

On Being Radically Vegetarian

With the following article, *Vegetarian Times* initiates its "Essay" series, a collection of articles and opinions from prominent and outspoken vegetarians. All opinions expressed in our essay series will be solely those of the author. Replies will be published in our "Letters" section.

by Mark Braunstein

Despite our two eyes, we see in only one direction: where we do not look, we do not see. Like our eyes, our intelligence beholds only that toward which we turn it. If you are reading this (and you *are* reading this), you probably are a vegetarian, probably once were a carnivore, and a year before converting probably never suspected you would do so. And a year before that, if some soap-box nutritionist or animal rights evangelist had shouted at you a reason for closing your mouth to flesh foods, you probably never believed it. But now that you do believe it, that conviction does not entitle you to close your eyes.

Your shoes are made of leather. In times of famine, carnivores often resort to cooking and eating their shoes. True, cowhide is only a by-product of hamburger, but if cows were killed specifically for their skins, would their flesh be any more morally edible so long as you did not wear leather?

And what about the veal floating invisibly inside every glass of milk? Cows are not killed, but the cruel conditions under which they are condemned to live in no way compensates for our saving

their skins. Meanwhile, their calves are killed: there can be no quart of milk where there is no cutlet of veal. If your lips are white with milk, it is because someone else's are red with blood.

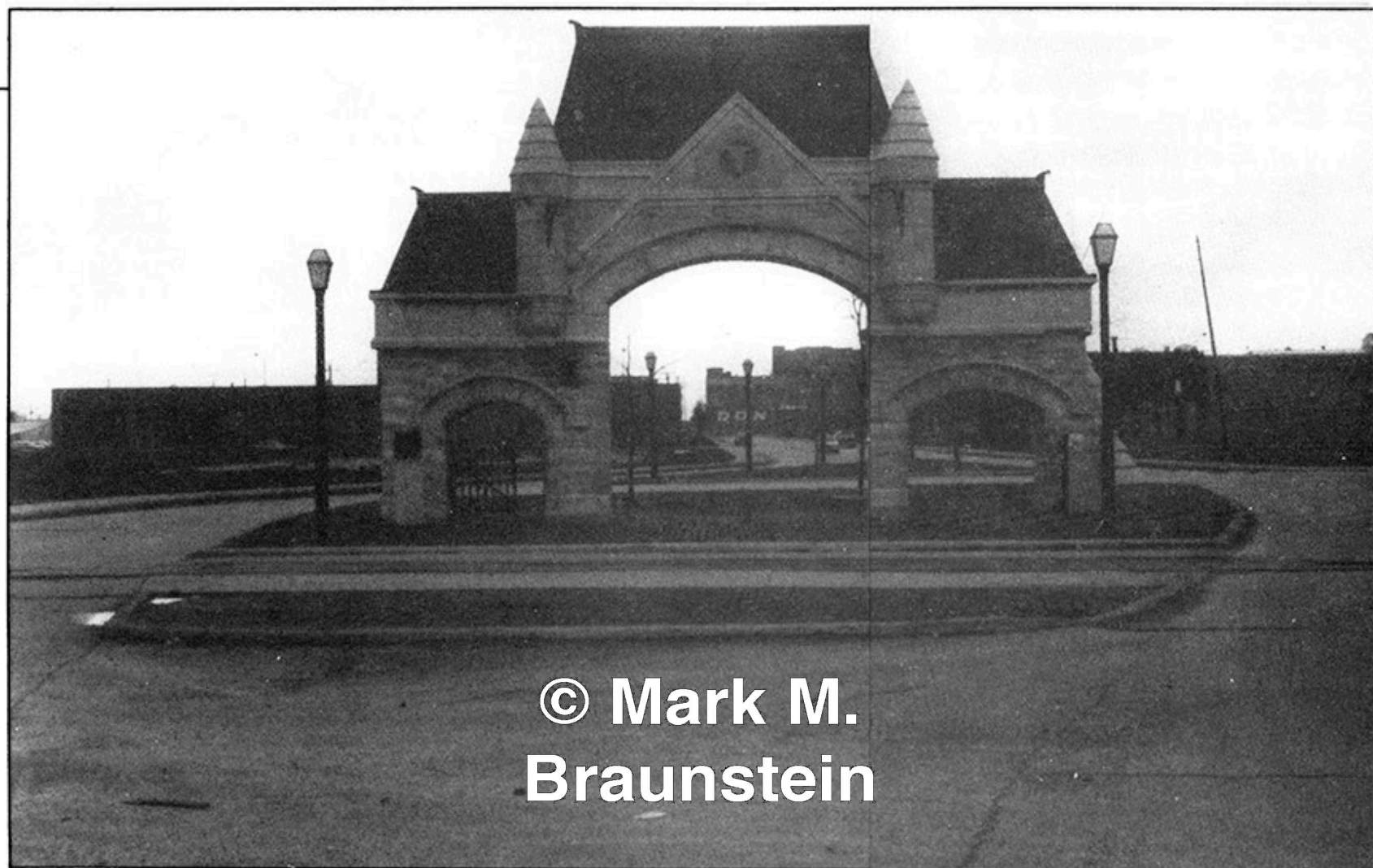
And who has not felt the chicken heart beating silently in every egg? This heart is not the chick's, which does not exist, but the hen's. While a dairy cow in the winter in Wisconsin is freed from her barnyard shackles at least for an hour a day, a hen, even in the summer in Texas, never once sees the sun; while a cow usually artificially inseminated but occasionally permitted a liaison with a bull, a hen never once has any husband to peck; and while a cow can nurse her calf for as long as a week before the cowchild is sent away to the veal farm, a hen must forever count her chicks before they hatch.

