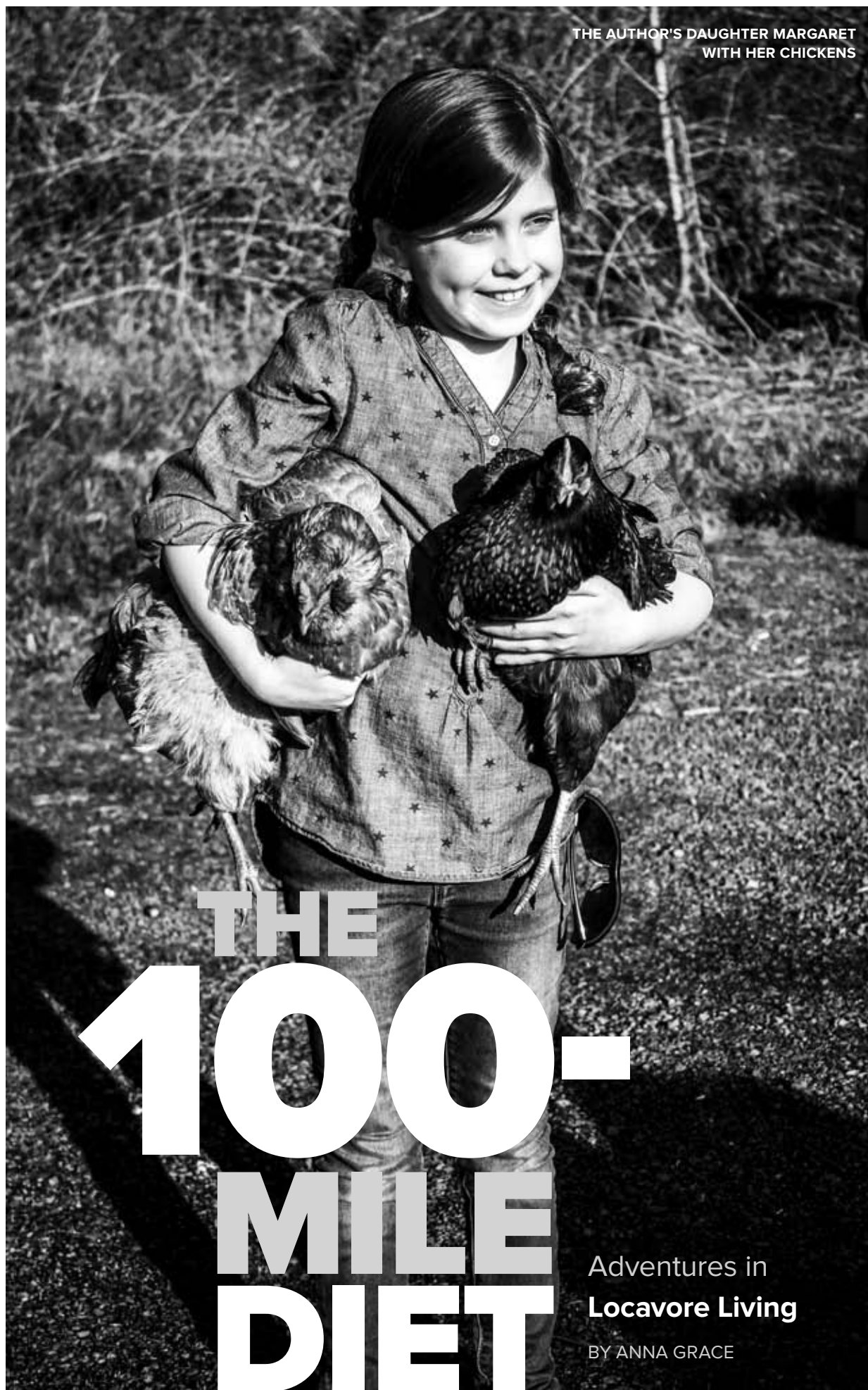


THE AUTHOR'S DAUGHTER MARGARET
WITH HER CHICKENS



THE 100- MILE DIET

Adventures in
Locavore Living

BY ANNA GRACE

PHOTO BY ANNA GRACE

“If we had a cow,” my daughter said, hope resonant in her voice, “we wouldn’t have to go to the store at all.”

We are not getting a cow. Our family is already scrambling and busy without the addition of milking anything.

But Margaret was right. With our garden, the chickens, staples from Hummingbird Wholesale, home canning and the freezer full of meat, we have everything on hand that we eat regularly, with the exception of milk products.

And I do really hate going to the store.

My husband and I didn’t get up one morning and suddenly decide to adopt a 100-mile diet, with an emphasis on our own produce.

