LOVE LETTER FROM A MERMAID: ON PLASTICS AND YOUR HEALTH

April 30, 2024



Member Submission by Lois Wilcken

Dear Coop Members,

Allow me to introduce myself. I go by many names: Atargatis, Ba, Liban, Little Mermaid, Lorelei, Mami Wata, Orehu, Seirēn. I bear many attributes: seduction, wealth, vanity, irresistible music. The reason for this diversity lies in the nature of my dwelling, the sea that girds our planet Earth. All nations know me. They love me, but they also use me as a receptacle for their waste, especially plastics. Words of caution: What goes around comes around. Just as plastics harm the marine life I see day by day, so they harm you and your family.

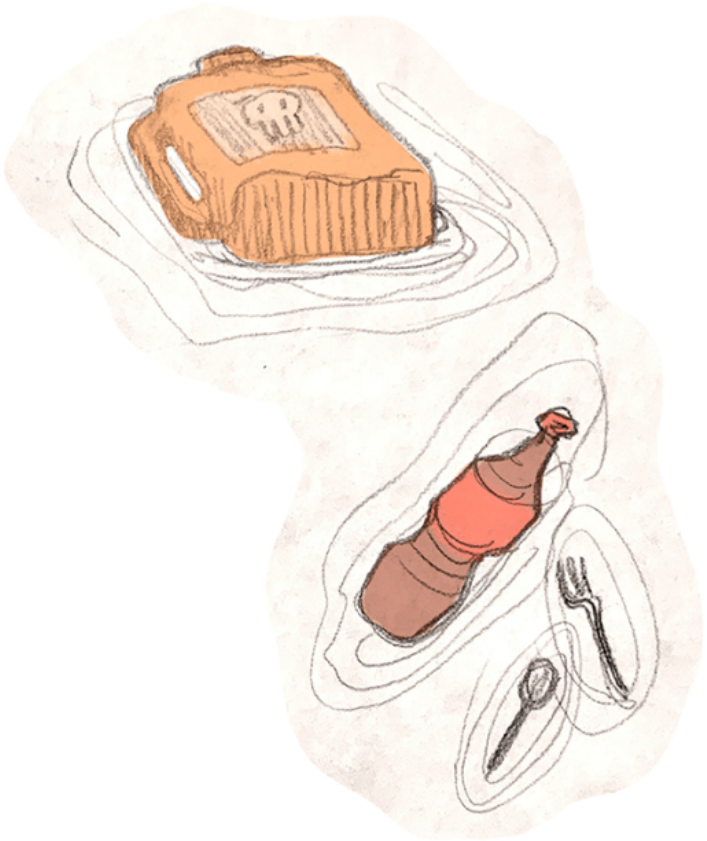


ILLUSTRATION BY KAITLYN QUACH

Life did not evolve with plastics. In planet-Earth time, the existence of plastics barely fills the blink of an eye. Scientists call it a novel entity, synthetically created from fossil carbons little more than a century ago. Pliable chains of large molecules called polymers form the foundations of plastics and host additional chemicals capable of imparting such properties as color, texture, durability, water resistance and more. Today's plastics bear 13,000 chemical additives; science associates about 2,300 of these with health impacts including cancer, birth defects and diminished cognitive function. Your vulnerability depends on your engagement in the basic phases of plastic's life cycle: production, use and disposal. Workers and people in communities close to production sites suffer most from the first phase, and disposal sites like myself (the sea) suffer most from the last. Everyone suffers from the second phase.


ILLUSTRATION BY KAITLYN QUACH

You might imagine that plastics are fixed in form, but they actually change over the course of their lifetime. If you could eat the kind of mushroom Alice ate in Wonderland, you might shrink to a size where you could witness the degradation of plastic. First, you would see macroplastics, fragments splintered off over time from the deceptively coherent original. With an additional mushroom or two, particles of microplastics and nanoplastics (MNPs, less than ten-millionths of a meter) would appear. We know MNPs best for their explosive population growth in aquatic ecosystems like my own; plastic polymers and their chemical additives have invaded every corner of the sea. Migration, you might say, occurs at the end of plastic's life cycle—in the disposal phase. It happens, however, during the use phase as well, mostly in your plastic packaging and storage.

