

Michigan in the Raw – The Living Foods Scene

By Petula Brown

Photography by Cristo L. Bowers

It's the summer of 2008. I'm trying to make sense of the implosion of society as I see it. Gas at \$4+ per gallon, with winter heating bills coming just around the corner, cries out for some manageable resolution. Food scares (meat, tomatoes, hot peppers) have turned eating into a game of Russian roulette. Yet, if you consider the widening girth of many American waistlines and scope of chronic illnesses, it seems food contamination is just the icing atop a cake called the American diet whose nutritional soundness is, at best, questionable and, at worst, lethal. All these dynamics reinforce my notion that my exploration of local raw food options may be a path toward salvation...or at least a speed bump that slows my descent into financial and medical oblivion.

However, when a friend introduced me to raw food in the late 1990's, I wasn't looking for a savior from economic and gastronomic turmoil. It was a novel approach toward relating to food. Before gracing your palette, the meals didn't come through a take-out window or do time in a microwave. While observing a raw food preparation class, I noticed that nothing was chemically processed, pre-packaged, fried, smothered, broiled or baked. At my first raw food buffet, I realized that all the foods had ties to the Earth – literally. Every ingredient was a vegetable, fruit or nut. I figured that raw food cuisine was extreme vegetarianism that allowed young non-conformists or old hippies to rebel against society in the safety of their kitchens. I appreciated my friend's commitment to raw food living. I admired how it seemed to liberate her from dependence on traditional health services as well as most chronic conditions. So when I wasn't traveling for work and dining on hefty, gourmet, expense-account meals, I tried some of her homemade creations and attended a couple buffets, courtesy of the Creative Health Institute (see Spring 2004 Crazy Wisdom Community Journal article "Healthy Eating, Healthy Living – The Living Foods Way"). When she left Michigan in 2000, so did my interest in pursuing raw food dining options.

Fast forward to winter 2007-2008. Now a 30-something

mother of a pre-schooler and a caregiver for elderly parents on the East Coast, I'm more attuned to the relationship between daily choices and long-term wellness. Looking to stave off aging, chronic ailments and genetic predispositions, raw food is back on my radar. Hoping for a shorter commute than Creative Health Institute's Eaton Rapids location, I stumbled upon Detroit Evolution Laboratory (<http://detroitrevolution.com/>) on the Web. Intrigued by their Web site's unique melding of informational content about raw food, and a holistic perspective on mind and body issues and distinctive stylistic touches, I decided to attend a cooking class in their home, a loft one block from Eastern Market. The Saturday afternoon "Spring Raw Goddess Revival!" began not in the kitchen, but in a sitting room where several women from across Michigan (from as far away as Lansing) listened to co-owner Gregg Newsom discuss his transition from vegan to raw foods, the inspiration behind leaving corporate life to create Detroit Evolution (Mr. Newsom teaches yoga and facilitates meditation sessions) and how Detroit Evolution aims to contribute to broader greening initiatives within Detroit. In the background, co-owner Angela Kasmala put finishing touches on food prep activities in a kitchen that was about 25% smaller than my kitchen, but everyone had sitting room around an island that was surrounded by colorful fruits, hearty vegetables and aromatic herbs. Observing how Ms. Kasmala skillfully prepared and combined the foodstuffs into healthful and tasty drinks, salads, breads and desserts, without ovens and stovetops, was impressive. Combined with wide ranging discussions that covered everything from ingredient sources and sprouting strategies to raw food fasting plans and enema techniques, I realized that beyond cooking tips, the class' broader goal was to help others attain healthful and sustainable lifestyles; the cooking techniques are one element of a larger equation. Such a multifaceted approach is intentional. Ms. Kasmala comments, "Conscious eating includes processes beyond knowing calorie counts and nutritional information. It includes knowing where food comes from, how it's made and how it impacts the broader environment." Ms. Kasmala, who studied at Creative Health Institute before creating the Laboratory, credits raw food as her salvation after battling bulimia for over ten years. "Raw food" says Ms. Kasmala "helps release chemical and emotional addictions to food." Though very passionate about raw food, Detroit Evolution emphasizes using a combination of approaches based on individual needs. The Laboratory does not ascribe to any particular style of raw food diet, but considers its holistic perspective most similar to the philosophy of Rebbe Gabriel Cousens, M.D., founder of Arizona's Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center. Detroit Evolution "is about tuning into your body, not about the food," according to Ms Kasmala. So the Laboratory's non-food activities (meditation sessions, yoga classes) nicely complement their raw food education efforts to provide a comprehensive wellness program. While Detroit Evolution's whole person approach to wellness was impressive, I was intrigued to learn about other

