

Sashimi is Powerful Stuff

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by Michael Moore

Sashimi, the raw fish so dearly beloved by the Japanese is powerful stuff. Just look at what it did to Marcy. We've all met a Marcy: a kind and generous person who makes her friends feel guilty for wanting to throttle her.

Blessed with tireless energy, she is a watchdog for Nature's downtrodden creatures. Her tiny apartment is filled with posters and other reminders of one's responsibilities to the world. It's hard to leave her place without feeling a twinge of guilt about not doing enough for our beleaguered planet.

Recently, during a school holiday, it fell upon my shoulders to take a group of married teachers, whose husbands couldn't get away from the office, and their offspring to a beach resort on the Japan Sea. Marcy doesn't have any children, but she joined her colleagues from the international school where we all worked anyway. She does have a husband, but he was away somewhere doing meritorious deeds.

My son was not at all pleased that his teacher was coming on the trip. "I'm only in the third grade and we have to do more homework than the kids in high school", he lamented. "And she smiles when she assigns the work. She'll probably make me clean the beach as a special assignment."

As it turned out, Marcy didn't make him clean the beach, but she did announce he would get extra credit for performing this noble act. And reminded him that a good citizen leaves an area cleaner than how he or she finds it.

Marcy, however, has – or rather had – a problem. Although a champion of all organisms possessing flesh, she couldn't, prior to our little trip, bring herself to stop eating them. She particularly enjoyed consuming those creatures that made their home in the ocean. And as a resident of Japan, she had become especially addicted to sashimi. Marcy felt she should be a vegetarian, but she simply couldn't kick the flesh eating habit. She would announce, before devouring a little morsel, "I shouldn't be doing this, but I'm going to stop soon."

The minshuku where we were staying - a Japanese version of a bed and breakfast house - prided itself in serving fresh seafood. The owner made a long trip to the fish market each morning and always returned with a fresh fish that he skillfully filleted and served. Everyone enjoyed the sashimi, Marcy most of all. Her guilt ridden comments, however, had begun to get on our

nerves, especially since she consumed more than her share of what was served on the communal platter. The second night, the proprietor was proud to offer us a dish of raw sole.

The fish had been caught in the bay near the minshuku only minutes before reaching the table. The proprietor had deftly skinned one side and cut it into thin strips. Once we'd finished this side, he was going to turn the fish over and repeat the operation. As it turned out, it took us some time to reach the second side of that fish.

Marcy reached greedily for a strip of the sashimi. As she peeled the flesh from the backbone, the freshly skinned creature began to shudder and then flip-flop on the plate. Marcy screamed and fled the room. The proprietor apologized profusely. My son giggled.

Marcy finally returned to the table. We assured the owner of minshuku that he no reason to feel embarrassed. And all of us, except for Marcy, finished off the sole. But not before Marcy had made an announcement. This had been a sign from the Almighty and she would never again allow flesh to pass her lips. She remains a vegetarian to this day.

Like I said, sashimi can be powerful stuff.