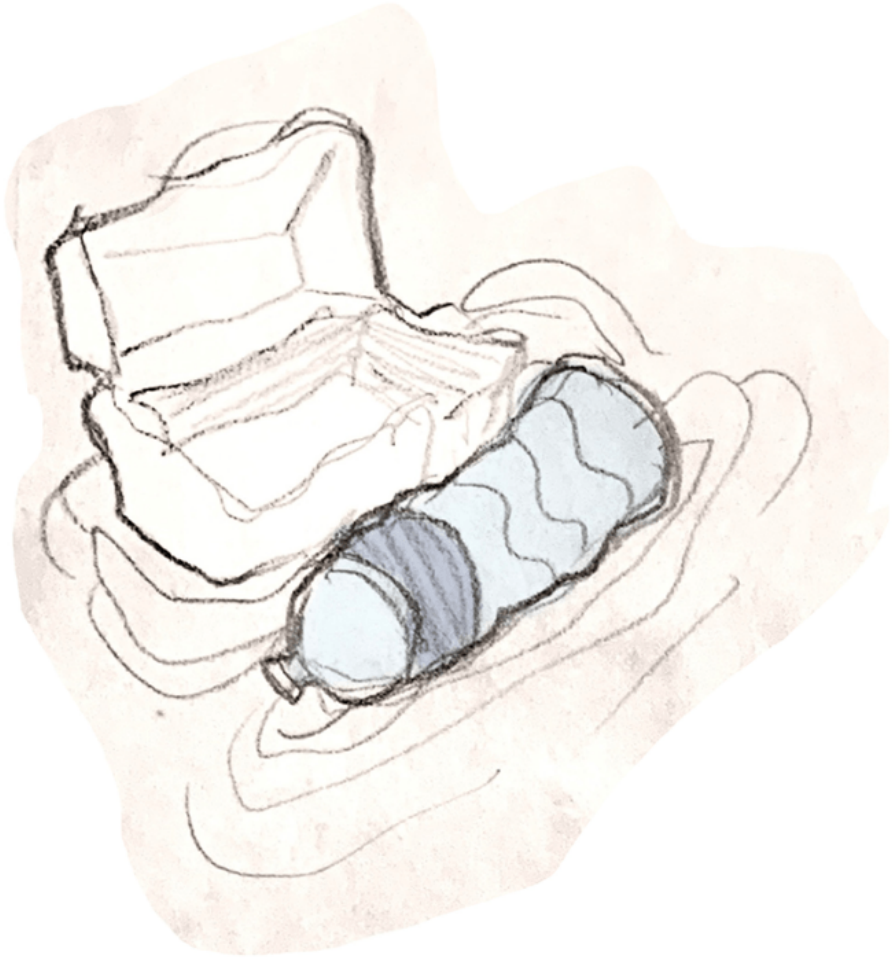


ILLUSTRATION BY KAITLYN QUACH

A peer-reviewed study published in *Environmental Science and Technology* in 2023

confirms the migration of MNPs during use. The scientists conducting the study measured MNP release from plastic containers and reusable food pouches under three scenarios: storage at room temperature, refrigerated storage and heating by microwave. By far, three minutes of microwave heating caused the highest release of MNPs (temperature factor), while refrigeration and room-temperature storage over six months came in a close second (time factor). The reusable food pouch released more particles than the plastic containers (physical properties factor). The Food Packaging Forum, based in Zurich, identifies surface-to-food ratio as an additional factor influencing extent of migration, identifying single-serving packages as most likely to contaminate food.

