1 A Tale of Egg and Agency

If you control food you control people

On May 24, 2008 on Gabriola Island, one of the small Gulf Islands off the west coast of Canada, Anna Bauer was serving local eggs in the kitchen at the Gabriola Farmers Market. Anna was handed an official notice by the health inspector, informing her she could use only eggs that had been officially graded. She refused.

Anna describes herself as someone who would rather dig ditches than pose for pictures. She doesn't own a television set; her primary mode of transportation is her bike; and she is a member of Gabriolans for Local Food Choices, an advocacy group dedicated to seed saving, supporting local farmers, and other strategies to increase local food sovereignty.

"It's not just about eggs; they are like the canary in the mine shaft," she told the *Sounder*, Gabriola's local weekly newspaper. "We are losing ground in our accessibility to food, as well as our independence and self-sufficiency." Quoting Henry Kissinger, she said, "If you control oil you control nations, if you control food you control people," adding, "This is about control, not health."

The story from Anna's perspective:

> *So when this started it was in my seventh year of doing the Agi Hall [farmers market] kitchen, and until then I had not been bothered by anybody. I would just use local ingredients if I could get them…you know, as much as I could. And then this*

inspector showed up and told me that everything I used had to be bought…from official places, not farm gate, nothing like that, and I thought uh, huh. I said, "That includes eggs?"…Oh, yeah.

So, anyways, I told him that I would not oblige him with that and he could choose to be warned…because I understood that he had a discretionary clause and he didn't have to do everything to the letter. I understood that someone with his job would have that—they don't have to be antagonistic.

He responded…in an extreme way, and he said as long as he had that job there was no way that he could ignore that, because of the health risks. So then I said, "You must know that the health risks are worse on the other side," but he couldn't go there. He urged me to respect the regulations, and I said no way—he chose the wrong person to do that battle. He wasn't going to get any concession from me. I just wanted to be clear about that—I didn't want to lie about it.

It's almost possible to feel sympathy for the inspector; he had certainly chosen to challenge someone who was up to the challenge. Anna knew a lot about the difference between the eggs laid by local chickens and those which, while inspected, mostly likely came from factory farms. She saw a clear connection between the regulations on egg grading and larger, systemic issues, and she was sure she had the right to say no. So she did.

Because of that I couldn't get a permit, which was used against me. Without the permit to run the kitchen, which I'd never needed before, all of a sudden I had to pay a fee of $120 to get the permit. But I could only get the permit if everything came from official sources—it circled. So I chose to operate without the permit. I told the Agi board and they accepted me and they said, "Do it, do whatever."

Anna used local self-governance, in the form of the local community group that ran the farmers market, to resist the inspector's use of permits as an enforcement tool. Because the Agriculture Hall Board (Agi Board) supported her rationale for using

local uninspected free-range eggs, they were willing to stand up against the government's security measures.

Gabriola is a small island, and the story spread rapidly. When the health inspector arrived at the farmers market with a letter aimed at shutting Anna down, some fellow islanders showed up in the kitchen in support of Anna.

> *I think in the end there were seven people there. And so he told me—he ordered me—to shut down the operation. So I said, "Okay, I won't oblige. What's the next step?" So he told me the next step was a warning, and there were four stages with the final one being, you know, not the police but the equivalent, a few heavy-handed men would come…and I said, "Okay, I'll go with that because that will be really good PR,"…and I said, "I don't mind."*

Anna exercised her free will, and having others around her provided support for that position. In the health inspector's mind Anna was a subject of the government and he, as a representative of that government, was there to ensure she complied with the public good, as determined by the government. By exercising her internal authority, backed by friends supporting her position, she was challenging the health inspector's story about who the defender of the public good was.

