening to others, honoring who I am and being content about it, setting up boundaries with loved ones and ultimately striving to remain in a space of peace and gratitude. Applying all of the 13 pearls in my life have helped me to develop a healthier sense of myself. I now believe that this will be a life long journey for me, one that I embrace for because I now have seen glimpses of beauty in all of life and therefore as a result I have come to believe that the journey is worth it.

Thank you for letting me share with you, Beloved. ●