PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: A HARD AND FAST (AND FAMISHED) FILM

November 26, 2024

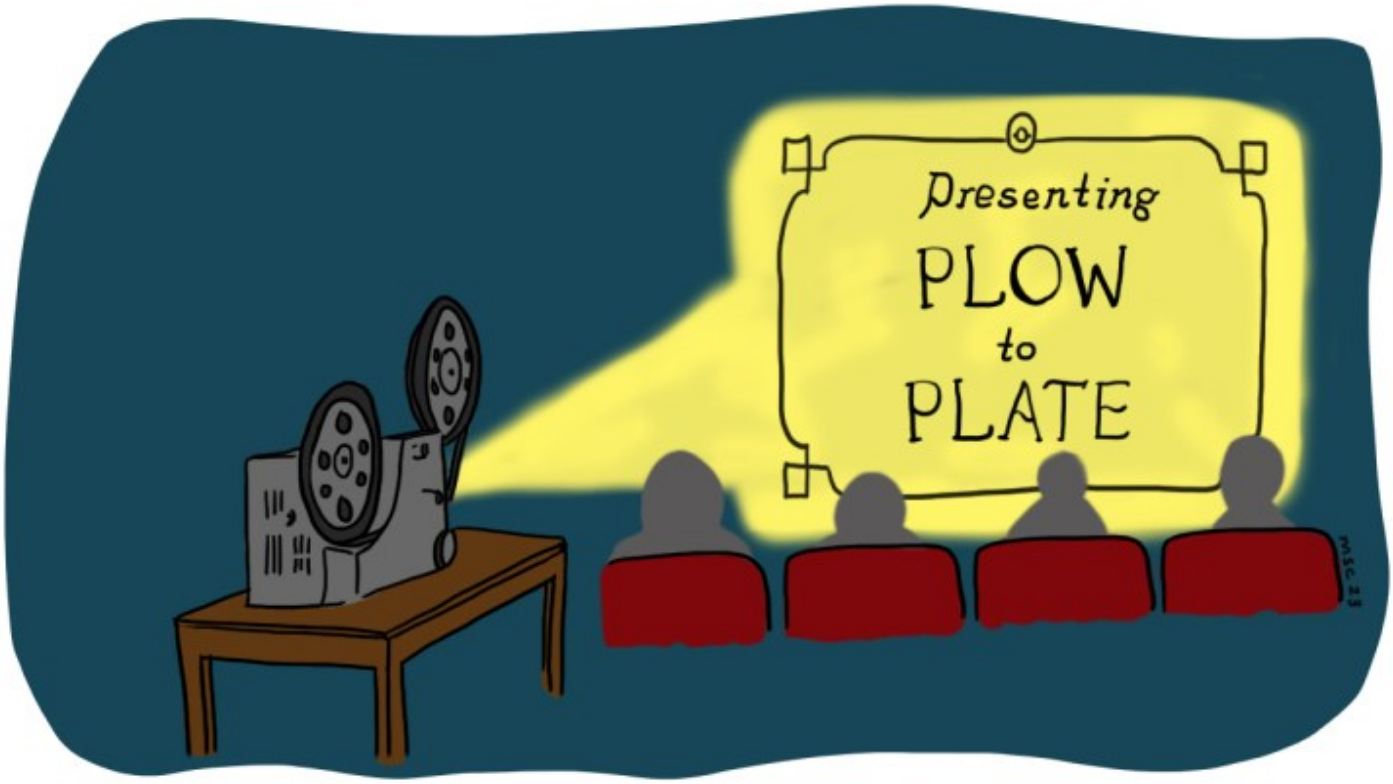


Illustration by Maggie Carson

By Adam Rabiner

November 26, 2024

Plow to Plate has spilled plenty of ink explaining how processed foods have contributed to unprecedented levels of global obesity and related diseases. We've also presented views on alternative healthier diets, whether they be protein- or plant-based. *Fasting: The Healer Within* takes a different tack. The film, which was co-directed by Sinclair Fischer-Gray, Saxon Fischer-Gray, Tyler Tolman and Lindsay Guerrero, is about the absence of food, and what it does to the body and mind over time.

These effects are seen in Sinclair and his younger brother, Saxon, as they embark on an incredibly ambitious 20-day water fast followed by a 20-day fruit-juice fast. Sinclair's primary motivation is to heal his body from a ruptured disk sustained playing rugby. The injury left him with chronic knee, neck, back, and leg pain. Saxon is a

healthy 26-year-old who comes along for moral support.

Before the two Australian brothers embark on their adventure, the film sets the stage with a cast of characters who explain the benefits of fasting, give the brothers advice and discuss their blood chemistry. We meet Joe Cross, a fellow Aussie, who healed himself through fasting and made the 2011 documentary *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*. Dr. Alan Goldhammer, who runs a fasting clinic in Santa Rosa, California, explains how fasting is an ancient physical and spiritual healing practice. The most important and influential talking head is the person who introduced Saxon to fasting: his mentor Tyler Tolman, who runs a retreat in Bali, Indonesia. Tyler best articulates the multi-faceted aspects of fasting, discussing its religious overtones and themes of purification, holiness and communing with oneself and nature. He also digs into the physical and scientific sides of the equation. Tolman believes that just about any disease can be healed through fasting.

Fasting: The Healer Within balances the technical and biological with the spiritual. The brothers who anchor the film are also game to flush out the toxins from their bowels using colonic machines, as well as shed their childhood traumas and other repressed emotions through a technique called “rebirthing.” Biochemical processes like autophagy, autolysis and ketosis share time in the film with discussions of energy flows and other naturopathic concepts.

It is no wonder that Saxon and Sinclair use every conceivable practice or ritual to help them through their fasts. By day six, living in a trailer in the shadow of Mount Warning in New South Wales, they are already tired, hungry, uncomfortable and bored. They are boosted by a sign on the wall that reads, “You’re Supported & Loved” and occasional phone calls with their mom. Saxon misses the warmth and love of taco night with his family and writes an affirmation in his journal: “The harder the day, the deeper the detox.” Both are already struggling, weak, sad, lonely, craving food, experiencing stomach aches and at wit’s end while trying to remain positive. A good attitude proves difficult to maintain when there is no food to serve as a distraction, and little to hide behind as old insecurities creep to the surface and tell them that they

are not good enough to pull this off.

Watching this up-close portrait of the brothers' shared hardship reminded me of the History Channel's show *Alone*, in which survivalists vie to be the last man or woman standing in a harsh natural environment—with no food and a handful of tools. Saxon and Sinclair do not face down a severe winter or a menacing grizzly bear but they experience the same mental anguish and physical transformations (each one loses 26.5 pounds in twenty days). I wish we saw more of the day-by-day vlogging during the fast.

On day 21, after the water fast, you have never seen two people relish and appreciate a giant glass of watermelon juice more than these two brothers. Finally, the film moves on to the denouement which covers the proper way to conclude a serious fast. It's shown during a family reunion in Bali with Tyler and their parents and siblings, and two post-fast follow-ups—one eight months later, and a final conversation between the brothers three and a half years afterwards.

Despite the discomfort and difficulty, they agreed that the experience under Mt. Warning was life-changing and provided great memories. The pair learned about their minds and bodies and the art and science of fasting. More importantly, they discovered that genuine healing is an ongoing everyday endeavor.

Fasting: The Healer Within, Tuesday, December 10th, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link: https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child, Ana.