What exactly is the risk here? What happens when MNPs migrate from food into your bodies? The research is young, but evidence of health hazards due to the ingestion of MNPs is mounting. Fragmented plastics accumulate in tissues and cells, causing inflammation and oxidative stress, but they also act as vehicles for their toxic chemical additives. In its work toward a Global Plastics Treaty the Minderoo–Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health in 2023 named decreased fertility, premature births, neurodevelopmental disorders, cardiovascular disease, and renal disease as just a few hazards humans face. (Download the report here and see Figure 4.1 on page 71.) Tragically, infants in the womb and young children are at highest risk. The sensitivity of early development increases the odds of such conditions as low birth weight, impaired lung growth and childhood cancer. Some conditions manifesting in adults can have their roots in fetal and early childhood exposure.

Is waiting for yet more definitive research worth the risks? Should policy, on the other hand, follow a precautionary approach, placing the burden of proof that the product is safe on those companies profiting from the manufacture of plastics? What can you do meanwhile? Can you think of precautions that your Coop can take as the science moves forward? Although I live in the sea, I do encircle the planet, and I hear just about everything. Some of you have ideas about alternative (non-plastic) bags for produce and bulk; others would like to see the larger bins replace small packages in the bulk aisle as a reduction of surface-to-food ratio. I’ve heard one member talk about a

special section—with lots of visibility—for items that do not come in plastic packaging. I feel certain you, too, have ideas. A little sea bird tells me that you may get involved by contacting plasticfreefoodcoop@gmail.com.

With love from the sea,
Your Mermaid



ILLUSTRATION BY KAITLYN QUACH

Artwork by Kaitlyn Quach

Kaitlyn Quach is a cartoonist and activist who works part-time in food service. They love long walks, grape hyacinths and slightly scary-looking mermaids. It is now impossible for them to get lost inside the NY State Capitol/LOB because they've been lobbying for climate legislation so many times.

You can find Kaitlyn on Instagram @the.gauntlets

THE HUDSON VALLEY FARM COOP COMMITTEE IS RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

April 30, 2024



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

The Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee is recruiting new members. This is an exciting project and you will be joining a diverse team creating positive change in our food and farming systems. Committee members receive Park Slope Food Coop shift credits for their work. Agricultural business experience is not required to join.

The Hudson Valley Farm Coop (HVFC) is a proposed venture that will acquire, improve and operate 15 farms in the Mid-Hudson Valley for the benefit of its shareholders and the wider community. The start-up budget for this project is $30 million. The Farm

Coop will raise funds through a unique financial mechanism called a Direct Public Offering. The HVFC will provide its members the rare opportunity to own a stake in socially progressive and ecologically regenerative farms. Their investments will help to re-create, sustain, and protect this wonderful corner of our threatened and critical agricultural region.

Our immediate needs are in four broad areas:

• First, we are looking for experienced attorneys, business administration and finance professionals. The tasks at hand include refining the business plan, preparing our financial model and pro forma statements, establishing the cooperative corporation and structuring the direct public offering.

• Second, are professional planners and geographers to round out our design team.

