

White Meat or Dark Meat? Neither, Thanks.

Category: Eating

written by Laurel Hunt | December 12, 2021

I'm not much of a cook, but I've always loved Thanksgiving dinner. What could be better than a heaping plate of turkey, smothered in pan gravy? Or the smell of roasting turkey wafting through the house? So many memories of family and friends have been centered on that sumptuous bird—until one day last summer, driving on the interstate, when I followed a livestock truck.

The open-bed tractor trailer held hundreds of stacked cages containing large white birds. The speeding truck was several car lengths ahead of me, too far away to see the birds clearly. White feathers floated off the truck, swirling like snowflakes across the lanes. Were they swans, going to grace a lake? Mesmerized by the puffs of feathers scattering across the road, my mind entertained different scenarios as to the birds' destination.

After barreling at top speed along a level stretch, the truck slowed to climb a hill, and I drew closer. One bird lifted its head, its profile unmistakable. They were turkeys, clearly headed to a slaughterhouse. My heart sank. I'd read about factory farms and processing plants. They're not pretty. Were the white feathers floating off the truck a form of SOS?

I began hoping the truck might run off the road and gently overturn. Nobody would be hurt, but the cages would spring open and the turkeys could scramble to freedom, disappearing into the woods. Never mind that their legs had probably been broken when they were flung into the cages. Or that some of them may have already died from the stress.

I tried to focus on the road ahead as I passed the truck, with only a quick glance at the turkeys. Those in the front cages, bearing the brunt of the highway wind, had been stripped bald of feathers, down to their pink skin, as bare as a baby's bottom.

One Thanksgiving, I had splurged and bought our turkey from a local organic farm. Although it was expensive, it was moist and flavorful. From now on, that will be my choice, if I have turkey. This year, I had salmon instead.

Laurel Hunt

Asheville, North Carolina