

2-17-2001

Interview with Margo DeCamp

Audra Ransburg

Margo DeCamp

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.kenyon.edu/elfs_interviews

Recommended Citation

Ransburg, Audra and DeCamp, Margo, "Interview with Margo DeCamp" (2001). *Interviews*. 2.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/elfs_interviews/2

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Foodways at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

ELFS-ALR-A021701.A

Researcher's Name: Audra Ransburg

Event: Interview with Margo DeCamp

Place: Margo DeCamp's home on Depolo Road in Gambier

Date: February 17, 2001

AR: This is Audra Ransburg interviewing Margo DeCamp on Saturday morning, February 17th at her home in Gambier. I have this project for Howard Sacks' class looking at foodways in Knox County and my subsection is to examine why people choose the foods they choose. I was talking to Erin Salva and she recommended that I talk to you as a member of the same co-op that she was a part of. So I guess, you're my 'I choose food because it's good for me' person, unless I've got you all wrong. I was just wondering if you could talk to me a little bit about that?

MD: OK, do you mean free form or are you going to ask questions?

AR: Free form unless you'd rather. I have some questions.

MD: OK, well I approach it from several points of view. One is just the physiological health reasons for me and my family. We feel that we want to be healthy and the second reason is sort of for myself personally is sort of a spiritual sort of thing as far as I'm vegetarian. Now my husband is vegetarian at home and when he goes out he'll eat whatever and that's fine with me. My older children have left the rest are the same way. In fact my son's practically a carnivore and that's fine. They've got to make their own choices. But they've been raised healthy. So we're not real strict about it. When they get older it will be there option. Whatever they want to do. But I'm definitely a vegetarian. I do eat eggs- I don't eat eggs, we use eggs in cooking. We use cheese. I like ice cream, I try not to eat too much of it. But you know, that kind of thing. It's that too- it's the spiritual side which to me is all one, but I realize a lot of people choose a healthy diet mainly because they want to feel good. Live healthy- it's just all part of the life style. And we enjoy growing food.

AR: How much of your food do you grow?

MD: In the summer it's a lot. In the winter we freeze some things. We freeze some spinach. Almost all our potatoes this time of year start to grow. Onions, we're still eating from the garden and I have some frozen that will make it most of the way around the year. But I don't freeze and can as extensively as I used to. I make a lot of pesto and tomato sauce. Now more of my time is going to doing things with the children than putting up the food. But in the summer we eat extensively from the garden and in the winter we grow sprouts. We have our own chickens so we use their manure in the garden and for compost.

AR: Do you get your eggs from those chickens?

MD: Yeah, we actually sell some of the eggs too. And they are free range. Right now they have to be in their pen because we've got to work on our fence, but for the most part they have a huge area to be in. Even their pen as you saw is huge. It's nice to let them just be anywhere, not just stuck in the mud. They're our pets.

AR: How many kids do you have?

MD: I have four. One's in college- at Connecticut College and one's graduated college and is in California. And then I have two younger ones- eleven and nine.

AR: When you buy your food, where do you buy it?

MD: Some at the grocery store. But a lot at the natural food store.

AR: In town, or do you drive somewhere?

MD: In town. A lot of it in town. Now occasionally we go to Columbus. Our bread we get in bulk from Columbus because I like the organic, we're into organic and I like the organic a lot. Beagles we get from Columbus. Occasionally we'll go to Wild Oats down there and get like mayonnaise, things you can't get locally. Rather than be in the food co-op, I use the local store and he'll give you ten percent off if you buy a whole case of things.