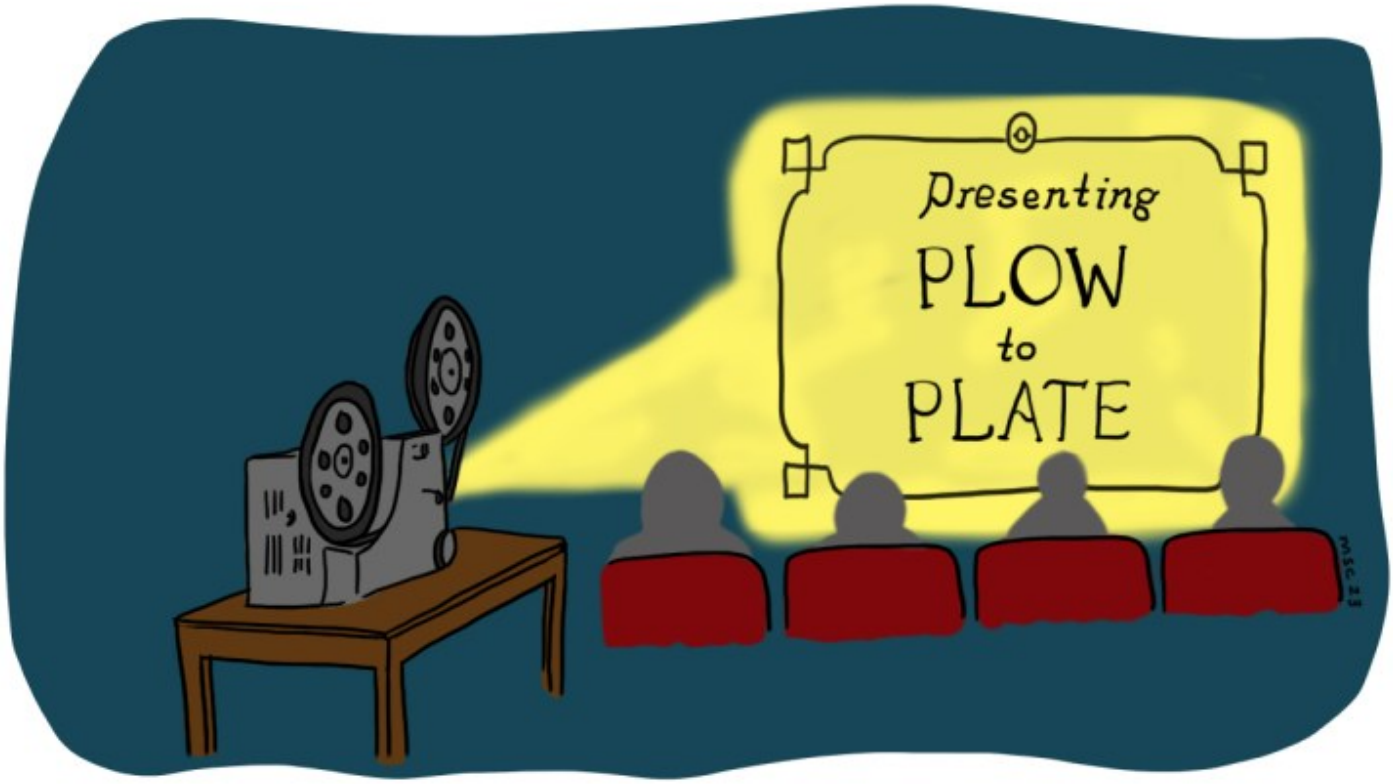
• Third, are seasoned marketing professionals to help sharpen our presentations to attract project cosponsors in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, and eventually individual Farm Coop shareholders.

• Fourth, community organizers to explore the potential for a unionized workforce and to build partnerships with others, including social justice, local agriculture and rural revitalization organizations.

The Park Slope Food Coop voted at the April 2021 General Meeting to become the original sponsor of this new and separate cooperative business. PSFC members interested in joining the committee may contact Jonathan Farber for more information at info@hvfarmcoop.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: THE MAGIC PILL

April 30, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

The 2017 documentary *The Magic Pill* argues that food, not pharmaceuticals, is the best medicine. It is the same case made by many *Plow to Plate* films, most recently Nelson Campbell's two screenings, *From Food to Freedom* and *Plant Pure Nation*. Director Robert Tate employs a tactic similar to Campbell's. He assembles a group of people, mostly his friends and family, suffering from various ailments, and gets them to agree to a 10-week total revamp of their diets. Tate and Campbell also agree that overconsumption of modern-day processed foods destroys human health—indeed, they'd hesitate to call this real food.

But here the similarities end. Nelson subscribes to the strictly plant-based diet espoused by his father, biochemist T. Colin Campbell, in *The China Study*, and agrees with Michael Pollan, whose simple counsel is "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." Tate takes the opposite tact. He argues that humans were hunter-gatherers for 500,000 generations, surviving and thriving mostly on animal prey. By contrast, agri-

culture and the advent of wheat, a primary bugaboo in this film, has only been around for 10,000 years or about half of one percent of the human race's time on Earth. His ideal is the paleo diet, also called the caveman diet or "Atkins on steroids."