And when will you learn to let the honey bee be? No other insect, besides the earthworm, does as much good on our farms. Stealing its honey is certainly no way of showing gratitude. Adding injury to insult and cavity to robbery, the beekeeper replaces white sugar for the honey the bee had intended for its food.

Furthermore, by means of a trap door device at the entrance to its hive, its pollen is stolen. Unsifted batches are filled with many bee wings and legs. Thus pollen costs very much—in fact, an arm and a leg.

If you would not buy flesh from Armour or Oscar Meyer or Frank Purdue, why do you buy corn-on-the-cob from Colonel Sanders or pies and fries from Ronald McDonald? Patronizing a steak house just because it has a salad bar and you are very hungry compare to consorting with the enemy just because it has pretty daughters or handsome sons and you are very horny. The wonder of it all is how you are able to sit in those charcoal charnel houses and eat the lettuce and tomatoes amid the nauseating stench of burning bones and flesh.

And when carnivore companions invite you home for supper with gracious promises of special salads, do you gratefully accept? But where everyone else busily buries the dead bodies on their plates, that is not a meal; that is a funeral. How can you be sociable where, out of respect for the dead, you are inclined to be silent? You might even be



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Union Stockyard Gate. This Chicago landmark stands as a visual reminder that the Windy City was once "Hog Butcher to the World." From 1865 until 1971, it marked the entrance to the 475 acre Union Stock Yards. This photo was taken by Mark Braunstein.

justified to demand that no one be served flesh as a condition of your coming. Your bodies are your temples, dare you mind your manners, but not your manors?

Keep your peas, but not your peace. From the canned food and TV dinners of factories to the canned laughter of television, and from the platform platitudes which politicians themselves never believe to the white sugar placebos which doctors themselves never swallow, ours is a sick society where misconception cons the conscience while nature's truths go unheard or unheeded, an organic carrot held out to a blind donkey.

Despite nutritionists' recommendations, all in good intention, that we obtain this protein from eggs, that mineral from milk, this or that vitamin from pills, we vegans who thrive our whole long lives upon fruits and vegetables and nuts and seeds prove by living example the superfluity of scientific nutrition and the phony-baloney of pharmacology. For this is the vegetarian dialectic of diet and ethic: that not coincidentally, but absolutely essentially, those foods which are the products of the least deprivation of life from others will contribute to the longest life in ourselves.