AR: What other factors go into your choices when you buy your food? Do you have strict brand loyalty with your vegan mayonnaise, or do you-

MD: I'm not vegan. I eat eggs and cheese, although I'm not heavy on it. Probably the most milk I get is my weakness, ice cream. I do a fair amount of cheese for the family because they like macaroni and cheese and stuff like that. It's alright as long as... When I go out I definitely go for organic. I don't mind paying the price and it's not because we have so much money, but it's because we feel like we want the farmers to take care of their land. They have to be able to sell their product. I think the price is going to come in line as the years go by. But right now, they can't sell their product if the people won't pay. It's worth more to us too. We don't mind paying the extra, but sometimes, it's so extreme that I do say no. But for the most part, if it's available in organic, we want to support the growers, we want to feel our bodies. We want the tide to swing over to organic, which it is. So a lot of the major food growers are realizing that a lot of people are buying these products and we're going to have to produce it now, unfortunately they don't want to do it, but they're being reinforced. The government's still behind us as far as organic standards, they didn't let that get diluted. So that's really fortunate. Things are going to change. And just the natural, whole wheat and less processed we can get, I'm an at home mother- I work out of the home. When the children are home from school, I'm generally not working, so I'm available to make dinner. So most of our food I make from scratch. Not all of it, we order pizza. We go out. I'm not saying it completely, but on an average night, I'm making the dinner.

AR: When you do go out, do you find it hard to find things that stick within what you'd like to eat?

MD: More as a vegetarian than as a- not really, in a way. It seems a lot of restaurants are coming around. You can always get salad, but that gets boring after a while. It depends on where you go, obviously. But it seems that there are a lot of restaurants like this Cheesecake factory that have so much on the menu that you're bound to find something. And I'm happy just having an all vegetable menu. I don't need an entrée so to speak- and the same with my children. It's getting easier and easier and you learn. Often if it's a new restaurant my husband and I will go first and see what's going to be available for the children. We find that we can go out and get a good meal. Your standards are lower of course. They don't use whole-wheat flour, but that's fine. It doesn't matter as long as your basic at home diet is good, then I feel like when we're out it's not as important because you have a good base. You don't have to be perfect all the time. It's more the vegetarian- for me personally, I really don't want to eat anything from animals, except the cheese and eggs, but if I lived by myself that would probably get phased out too except that I like my chickens. Their manure is very valuable. I consider the chickens more valuable for producing manure than producing eggs. And when they're out ranging, we don't have to feed them all that much and they eat a lot of our leftovers. And we've also got a source for organic food for them, so they're truly organic eggs.

AR: How do you collect the manure when they're free range?

MD: They spend the night on the perches. They automatically perch. It's neat. It gets dark, they're in there on the perches. You do have to close the door or raccoons will get them. If you went down there now, I'd be embarrassed I've had a little trouble with my back so I haven't cleaned it out. Since they're not in it a lot, it's ok. If they had to stand in it, that wouldn't be. So you get plenty of manure.

AR: Can we talk about your kids a little bit? Are they enthusiastic about being vegetarian? Are they resistant?

MD: You know how it is when you're raised, what you're raised seems normal to you. Now as a teenager- Susan's eleven now and she's starting to feel out all aspects of her life. She wants to test our values and that sort of thing. She has tried salmon and she didn't like it. I'm beginning to say to her- if she says I want to try it, I say yes. I feel that even with my son, who like I said definitely has a meat based diet, he knows what to fall back on. If at some point in his life his health begins to suffer or he marries someone who's into it, he's got the base. I also feel that it's extremely important to feed them healthy when they're young. Then when they get older, they've got that foundation that's really important for all aspects of their physical health. As far as a social thing- if they have friends over, I always try to have something that doesn't seem odd. Lasagna, or macaroni and cheese and maybe I'll make cookies which I don't usually do, or something sugary so that to them they feel like they're the same. I just don't want them having the feeling, oh we're so odd. I don't want them to feel uncomfortable.

AR: Is it hard to keep this lifestyle up in rural Knox County? Do you think it would be easier in the city or it's easier out here because you can have your chickens?