Claiming that "what we have been told about nutrition is dangerously wrong," Tate's subjects invert the FDA low-fat high-carbohydrate food pyramid. They empty their pantries of bread, pasta, rice, sugar and bad trans fats (most processed vegetable oils) and fill their fridges with meats and proper fats including olive oil, ghee and even lard. To save money, one family even buys a whole grass-fed cow.

> "WHAT WE HAVE BEEN TOLD ABOUT NUTRITION IS DANGEROUSLY WRONG."
>
> DIRECTOR ROBERT TATE

The Magic Pill doesn't shy away from showing how hard these radical shifts in diet can be, at least at first. Abigail is a young girl in the film with autism whose diet initially consists of chicken fingers, macaroni and cheese, goldfish and apple juice. At first, she and her siblings hate and radically reject the new options, going so far as flinging them on the ground and against the walls. The film suggests that their reactions are comparable to addiction withdrawal—but after about five days, their taste buds adjust and they accept and even like the ketogenic menu.

Another segment focuses on the Yolngu aborigines of Australia whose traditional lifestyles and diet largely ended in the past century. An organization called Hope for Health is teaching the Yolngu that their traditional meat-based diet was good and that the Western diet that they largely adopted from the "dominant culture store" is wrecking their health. A group of Yolngu participate in a two-week program reconnecting them to their old ways of life—taking long walks, stripping trees of bark to use as blankets, as their grandparents taught them, and eating what the land and sea provide.

Along with these stories and testimonials, *The Magic Pill* explains the science behind the ketogenic diet. Ketosis changes metabolism so that instead of using glucose as the go-to fuel, the body taps into ketones—acids produced from fats, not carbohydrates or sugars. There is a segment on the trial and attempted silencing of a maverick South African doctor named Tim Noakes, who was critical of the conventional wisdom touting a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet. Another section of the movie traces the conventional wisdom to Ansel Kees, a physiologist who based his findings on the dangers of saturated fats on a flawed study. For good measure, the film visits Joel Salatin at Polyface Farm, to discuss regenerative farming, grass and carbon capture. You hear his voice before you see his face, and I knew right away who he was by his many appearances as a talking head in myriad documentaries about the alternative food system.

The ketogenic diet and this film have their critics. But the advice to eat real food—animals that swim, fly, prance and burrow—is good. Eat lots of plants. Avoid processed foods, chemicals, bad fats and too much sugar. I'm not ready to give up cherished rice or pasta. All in moderation. If you shop at the Park Slope Food Coop and have read this review, most likely you are on the right track.

The Magic Pill, May 14, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

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@mail.com.

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

FILM NIGHT: THE DEVIL CAME ON HORSEBACK

April 30, 2024

"[Steidle's] work in Darfur lends this absolutely necessary book its compelling immediacy and irrefutable authenticity, as a testament now and for years to come." —*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

THE DEVIL CAME ON HORSEBACK

BEARING WITNESS TO THE GENOCIDE IN DARFUR



BRIAN STEIDLE
and GRETCHEN STEIDLE WALLACE

An extraordinarily powerful and original film, *The Devil Came On Horseback* (2007) exposes the genocide taking place in Darfur, as witnessed by an American observer who has since returned to the U.S. to draw international attention to the ongoing tragedy. Using the exclusive photographs and firsthand testimony of former U.S. Marine Captain Brian Steidle, the documentary takes the viewer on an emotionally charged journey into the heart of Darfur, Sudan, where an Arab-run government is systematically executing a plan to rid the province of its black African citizens. As an official military observer, Steidle had access to parts of the country that no journalist could penetrate. Ultimately frustrated by the inaction of the international community, Steidle resigned and returned to the U.S. to expose the images and stories of lives systematically destroyed. Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern's film allows us to witness Steidle's transformation from soldier to observer to witness and, finally, to passionate activist and moral hero.