> *So, then he got really upset and shoved me. And at that point Jenny said, "Take your hands off her—that is assault". But he was also heavy handed with Signe who was taking pictures of that—and he pushed her too—so he had completely lost it.*

The health inspector's response indicates his anger, frustration, and bewilderment at not being acknowledged and respected as the official authority on public health—an authority to be feared, since from his perspective he wielded the power to close the business. His story was based on a belief in the "rightness" of the regulations that he was enforcing. He knew his job. The government's aim was to prevent salmonella, and according to his story he was representing *the* public health solution. Anna's story was different. Anna and the seven people gathered in the kitchen in

support of her stance did not believe that his actions promoted better public health; they recognized Anna as the authority in this interaction, not the health inspector.

The dynamic between Anna and the health inspector expanded to a challenge from the island community to the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) regarding best practices in public health:

> *There was a petition—a lot of people signed. A potluck was organized because during that time we also discovered that public potlucks were illegal. You cannot just invite the public—you have to have a food safety plan and all that. So we did that as a protest. And it was very well attended.*

Over 300 people signed the petition, and 150 people protested the egg and potluck regulations.

The challenge became a news item that quickly spread from local to national media:

> *Someone had called [the editor of the local paper] so she came, but she came after all that had happened and made the news. And then it just kind of went from one thing to another—it made national news without me doing anything.*
>
> *Some of the people I had as regular customers were connected to CBC [Canadian public radio and television], especially one—he and his wife came every single Saturday. Shelagh Rogers [a nationally known CBC host] also came occasionally, and Shelagh's husband was also a regular. So, if it wasn't for them I don't think it would have gone viral…so, it was just one of the lucky coincidences I think.*

Anna Bauer was invited onto the CBC and featured in news media across Canada; all critiqued the government's policy. Apparently, her beliefs about food safety are echoed by many others across Canada. Two years after Anna refused to comply with the health inspector's demands, the health authority changed its policy, and uninspected farm fresh eggs can now be sold in restaurants and

grocery stores. Local food advocates held celebrations throughout the region!

When the health inspector handed Anna that official notice, she was at the receiving end of a well-intentioned government objective. In the case of the uninspected eggs, the government's aim was to reduce the incidence of salmonella contamination, a goal that is hard to argue with. The approaches used to reduce salmonella include regulations requiring official inspection and the grading of all eggs sold to the public, enforcement in the form of health inspectors and fines to ensure implementation of the regulations, and the language to provide the official rationale used for public consumption.

The truth at the heart of the government's story is the dangers of salmonella, and the government's duty to safeguard public health. But this truth is not complete, and the story doesn't cover all circumstances. The government's rationale for the problem of salmonella is based on records of food contaminated by food handlers and problems with ungraded eggs. It doesn't include the research that found five times more incidences of salmonella in battery egg operations relative to organic farms or the study that found that reducing the use of antimicrobials in poultry reduced the incidence of salmonella. The regulations are designed to address the problem the official story tells us about but nothing else.

When the mainstream media cover issues like this, voices representing corporate interest (such as the BC Egg Marketing Board) rather than public interest often find their way into the stories. The following quote is from the *Nanaimo Daily News* (February 17, 2009):

> ***When is Produce Safe to Buy?***
> *Restaurants and grocery stores can now sell ungraded, farm-fresh eggs after a policy change by the Vancouver Island Health Authority, but businesses that choose to do so could be putting the public at undue risk, warns the B.C. Egg Marketing Board.*

The change to health authority policy highlights the potential for questioning the status quo and shifting policy, even in the face of strong government and corporate interests. Anna's support from the island community, the media's interest in a farmers market story in the middle of summer, and the resulting outpouring of public opinion across the country redefined the story-telling space. It was no longer the action of a single health inspector against a single food services vendor; the space was expanded to include a broader discussion and opportunities to learn different stories about food safety and its definition. Repealing the rule that prevented Anna from selling uninspected eggs at a local farmers market is part of a broader shift towards different stories about food and public health.

Anna gives us plenty to consider as we start on the pathway towards hope, and the desire to co-create a compassionate world. In the next three chapters, we will let Anna's story shine a light on how each of us can become part of that co-creation.

