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# Review: The Raw, the Kooks and Their ‘Hippie Food’

Modern staples like yogurt, granola, avocado and hummus were once (literally) cult favorites.



PHOTO: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

*By Rien Fertel*

Jan. 19, 2018 4:38 pm ET

**We’re all hippies** now. Though most of us packed away our Birkenstocks and Grateful Dead records long ago, our stomachs remain resolutely tie-dyed. You might eschew tofu and renounce alfalfa sprouts, but foods like yogurt, granola, hummus, avocado and soy sauce, ingredients that were first embraced by hippie faddists in the 1960s and ’70s, likely figure in your daily diet.

In “Hippie Food,” a chronicle of the counterculture’s culinary contributions, Jonathan Kauffman describes a time when a simple bowl of brown rice layered with stir-fried vegetables and dashes of tamari could be an act as politically symbolic as hitchhiking to San Francisco with flowers in your hair. Currently covering the food beat for that city’s Chronicle newspaper, Mr. Kauffman remembers when corporate cheese and high-sugared cereals disappeared from

his Midwest Mennonite family table in the 1970s, only to be replaced with alien fare: oatmeal whole-wheat breads, ground-nut stews and garden-plucked vegetables. “Although I have been a fan of tofu since the age of eight,” he writes, “I have no interest in telling you why *you* should be eating it.” His goal lies in uncovering the history of why so many Americans do.

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## HIPPIE FOOD

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By Jonathan Kauffman

*Morrow, 344 pages, \$26.99*

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Mr. Kauffman begins in Los Angeles at the turn of the 20th century, when “drugless healers”—yogis, chiropractors, naturopaths and other self-help and -healing svengalis—roamed the Sunset Strip in search of acolytes. Then, as today, optimal well-

being meant eating well, however prescribed. Nutrition experts—many self-credentialed—touted vegetarian diets, raw-food diets and what was known as the “mucusless diet.” (Steve Jobs was the most famous disciple of this strict regimen: fruits and vegetables, supplemented by the occasional slice of whole-grain toast.) Starting in 1958 at the Health Hut, a “tiny, grotty restaurant” and specialty store on Beverly Boulevard, Lois Bootzin and her husband, Robert, known to all as Gypsy Boots, dished out beatnik grub: soy casseroles, fresh-squeezed juices and sprout-and-avocado sandwiches on soya bread. Though the eatery lasted just four years, Gypsy Boots survived as a kooky guest on late-night talk shows, proselytizing for the virtues of soy-milk smoothies.

Alongside playful prose (for Mr. Kauffman, alfalfa sprouts smell as if “a field of grass were having sex”), the great joy of “Hippie Food” is its rich cast of characters. Some, like the madcap Boots, “half cheer-squad leader, half generalissimo,” who stirred up the crowd at the restaurant’s weekly Back to Nature Luau night, might encourage readers to reconsider carob. Others, like Jim Baker, the whole-foods community’s answer to Charles Manson, will likely make many never look at a superfood the same way.

Jim and his wife, Elaine, were among the first restaurateurs to promise “organic” menu items. Compared with those of the Health Hut, the Bakers’ menus, first at the Aware Inn and later at the Old World restaurant, slyly incorporated nourishing ingredients into diner-style standards: massive Belgian waffles

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(prepared with soy and unbleached wheat flours), hamburgers stuffed with chopped veggies, and their famous cheesecake (made with honey and unrefined sugar). Jim also gravitated toward the era's other excesses: booze, psychedelics and cultism. (He also killed two men on two separate occasions, each with a fatal judo-chop.) In 1969, he opened a salad and juice bar, the Source, that quickly spawned a 150-person cult defined, in Mr. Kauffman's words, by

“meditation and sex magic, ecstatic music, and mind-blowing food.” Warren Beatty and Goldie Hawn were regulars at the restaurant. Baker would refashion himself as Father Yod, claim a bevy of spiritual wives, and pay his “family” no wages for work in the restaurant—though he would supply them with housing in mansions and unlimited organic produce. “Food,” as an Austin, Texas, co-op devotee declares later in Mr. Kauffman's narrative, had become “the hippie religion.”