MD: If I lived in the city, I'd be like a buffalo trying to live in a tree. I can't answer that question. In the city you could probably get every organic produce. There is a lot available in the city as far as products which would be a lot easier. Except for what we grow, we have very little organic produce available to us. And that can be important. They spray very heavily with pesticides which hurts the workers as well as the consumers. Having the garden is really important because you go out and pick it and an hour later you're eating it. Or you feed them yogurt and graze them in the garden and that's dinner. There's times of year where they're out there eating peas. They like to eat the tops off the onions and they eat those. They find all kinds of stuff to just eat out there and you can't get healthier than that. I'd be hard pressed to live in the city, but I'm just not a city person.

AR: Where did you grow up?

MD: I did grow up in suburbia, but my father always into nature. Every weekend we're off in the woods, tromping around here and there and now he still lives in suburbia and he can't understand why all of his children want to move out into the country.

AR: I think that's all I've got. Do you have anything else that you think might help me with my project?

MD: Tell me your main thing again.

AR: Why people choose to eat the foods they eat.

MD: For me it seems to be working. I do have physical problems. I just found out lately that I have osteoporosis and my personal feeling is that I have the diet together- it's not a diet thing or exercise. I just happen to be delineated- small boned, thin person. So I'm not saying we're completely without health problems, but I think for the most part we are healthy. My children rarely miss school. Like I said earlier, it ties into a spiritual thing a definite flow of the earth. The more people that can grow their own food. I'm really into mulching and the garden and sometimes I go out there and I see a little spider doing it's web and then it sees me and scurries back and I think- I'm an intruder in my own garden. This garden- all I do is plant it and lay down the mulch and then it becomes this great habitat and it's so cool to think you're getting your food from there. The circular thing that makes you feel that you're part of the whole earth, part of the whole life cycle. I guess that's what I like about it. I think the garden really ties it in. And the chickens too. I'm a chicken too.

AR: Have you ever had other animals, goats or anything?

MD: Horses. We are taking steps toward getting horses again. Obviously you don't eat them and they're an expense and they consume. I really like animals. We have dogs and

cats. I like animals period. And for the children too, I think it's a good way to raise children. I think it's important that they really realize- they know that the chicken compost goes out and the manure goes to the garden- they see the whole cycle. They see where the food comes from. I think it's important for them to be in the rhythm and understand and pick up on that.

-side conversation-

MD: And even with a vegetarian- and believe me, I think about this a lot when I feed milk product to my family. You have to think a few steps back to where this is coming from too. And how these animals are treated. I am vegetarian for the spiritual reasons, but a lot of it is the animal rights. I was a member of one group for a while and they got too extreme for me- I felt like they were just making more trouble. And I'm not one to prosthetise, but I do feel that animals are spiritual beings too. Not in the same way we are, but to have so many things imposed on these animals. Look at how those chickens are kept and compare that with ours. Our chickens don't mind giving up their eggs, they're happy. That's the only thing that bothers me about the people that consume meat. I think for a lot of people it just that they've done it all their lives and here it is. And then they drive along and- oh look at the cute little calf. They don't realize they might be eating that tomorrow. That's not going to have an easy death or an easy life.

AR: Is this a dialogue you find yourself having with people with any frequency?

MD: No. I think people really have to find their own way. If someone would ask, fine. You asked, so you're getting the whole load. I guess I do occasionally with my children. When issues come up we discuss it. But so many people love their cats and their dogs and they love animals. In other countries, they eat puppies and there are countries that are appalled that we eat cows. I think animals- we need to treat them with respect. We don't own them so to speak. We need to guard them.

AR: So you see the trends shifting?

MD: As far as the organic, I do. As for the animals, I can't predict that. I don't know. It seems that in terms of sustaining the world, you've heard the whole thing about how much grain it takes to raise a cow. That will be the pressure that eventually comes around. It does encourage me that often I talk to college students. Aren't there a lot of college students that are vegetarian?

AR: I think so.

MD: And obviously they may leave and it may change. But like we said, now they know. Even if they eat meat twenty times less a year, that's significant! Even if they make a choice one night a month- it all adds up.

AR: Thanks for your time.