2 Transformation

The moment one begins to be unable, any longer,
to think things as one usually thinks them,
transformation becomes simultaneously very urgent,
very difficult, and altogether possible.

—Michel Foucault, 1982

Personal transformation is the starting point for societal transformation, and it occurs when our stories about ourselves and the world change. How does this happen? Anna provides us with some insights. We must want to live a life of integrity, be ready to hear different stories, and be open to learning from these stories. From these factors transformational learning arises. Dots are connected. And we move into alignment with our values, holding a new understanding of ourselves and the world.

Integrity

Integrity means being whole or undivided—when our actions and words are consistent with our core values and beliefs, we live a life of integrity. Anna epitomizes the word *integrity*. She could not fathom serving eggs that were not produced in a way that was consistent with her values. The diagram depicts a circle with a 'V' (for values) and

a corresponding 'A' (for actions). Integrity arises when Values and Actions are aligned, as depicted in the whole circle.

The desire to create actions that correspond to our values is central to the idea of transformation. To live lives of integrity we must be aware of our own values—actions cannot deliberately be consistent with values that are not really understood. What is evident in the egg story is that Anna is very clear on her values, and her clarity allows her to follow a definitive course of action.

The practice of integrity leads naturally to the practice of self-reflection, since integrity requires an honest and critical look at personal values and assumptions. If we want to live a life of integrity, our values and actions need to be aligned. Our inner voice will let us know when they misalign.

Shifting stories

Transformation is not a tinkering at the edges but rather a complete change to a different mode of thinking and being. How does this happen? We think of it as a radical shift in perspective—a sometimes sudden realization that the things we thought we believed no longer really represent our understanding. We think of this as a shift of stories.

As human beings, we build our world through our stories. In his book *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Jonathan Gottschall expresses this powerfully:

> *Only humans tell stories. Story sets us apart. For humans, story is like gravity: a field of force that surrounds us and influences all of our movements. But, like gravity, story is so omnipresent that we are hardly aware of how it shapes our lives.*

We live in a society that, like all societies, tells powerful stories about how the world should be and how we should be in the world. Transformation requires us to become aware of those stories, see them for what they are, and replace them with other tales of how both we and the world can be. The reassessment of societal stories, and the process of seeing and understanding a different story that is based on mindfulness and integrity, is

similar to the experience of always seeing the candlestick in the diagram and then suddenly seeing the faces (or visa versa).

Anna's experience is a clear example of two different stories in the same space: one, Anna's experience of the superiority of farm fresh eggs, and the other, that the official version of inspected eggs equals healthy population. Anna was able to clearly see both stories due to her values and her desire to live with integrity.

Although we are writing about radical personal transformation, this process of reassessment does not mean throwing everything out without reflection and just starting all over. After all, the things we saw originally are usually still there, and as much as we may change our minds and way of living, we are still the same people. Instead it means being first aware of, and then reflective about, the stories we hear, attempting to understand where they come from, what they attempt to explain, and who that explanation benefits.

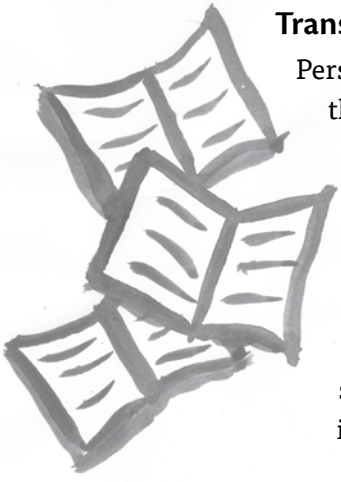
Who benefits from the egg regulations? The regulations around the grading of eggs were created to respond to the issues faced by large factory chicken farms, not by backyard free-ranging chickens. The British Columbia Egg Marketing Board (BCEMB) represents the interests of its members, registered egg producers averaging 17,000 chickens per farm. In 1967, the BCEMB was given the mandate to "promote, control, and regulate the production, transportation, packing, storage, and marketing of all eggs in British Columbia, including the prohibition of all or part of these activities." It created the egg inspection regulation in response to salmonella found in factory eggs, and that's the story that collided with Anna's insistence on serving locally raised eggs.