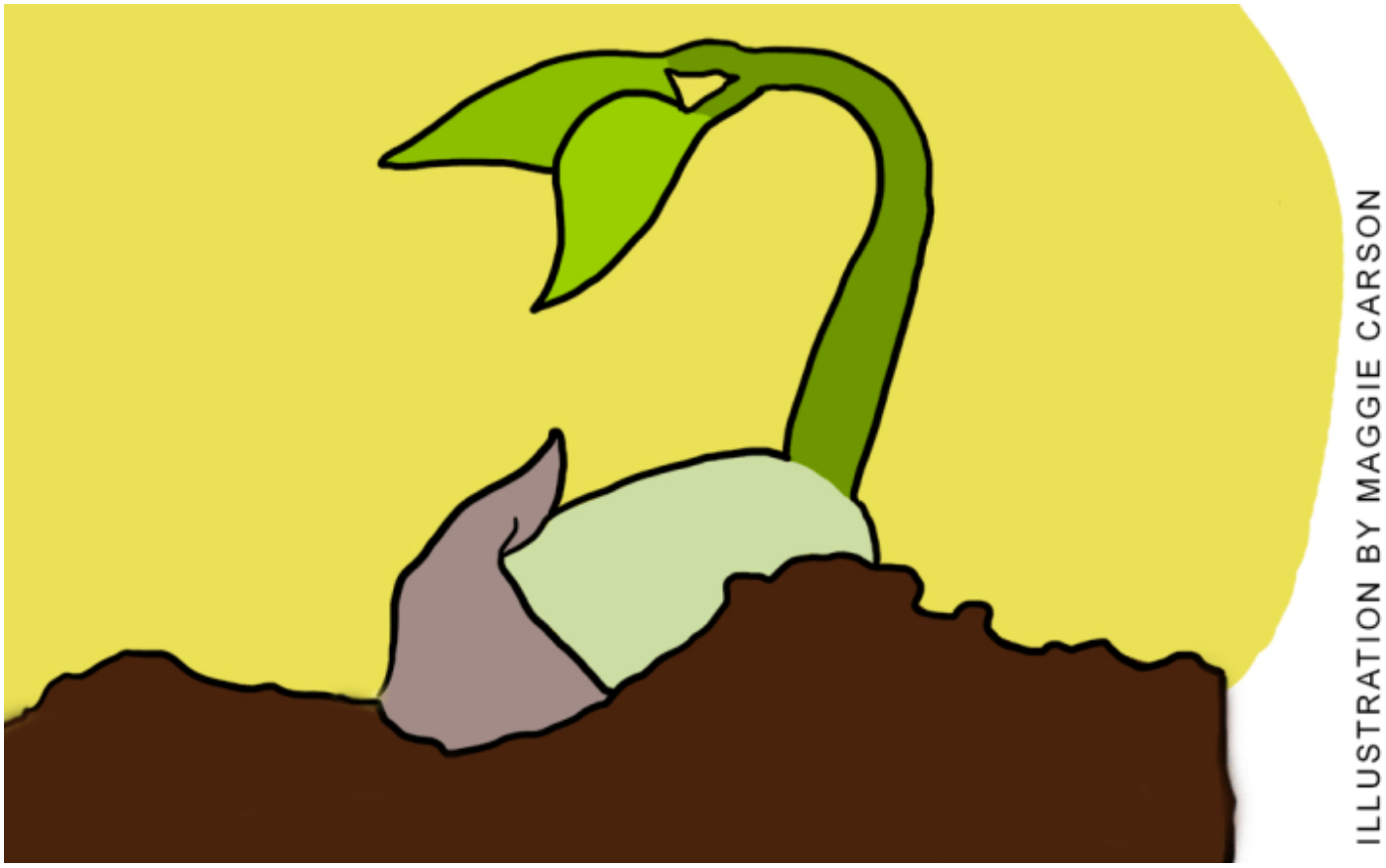
Coop member Jerry Risius is a three-time Emmy-nominated Director/DP, with two nominations as Director, for *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* "Beirut" (2007) and his independent breakout documentary, *Storm Lake (2022)*. He's also been nominated as Cinematographer for *Parts Unknown: Anthony Bourdain* "Lagos" *(2018).* His clients include: PBS (*Independent Lens, POV, NOVA, Frontline*, etc.), HBO, Netflix, Amazon, Showtime, among others. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and dog.

