

Editor's Note

This personal narrative plays with the conventions of food identity, especially vegetarianism. Sudolsky has come up with a new form of diet restriction: chicketarianism (in a footnote, even!), and uses this idea to look into the positives and the pitfalls of identity. What is Sudolsky saying about food identities like veganism? How does his creation of chicketarianism make a more convincing (and fun) argument than if he simply wrote an essay about his predilection for poultry? What does this essay bring up about food and identity in American culture? What issues, questions, or ideas might be left out of the discussion?

This essay has personality. What are the details that add to the essay's or author's *ethos*? Consider the effect of the photo of the author in a chicken suit or author's use of descriptive language such as "frigid ceramic tile" and "dingy façade." What about the effect of mentioning Chinese food at both the beginning and end of the essay? The author also tells a long anecdote in the beginning about food poisoning that isn't directly connected to the rest of the essay. Is this effective? Why or why not?

Bon appétit.

Confessions of a Chicketarian

Michael Sudolsky

I tightened the grip I had on my stomach. I could feel it coming. Strange smells diffused, contaminating the air I breathed. My knees ached from contact with the frigid ceramic tile. A bead of sweat fell from my brow. I felt it coming. I felt horrible. And then it came—my first (and hopefully only) encounter with food poisoning.

My brain attempted to recall what I ate. Desperate, I thought about my day. I wanted to figure out what menace could have caused this—bad cheese? Spoiled milk? Tainted meat? And then it came to me... Earlier that day my brother and I trekked on over to "China Bowl: Chinese Cuisine." We were famished, so despite the dingy façade, absent clientele, and lack of color, our stomachs led us inside. Without thinking, my brother and I had both devoured China Bowl's finest: Sweet and Sour Pork Bowls.

I determined the culprit: Pork. I cursed it. How foolish I had been. Mother had always advised us to avoid pork, for it belonged in the "bad meat" category. However, I put aside her warning and ate that Sweet and Sour Pork bowl. I ignored her, yet I so desperately wished I hadn't. I yearned for a time machine to take me back; but to

my dismay I was stuck in that foul bathroom. I was miserable; I was defeated. Mother was right, and at that point I made a promise to myself. Never again would I suffer from the cruelty that is tainted pork.

I told myself I'd begin a new; I would start a new lifestyle. I would prevent this from ever happening again. I considered restricting what I ate. My mind was littered with possibilities. I found myself visualizing different futures for myself. In one instance, I was a vegan, riding around on a "fixie" (a bike without breaks and an inability to coast) amongst my hip vegan friends. In another, I became a hardcore raw-foodist. I was sharing Trader Joe's Trail Mix with my raw-foodist friend Zach. But then I realized how ridiculous that sounded. I remember asking myself, "How could I ever go Vegan? I'm obsessed with poultry. I couldn't even go vegetarian."

I should probably explain my obsession with poultry. There was a week when I was a kid where I refused to eat anything but meals derived from chicken. I collected chicken memorabilia. Chicken statues, book rests, paperweights and other chicken related things littered my bedroom. There was one Halloween where my mother even helped me dress up as a chicken. Everyone knew chickens were my favorite animal. The way they moved, clucked, came into this world; all of it was fascinating. There was just something about the chicken species that made them irresistibly amazing in my mind. Yet somehow, despite my love for the living version, I found that I was perfectly happy with lifeless chicken too. I loved the taste of chicken. To me, chicken has this uncanny ability to fuse perfectly with any meal. I thought about all of this (while gripping my upset stomach) and seconds later I had figured it out—I was to become a "chicketarian"¹.

Fully recovered from the incident, I was eager to start my new lifestyle. I knew my switch to chicketarianism wouldn't be monumental or even meaningful. There was just something about a restricted diet that intrigued me. I felt that not only would chicketarianism make me healthier, but it would add this certain something to my personality. I looked forward to passing on holiday ham. I saw myself skipping Fourth of July hotdogs and hamburgers. I pictured my parents complaining, but I didn't care. I was excited to be different.

With chicketarianism on my side, I found this air of freshness surrounding me. I felt renewed. It was as if I pressed a reset button on my health. I deduced that there really was something to restricting one's consumption of meat. Many view vegans, raw-foodists and even vegetarians as insensible creatures, arguing that animals were put here for a reason; but I began to understand. I started to connect with the food conscious people I had always been surrounded by. No longer were the vegans

¹Chick-e-tar-i-an (noun) – One who restricts their consumption of meat to chicken related foods. Some may include all poultry and fish.



FIGURE 1 Me, dressed up as a chicken.

consumption of that tainted meat. High school graduation came and went. Chicken quesadillas have been perfected, and China Bowl went out of business. I have grown, yet I'm still following a chicketarian lifestyle. On trips to the store, my reusable tote bag still follows. Chicken memorabilia can still be found in my bedroom, and attempting to reuse old things still remains a pastime. But recently, I have found the answers to the questions I posed on my identity.

I wondered if I was a prisoner to my own creation. Had chicketarianism shaped my life? If I wanted to, could I leave this lifestyle? Or would it be leaving a part of my identity? To those questions, and so many more, I found the answer when I watched a raw-foodist friend take a bite of meat.

As I watched my friend Zach leave the days of nuts and salad, epiphanies exploded in my brain. Zach was eating meat—yet he didn't lose his identity. All he lost was a label. Zach was still the friend I had come to know him to be. With this, I found that one's diet is a mere aspect of the complex thing we call life. I had thought chicketarianism made me into who I am, but for whatever reason, it was I who gave up red meats.

It has always been I, not the chicketarian, who makes decisions. Watching Zach eat that burger, I finally came to the realization that I have always been myself. I've never been anything else. I am who I make myself to be; I make my own identity.

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at my high school ridiculous hipsters, but friends. Yet I thought to myself: had these new friends befriended me, or chicketarianism?

It felt like I belonged to something greater. With my new friends I hopped on the environmental bandwagon. A canvas tote bag from Trader Joes was soon in my possession. I opted for a refreshing bike ride instead of driving. My friends and I attempted to find innovative ways to reuse old things. I woke up, environmentally. Just like chicketarianism, an aspect of sustainability had become a part of me. However, I couldn't help but wonder if I was being myself.

Three years have passed since my con-