The requirement for all eggs to be inspected works for the large factory chicken farms but makes no sense for eggs from small local farms. The cost is prohibitive to take a few eggs in to an inspection facility and then back home again. The acknowledgement that eggs from pasture-fed chickens are healthier than

those being inspected doesn't enter into the official story, and thus it doesn't enter into the regulations either.

The reflective reassessment process may call on us to dig deep into history, gradually coming to see the roots of a story for what it is, as demonstrated in the history behind the egg regulations. Or it may be that we immediately recognize a story that is blatantly incongruent with our values and reality and is ripe for replacement. Anna's response was immediate due to her clarity about her values and her knowledge about healthy eggs, but others may need to look more deeply to understand the origins of the different stories. Sometimes we may recognize some value within the story and use that portion to build a new story that is not harmful to the Earth or other living creatures.

This may sound like a pleasant activity—quiet storytelling for a winter's afternoon. We see it as much more urgent. We live on a planet that is being reshaped by climate change—climate change that we as people are causing. It is a world where literally millions of people (65 million as of 2016) have become refugees, forced from their homes by myriad political crises and natural disasters. It is a world rife with inequalities of all sorts. It is crucial that we understand when societal stories are leading us closer to disaster and what new stories could lead us on another path.



Transformative space

Transformative spaces

Personal transformation starts with being in a space that offers opportunities for us to hear new stories about ourselves and the world around us. These spaces can be anywhere—in our homes, our communities, our workplaces, or elsewhere in the wider world. They may be spaces we spend time in frequently or spaces that we visit very infrequently or only virtually. The nature of the space is not what is important; what is important is that the space "makes space" for new stories.

The kitchen at the farmers market was a transformative space—it provided space for more than

one story about healthy eggs, and it also provided two stories about authority. Those in the kitchen and those witnessing the discussion had the opportunity to hear all these stories.

We may discover these stories and analyze them in different ways. Sometimes we find them purely through the process of reflection that we've already talked about. Sometimes we encounter them in a different way. We see someone else who has chosen a different path and seems to be acting from an entirely different basis. When that person shares their stories, we may be challenged to think about our own.

These spaces may feel distressing and discordant. We might experience what has been called a "disorienting dilemma"—a feeling that a new story seems to be true yet contradicts a long-cherished personal belief. The spaces may feel wonderful—places where we suddenly feel that we have found somewhere to belong. We may sometimes experience both sensations almost simultaneously. The sensations of dissonance come from a deep understanding that the societal story that we have learned does not fit with our reality or experience. The resonance comes from seeing the possibility of a new story that is integral to our core values.

We can easily envision one of the seven people in that farmer's kitchen experiencing both a disorienting dilemma, as they discovered that the public health system isn't always the protector of our health, and a resonance with Anna's values and her willingness to stand up for her beliefs.

Some of the stories in this book will identify that kind of sudden dilemma and its aftermath. Other storytellers we listened to found, in the slow accumulation of information and experiences, a growing realization of the dissonance between societal stories and their own core values and beliefs. Many mentioned key moments of resonance in which they felt at one with the Earth and recognized the need for a different way of being in the world, for the Earth's sake as well as their own.

Transformative spaces are important, but they are not enough. The deconstruction and reconstruction of societal stories happens only when we as listeners are ready to become aware of

different stories. That readiness involves openness, a desire for integrity, and a kind of personal courage. We see three components to this courage: willingness to let go of what will be lost if a story is abandoned, willingness to allow multiple realities, and willingness to truly hear stories from multiple perspectives. It's really an iterative process. We cultivate our courage through reflection on our values and through a longing for integrity in all areas of our lives. At the same time, reflection on our values gives us the courage to make changes.