This documentary will be screened on Zoom, using this link https://us02web.-zoom.us/j/86972786016, on Wednesday, May 8 @ 7pm. Jerry will be present for a Q+A after the screening.

To be added to our email listserv for future screening announcements, please send a request to jlymiller@me.com.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE SEEKS NEW MEMBERS

April 30, 2024



The Food Coop's Environmental Committee is seeking to grow! The mission of the committee is to provide education, research and advisement to ensure the Food Coop operates in fidelity to its environmental policy to support "the best products and practices with regard to the health, safety and preservation of humans, animals and the overall biosphere." You can learn more about the Environmental Committee's history and activities here. We seek members with education and professional experience in environmental topics relevant to the Food Coop's operations and impact. If you wish to apply, please fill out this web form.

RECEIVING COORDINATOR MIRIAM EUSEBIO PULLS UP STAKES FOR WEST

COAST PARENTS

April 30, 2024



By Hayley Gorenberg

In the late 1990s, Californian Miriam Eusebio set off to pursue a master's degree in directing at Brooklyn College, and her friend enrolled at New York University in the West Village. "We looked at a map, and put our fingers on the campuses—and in between was Park Slope. So that's where we decided to move," she said. The roommates soon learned of the Coop. "I thought, 'This seems kinda weird and cult-y. Don't know about that!'" Eusebio said. "Plus, I was going to be in grad school, which is designed to be more work than is humanly possible."

A turning point came when Eusebio tried to buy a single zucchini at Key Food. The squashes were packed in plastic-wrapped polystyrene trays, three zucchini to a package. Eusebio inquired about purchasing a single zucchini. An employee disappeared

into the back with the heavily wrapped three-pack, and returned to Eusebio after breaking open the package, discarding the original wrapping, and rewrapping a single zucchini in more plastic and polystyrene. “That was it,” she said. “I had to join the Coop.”



Eusebio has been a receiving coordinator for nearly 25 years.

Even though Eusebio and her roommate were frequently on work alert for missed shifts, and she had to reschedule for a new squad whenever her semester schedule changed, she stayed. “I really found a place that matched my values as a person in the world,” she said.

She earned her graduate degree in directing, but with jobs in theater scarce, Eusebio needed other work. She recalled being encouraged to apply for a part-time receiving coordinator position that seemed flexible enough to accommodate her efforts in “the real off-off-Broadway world, lots of self-produced stuff.” She landed the Coop job in 1999, and even made some connections to fellow members that led to theater work, stints teaching theater arts summer camps, etc. At one point she left her Coop job to do teaching artist work for a few semesters, but she soon came back. “The Coop does

not forget you!” she said.

> “SOMETIMES LEARNING TO BE IN A COOPERATIVE IS LIKE LEARNING TO SHAVE OFF THE CORNERS OF YOUR SQUARE PEG TO FIT IN A ROUND HOLE.”
>
> *MIRIAM EUSEBIO*

Needing more money, she took on more hours. She had started as coordinator for “health and beauty” items, but over time her responsibilities shifted to other disparate categories: stationery, batteries, and super-local Union Street Honey, advertised as “produced by a father-son duo who keep four beehives in Park Slope, Brooklyn.” Eusebio enjoys working with the distributors, recounting how she keeps in touch with the local honey business: “John calls me and says, ‘The bees have made some honey!’ And I say, ‘Send me as much as you can!’ And we get maybe ten cases.”

While she’s enjoyed her work at the Coop, Eusebio feels a pull back to her hometown of Davis, California, where her parents, now in their mid-eighties, could use her help. “It’s a pretty big life change, and I have a lot of sadness about leaving New York and leaving the Coop,” she said. “But I also feel really positive about the next part of my life.” Living with her parents, she plans to focus her outside work on theater. This spring she will direct a play with Acme Theater Company, a youth theater where she participated when she was growing up. The group plans to stage David Ives’ “The Liar,” based on a 17th-century French comedy full of “mistaken identities, running in and out of doors.”



