

GRIST FOR THE MILL



As we celebrate the arrival of spring with its clichéd, yet truly appropriate, descriptive words of rebirth, renewal and rejuvenation, I am reminded of what I consider to be my own rebirth, renewal and rejuvenation. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago, a few days before New Year's— and just three months after the horrors of 9/11 – the only thing I was certain of was that I couldn't wait to see the end of 2001, an *annus horribilis* to the nth degree.

I'll be the first to admit that my cancer diagnosis brought with it an inner strength that I never knew existed, along with an incredibly positive attitude that even my closest friends and family members marvelled at. Realistically, I also had two young daughters who needed me, and I vowed never to burden them with a mother who had a doom-and-gloom outlook on her life. It wasn't soon before I realized that, as much as my kids needed me, I needed them even more – and I thrived on the love and devoted attention that they and my husband provided on a daily basis as I recovered from numerous surgeries and chemotherapy.

My brush with serious illness brought with it a new way of looking at the world and my place in it. Although I've been a confirmed gastronome for most of my life, as well as a trained chef, professional recipe developer and tester, and culinary consultant, I'd never thought much about the provenance of the foods I was purchasing for myself and for my family. Come the beginning of 2002, I started purchasing organic and naturally raised meat, poultry and eggs, and organic produce. (I'd already been buying organic milk.) Then it began to occur to me that there was often a choice between purchasing what I'll call long-distance produce and local, in-season produce.

Since I launched *Edible Toronto* a year-and-a-half ago, many people have asked me about my background and how I came to start a local-food magazine. The truth is that I don't think I'd be the owner, publisher and editor of this magazine if I hadn't been diagnosed with breast cancer. The diagnosis was the catalyst for my realization that the foods we'd been eating might well have been making me and my family sick. Sure, it's likely I'd have gotten into local foods eventually, but being faced with cancer was also instrumental in changing my personality and my way of looking at the world; I'm a very different person than I was prior to December 2001.

In the past couple of years, I've had many people tell me that it took a crisis for them to take a good look at their lives and to make changes; often these changes have to do with food choices and with looking at the foods they purchase as having much broader implications than simply being nondescript items in a shopping cart.

I do not wish a crisis on anyone. But I do wish that people would become more judicious in their food choices and in how they spend their precious food dollars. It makes me crazy to hear that McDonald's is one of the few food companies reaping huge profits in this sluggish economy.

There are things in our lives that we can control and others that we have no say in. We all have a say in what we put in our bodies. Savour this season of rebirth, renewal and rejuvenation. Support our local farmers, fishers, and food producers. And most important of all, be well.

With warmest regards,

Gail



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