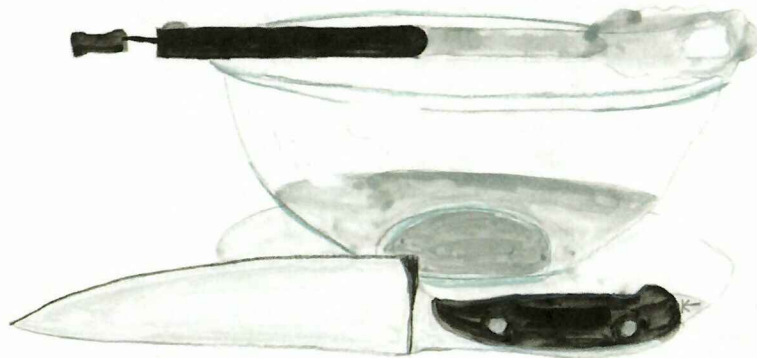


HOW TO CHOOSE A WOODEN BOWL

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY KELSI TURNER TJERNAGEL



Here is how to choose a wooden bowl:

You discover you are insulin resistant. You shake your head. No, thank you.

Then you go to the library in the sleepy little desert town where you live and read all the books about carbohydrates, the glycemic index, blood sugar. You read until the words stop making sense.

In the face of such overwhelming information, you resolve to simply begin by eating salads at lunch and supper.

You select a glass bowl from the cabinet. You pile mixed greens from the grocery store in it. When you lift the lettuces from the bowl, the tongs clang-scrape-clink against its sides. The noise makes you wince.

After a few days, salad tastes like homework.

You read more cookbooks. Salad recipes begin to remind you of the advanced calculus course you took in college. You are chronically missing something vital that would lead to success: You are out of celery. You forgot to roast the sweet potatoes the previous day. Your grocery store does not carry walnut oil. Your lettuces have gone bad. You've burnt the sunflower seeds ... again.

You keep trying.

A few months later, you read a recipe that begins "Place the lettuce in a large wooden bowl ..." Your mind lingers on the word *wooden*.

You search in earnest for a wooden bowl: at thrift shops, art festivals, farmers markets.

You quickly realize that *vegan* just means *vegetables*. You sign up for classes: Whole Foods Workshop and Vegan Cooking 101. You practice your knife skills. You read every single post from your favorite whole-food bloggers.

Even though your husband's job requires move after move after move, you haul your garden pots with you and you plant

greens. In Virginia you try kale, mesclun, and spinach on your townhome's deck overlooking the Rappahannock River.

You keep trying.

You think about color: You choose red bell peppers instead of green because they look better against a bed of spinach.

You think about texture: You make long ribbons from your carrots instead of coins.

You think about seasons: For the first time in your life you shop at farmers markets. You learn to embrace the ephemeral moment when the perfect peach or summer squash is ready. You learn that fluorescent-lit grocery stores, with tomatoes available all year long, are lined with lies.

One day, while you are selecting your produce for the week, you spot a beautiful wooden bowl. You check the price, then finish your shopping while debating whether to invest in it. Yes, you decide, this is your wooden bowl. When you return to the vendor's booth, it's been sold.

You discover your favorite flavors: sharp green apples, creamy kabocha squash, bright citrus.

You move again.

You find an organic farm tucked in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains and there you discover Troutback lettuce. At home, you pile the leaping lettuces in your glass bowl, chop some asparagus stalks, thinly slice French radishes, drizzle it all with olive oil and sea salt, and as you sit down for lunch you realize how far you've come.

You are grateful.

You begin to read gardening books, and while you don't understand a tenth of it, you like the world they describe. You decide that someday you will stay somewhere long enough to have a real, in-the-earth garden.

Your eyes continue to search for a just-right wooden bowl at estate sales, garage sales.

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You move again, this time to northern Minnesota at the beginning of the coldest winter in 30 years. You discover sprouting, and those little green shoots of hope in a jar get you through the loneliest, most isolated winter of your life.

This move is different. It's harder. It stretches you so thin you become brittle. Your marriage is strained. You are empty. You don't know what to do.

You keep trying.

In the spring, you visit more art fairs and heft dozens of wooden bowls in your hands. This one tries to bite your fingers. That one wants to fly away. Another feels like so many splinters in your hands.

You make more salads and continue your search for a soft, quiet, forgiving wooden bowl.

You sit in the summer sunshine with your husband and you both apologize and forgive each other for a million little injuries. You both decide to better nurture your marriage.

You keep trying.

Seven years have passed since you first started searching for a wooden bowl. Your insulin resistance is healed.

One day, you and your young daughter are at an art fair on the shore of Lake Superior, and you notice a booth with six large bowls resting on black cloth. They are breathtaking.

You step into the booth, into the heady scent of fresh-cut wood. You can tell that this is the woodworker's art, not just a job. You ask him: What kind of wood is this? Where did the wood come from? Why do you make bowls?

You tell him that you and your husband just celebrated 15 years of marriage. You tell him that you need an object to

mark the occasion. You need a wooden bowl to anchor your family—not to a geographical place, because that is always changing, but to each other. He listens.

There are three bowls you decide to try.

The first bowl is out of your price range, so you press your palm to it, and return it to the shelf.

The second bowl is too large for your family.

The third bowl is made from a walnut tree. Like you, it is both dark and light. You heft it in your hands and the bowl hums. You slip off your clogs, pressing your bare feet to the earth. As you cradle the bowl, the circle of your arms begins to glow in the same way that the interior of a lighted beeswax candle does.

You close your eyes and envision salads, wild with color, spilling over its brim. You hear the laughter and the poetry and the conversation shared over that bowl over years of mealtimes. You see the faces of your children and your husband and your friends gathered around the rim.

As you hold the bowl, you think about roots: the kind that help your beloved lettuces and vegetables grow, the kind that connect a person to a place, the kind that bind people to each other.

With your eyes still closed, you say a prayer that you can get all these different kinds of roots to weave together.

When you open your eyes, you turn to the woodworker and nod. Yes, please. 🌿

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