As eaters, we’re just not that ambitious. But a slow process of thoughtful bulk buying, gardening, preserving and storing had yielded a nearly self-sufficient kitchen.

When I’d thought of local diets and self-sufficiency in

the past, I imagined stalwart food fundamentalists, growing overly thin on a diet of amaranth and dried zucchini. But in Lane County, farms and retailers make it not only easy to eat local, but cost effective and endlessly delicious.

LOCAL, HUMANELY RAISED MEAT

Negotiating the morality of being an omnivore is challenging. But look closely and you will find farms humanely raising meat throughout the Willamette Valley: Deck Family Farm, Fair Valley Farm and Living Earth Farm to name a few.

We buy half a cow from Knee Deep Cattle Company. I love chatting with the farmer who owns the place as I pick up our beef at their family home and barn, just across Lorane Highway from where next year’s cattle are grazing.

Bulk meat takes advance financial planning, but saves considerable money. In the past we have split bulk orders with friends and family. Today, two secondhand freezers stand in our carport, holding summer produce and meat.

Buying half or a quarter of a cow will stretch your creativity. It’s not all steaks and ground beef. I’ve come across cuts of meat I’d never heard of. A package of kidneys comes with the deal. Tail is actually delicious.

4-H meat is another way to ensure the animal you are eating had a nice home and a name. After the 4-H summer fair, local businesses buy the kids’ livestock, and then sell it to the public. We have purchased a 4-H hog at 4-Star Meat Company with yummy results.

LOCAL GRAINS AND OTHER STAPLES

Every year in late August, we make a large bulk order at Hummingbird Wholesale. They carry Camas Mill’s local grains and legumes, along with other staples like honey. Hummingbird has a storefront with smaller portions of these locally harvested staples, but I go for the 50 lb. bags.

Having these staples on hand ensures we eat them regularly. Rather than thinking, “I ought to serve more black beans,” I simply cook up the black beans we have. Instead of running to the store for pasta, I experiment by serving polenta. Most of our staples are stored in 5-gallon buckets with Gamma lids (found at WinCo). Miller moths, mice and weevils are no match for these lids, and they are easy to open when a human wants some grain.

AREA FRUIT FARMS

We live in a glorious valley for fruit production. My little hamster trail of you-pick produce takes me out to J and M Farms for strawberries, Green-Hill-Aire for blueberries, Detering Orchards for peaches and Gravenstein apples that make the most decadent applesauce, Thistledown for random fruit runs, friends’ backyards for plums and pears. I think fully half the calories my son consumes in the summer come from the tenacious blackberries encroaching on our property.

There is more dirt and fewer chemicals to wash away on the fruit we gather. The energy spent drying, canning and freezing in the summer is paid back all winter long, in smoothies, oatmeal, on top of pancakes or straight out of the jar.

PLANT A BIG GARDEN, OR COMMIT TO A CSA BOX, AND EAT EVERYTHING

“This one produces ‘armloads of solid, crisp fruit ...’” my husband Jeff reads from the seed packet of cucumbers. We are standing in the back room at Down to Earth in early February, to plan for a harvest that won’t hit full swing for another half a year.

“Armloads?” I confirm. “That’s the one for us.”

Fast forward seven months and we are standing in the kitchen, cucumbers covering every surface, recipes for gazpacho and tzatziki open and resting on top of the produce. An ill-fated pickle project is in my way, just starting to smell funny. I consider taking a few “armloads” of cucumbers back to Down to Earth.

Committing to eat everything you grow takes a special kind of grit in the beginning. After a while the chaos of abundance becomes normal. I stopped planning meals in advance, and started walking down to the garden to find out what was for dinner. Recipes became less strict. This soup calls for two red peppers? How about ten?

If your home does not allow for a garden, CSA boxes produce roughly the same results, without the aphids. Participating farms pack up a box for you each week with whatever is going nuts in their soil. The Willamette Farm & Food Coalition is a brilliant help for someone starting on this journey and further information can be found at lanefood.org/find-local-food/csa-programs.

As I write this in early January, I sit in a kitchen with squash piled up in a corner, ropes of chilies, garlic and shallots hanging from the ceiling, an army of home-canned fruit lining the shelves behind me.

We’ve learned that locavore life isn’t about sacrifice and self-congratulation. It’s about the comfort of a delicious meal provided by the hands of our neighbors and the land that we live on.

Jeff and I started down this road of local food in pursuit of deliciousness. Looking back we see a small but satisfying little dent in our family’s carbon footprint, minimizing the miles our food traveled and the miles we traveled to get it.

Now all we need is a cow.