Across the nation, utopian communities devoted to whole foods were springing up. In 1961, nearly three dozen adherents decamped from New York to the town of Chico, in the heart of California's rice basket, to build a society on what the Japanese philosopher George Ohsawa called the “principal grain.” His followers gorged on a “Macrobiotic Zen” diet of brown rice, supplemented only with organic vegetables and fermented soy. Despite his proto-Michael Pollan take on sustainable eating—locally and in season—Ohsawa's lifestyle was too esoteric to take hold nationwide (not to mention too prone to causing scurvy and

malnutrition). Down in San Francisco, a troupe of mimes turned guerrilla-theater activists called the Diggers, and later the Free Family, doled out slices of brown bread baked in coffee cans to hungry hippies before and after the Summer of Love. Nutrition trumped taste. White bread, like white rice for the macrobiotics, was the enemy. Unpolished, unadulterated grains could heal the world during the era of population bombs and nuclear weapons.

Inspired by the world-wide famine warnings of Paul Ehrlich and others, a social-work student named Frances Moore Lappé picked up the farming-as-salvation theme. Her best-selling 1971 cookbook manifesto, “Diet for a Small Planet,” argued that only soybeans, in the form of tofu, could provide an adequate protein source for a burgeoning global population dependent on eating animals. By 1975 as many as a million people had relocated to farming communes, endeavoring to produce their own chemical-free produce—“God’s own food, bitten by God’s own bugs,” in the words of one farmer. Back-to-the-landers and their urban counterparts spawned localized food systems: farmers’ markets and cooperative groceries. It was “the gut reaction of a generation,” according to one journalist.

Sustainability was a whole other issue. Communal living was rarely edenic. Collectivist restaurants and food co-ops appeared in medium-size Rust Belt cities—Madison, Wis., Ann Arbor, Mich., Buffalo, N.Y.—perhaps because of the region’s long history of farm and grocery cooperatives. In Ithaca, N.Y., the collectively owned, vegetarian Moosewood Restaurant, alongside its ever-expanding series of cookbooks, helped introduce American eaters to a world of recipes: Greek moussaka, Brazilian black bean soup and Indonesian gado-gado (a salad of vegetables, hard-boiled eggs, and fried tofu or tempeh dressed with peanut sauce). This month Moosewood celebrates its 45th birthday, a phenomenal success story compared with the 5,000 cooperative buying clubs that opened in the 1970s. Armed with rallying cries like “Food for people, not for profit,” many devolved into bitter infighting over revolutionary methods. In the Twin Cities, an early co-op hotspot, a Marxist faction firebombed one store. The opposing side retaliated by throwing sticks of butter.

“The revolution failed. The revolution succeeded,” Mr. Kauffman writes toward the end of his book. The 1980s and ’90s witnessed the closing of communes and the shuttering of co-ops. Meat consumption steadily ascended. But mainstream

groceries now knew to stock alfalfa sprouts, macrobiotic rice cakes and soy sauce.

International foods, many of them vegetarian and vegan-friendly, are now part and parcel of the great gallimaufry that is American cuisine. “Hippie food” is both a scornful phrase for flavor-free eating and a lucrative industry, co-opted by Whole Foods and Gwyneth Paltrow’s Goop lifestyle brand, among countless profitable companies. Wal-Mart, the nation’s largest retailer, is also its largest organic retailer, according to one report. Tempeh and seitan might never rise above vegan nichedom, but whole-grain breads and fresh-fruit smoothies have become quotidian delights, to say nothing of avocado toast and grain bowls, hippie mainstays long before millennials got hold of them. A handful of açai berries will not save the world; a turmeric smoothie will not grant eternal salvation. But such new-wave hippie foods might allow us to live a little longer so that we can at least try.

—*Mr. Fertel is the author, most recently, of “The One True Barbecue.”*

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