We hold on to stories because they give us something—a direct benefit, protection from fear—or one of a dozen other reasons. The benefit can be an image of ourselves that we want to hold on to, a competing value, or a pleasure that we don't want to give up. As an example, think about food. Organic and local products can often be more expensive than mass-produced food. If we are holding on to a "get the best deal" story drummed into us as children, we continue buying the mass-produced food or the factory-farmed egg, even though we suspect a difference in health and environmental results. When we open ourselves up to hearing different stories, we must understand any resistance we have to that story in light of what we might lose. Our analytical mind works hand in hand with our values to support actions that stem from those values rather than old stories.

Every moment holds multiple realities. Picture a park with some people picnicking and others kicking a ball. A raccoon skitters through the trees, and a bird lands on a branch nearby the picnickers. Each of the people—the bird, the raccoon, those playing ball, and the trees themselves—experience a different reality of that same moment. Once we recognize the multiple realities, then it becomes easier to hear and understand stories that are different from our own, and different from those societal stories we thought were universal. This recognition is the starting point for compassion.

What were the different realities at the farmers market? The health inspector, Anna, Signe, Jenny, the customers, and the newspaper editor all experienced Anna's free will event dif-

ferently. All their stories are relevant when understanding how change happens.

If we spend time with only like-minded people, we are not likely to hear stories that are unfamiliar. If we don't have a chance to hear the myriad stories that are told about our world, it doesn't matter that we're willing to listen to them. The world is full of activities and of people who have very different perspectives from our own—no matter what our own perspectives may be. Seeking out difference and exercising curiosity will give us a chance to hear the many, many stories the world has to tell us and to learn that our stories, too, are just stories. If you are reading this book then you are already interested in making change happen. Engage with those who don't want the same change that you do. What stories do they believe and why? Meeting others where they are gives you the chance to see their practices, reflect on their relevance for your own life, and think about how their stories can inform yours.

Free will: engaging our capacity to act

Free Will

The idea that our every action is predetermined, or that our choices are entirely controlled by global forces beyond our control, are themselves stories. In the previous section, we talked about the willingness to change. Our will—our acknowledgement that we do have choices—is central to this. We have a choice about whether or not we want to live the way societal stories tell us to or live in a way that feels integral to our values and the new stories that we are constructing. We have depicted the concept of free will with a sign post showing that we have many different choices for the way we live our life.

Anna is a shining example of living life according to one's values and choosing to live by the stories she believed. This choice starts with believing we have a right to question the assumptions that underlie all of the stories we hear. Is capitalism the only type of economy? Why do we need countries? Why does a large house

symbolize success? When we question the assumptions behind these ideas, we open ourselves to new stories.

We also have the right, through our free will, to question laws and regulations that feel contrary to our values. Again, Anna provides us with a great example of questioning laws and regulations. Recognition of our free will sets us free to acknowledge that, while governments may believe they have ultimate authority over us, they don't. Anna proved that we can challenge government and overturn unjust policies. Governments have laws, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms to make us follow those laws. But we have the choice of standing up for what we believe.

Another aspect of free will is recognizing how much choice we have in our everyday life to live life according to our beliefs, our values, our own transformed societal stories. The majority of actions and behaviors don't involve any form of government. We can grow food in our garden (backyard or community plot); we can swap clothes with others or buy them at a thrift store; and we can ride our bikes, walk, or take the bus rather than driving. Our free will allows us to make our own lifestyle choices—and our ability to recognize multiple stories helps us understand and smile at criticisms of our unusual choices. At the same time, our choices can make it more possible for others we know to make new choices. By sharing our stories with the world—whether explicitly or just through our daily actions—we are adding to the collection of stories that others experience.

Experiencing a transformative shift in a societal story is not one single incident but rather a lifelong process. The first time you are consciously aware of a shift is the start of many more shifts. The awareness that the world is not as you assumed, and that the role you play in the world is also not what you assumed, opens your mind and heart to hearing and feeling other stories. Learning about these new stories occurs in many ways—through compassion, through critical reflection, and through mindful practice. These ways of learning/being are intertwined and complementary.

We will talk about these ways of learning in Chapter 3.