Eusebio uses her theatrical directing skills to teach members how things should be done.

Eusebio applies her directing and teaching chops at the Coop, as a staff member connecting with working members. “It takes a lot of effort to teach 15,000 people something,” she said. “In other relationships you have, you say a thing, and it’s said: ‘This is how you stock the eggs.’” But at the Coop, with members who take shifts for a couple hours every few weeks, “even if someone is experienced, you always teach them how to rotate the yogurt, even if they think they know.” On a standard stocking squad, accumulating the working hours that would correspond to a week of labor in a new, full-time job could take a year, she noted. “You feel like you’ve been [at the Coop] a year, so you know stuff. But you’ve only had the job a week. Sometimes [members] feel like they know stuff, but you still have to teach them without alienating them,” she said. “It’s the nature of the lightly controlled chaos of the Coop.”

> “YOU FEEL LIKE YOU’VE BEEN [AT THE COOP] A YEAR, SO YOU KNOW STUFF. BUT YOU’VE ONLY HAD THE JOB A WEEK… IT’S THE NATURE OF THE LIGHTLY CONTROLLED CHAOS OF THE COOP.”
>
> *MIRIAM EUSEBIO*

Monitoring the Coop floor, she often finds herself “communicating and teaching, saying the same thing over and over again.” She admitted having felt “ticked off” early on at some of the required repetition, and she had to learn to approach members with patience. “I’ve learned to recognize the look in people’s eyes when they actually understand, which, as a director, is useful. I don’t have to wait as long to figure out whether they got it or not. You get a lot of practice.” She described the sequence: “Teach! They do something different. You recognize what you said taught them that thing that they did. You have to switch the way you say it. You get another chance to teach that same thing. Because we’re constantly stocking the shelves.”



Both workers and shoppers need to have a good experience at the Coop.

Further melding her directorial mindset with her Coop approach, she said, “You have to pay attention to the psychological balance of the ‘cast.’ I want everyone to have a good experience at the Coop, whether they’re working or shopping.” She tries to pay attention to how members are feeling about what she asks them to do, telling a member nervous about working the dairy case, ‘Do it as long as you can stand it,’ so that they have an out. It’s not quite a cast, but it sort of is. It’s a little group of people who are working together on a particular project for a particular length of time.”

Among the most memorable events at the Coop was the impromptu marriage ceremony of two coworkers. They were moving out of town, and realized that as a same--sex couple who eschewed certain heteronormative institutions, they nonetheless needed health insurance benefits available through marriage. With their departure clock ticking, another staff member who had secured a Universal Life Church ordination offered to help. An announcement over the PA system summoned staff to the ups-

tairs community room, where the couple exchanged twist-tie rings, “because they hadn’t been planning it, and it was what they had,” Eusebio said. “It was just the most wonderful and moving ceremony. They’re still together and happy.”



Eusebio uses the PA system to thank members at the end of their shift.

The spur-of-the-moment wedding PA announcement may be most memorable for Eusebio, but her own end-of-shift PA announcements have secured special regard. “I like to have an ending point rather than the shift just fizzling off,” she said. She makes a practice of announcing appreciation for the squad. “I thank them for being part of this weird experiment that’s been thriving for 50 years,” she said. “People don’t always understand the nature of what they’re part of. We’re so trained in our whole lives to being in a hierarchical structure. Sometimes learning to be in a cooperative is like learning to shave off the corners of your square peg to fit in a round hole. I emphasize they’re not a customer; they’re part of something. They came, and they’re running the business that they’re part of owning,” she said.

“It’s kind of a little miracle, a place to find community and to stretch your brain about how the world works, and the structures that we live in,” she continued. “We are so interconnected. The Coop shows how much we gain when we depend on each other, and when we’re responsible to each other. The Coop is a place where you can really live that out—not only to members, but to the world, to say, ‘Look at this thing that works!’”

When she’s not writing for the Gazette *or teaching LGBTQ rights, Hayley Gorenberg may be found playing the Brazilian dobra with the Fogo Azul drumline.*