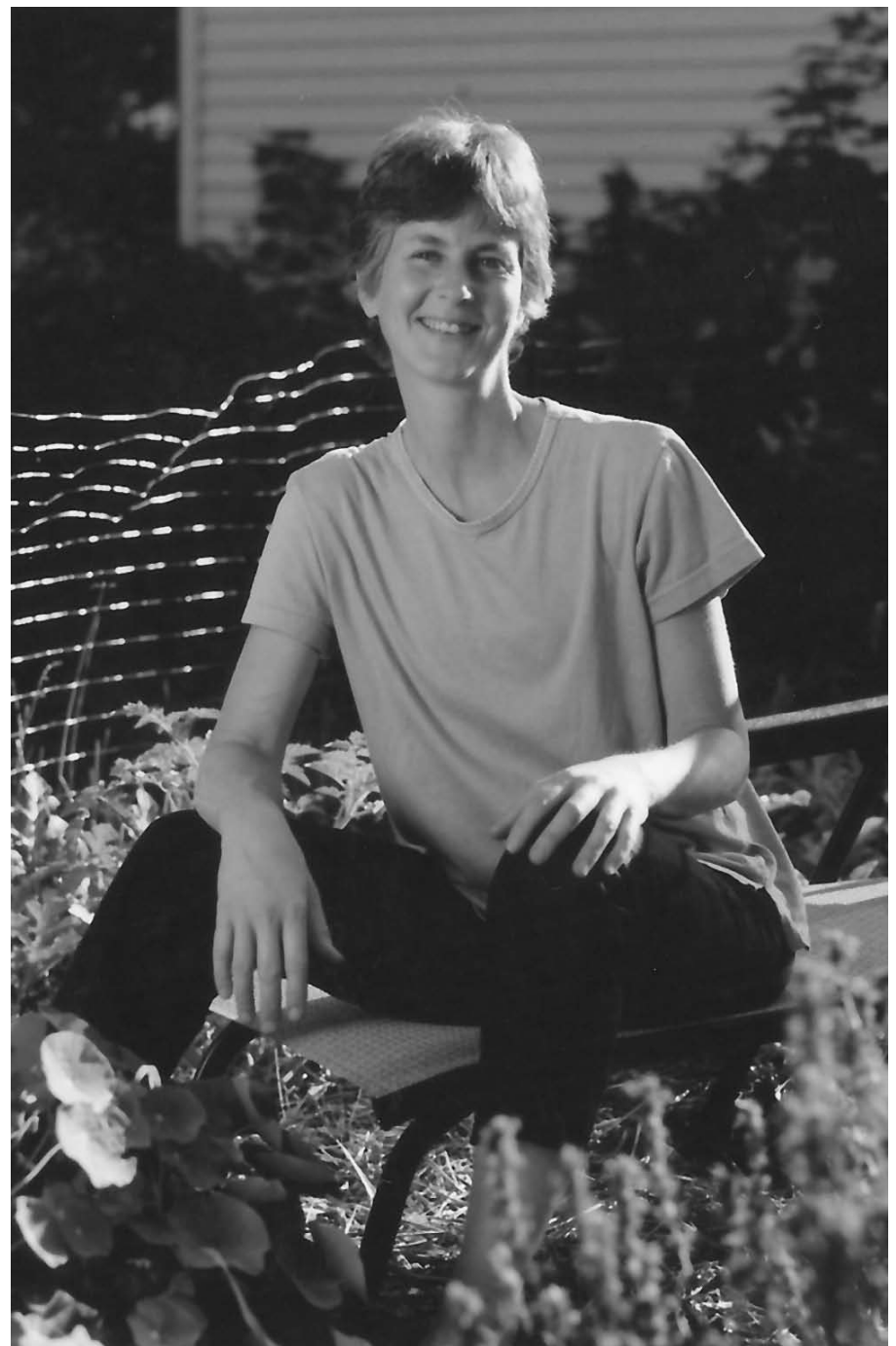


Photo by Cristo L. Bowers Imagist

Ellen Livingston

approaches to raw food education available locally. On Ann Arbor's West Side resides the headquarters of Living Yoga (<http://www.livingyoganow.com/>), the brainchild of Ellen Livingston. A certified yoga instructor who grew up in Ann Arbor and attended UM, Ellen has studied and followed a raw food diet for over 6 years, and explores raw food education for overall wellness. "We're teaching Natural Hygiene, the science of health according to natural laws. This includes our optimal biological diet as well as rest, sleep, sunshine, exercise, positive relationships and other spokes of the wheel of health," comments Ms. Livingston. "Our optimal diet is high-fruit (low fat) with greens, and may include some nuts and seeds." According to Ms. Livingston, "Some current popular 'living foods'

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low-fruit diets are difficult to sustain because vegetables are low in calories, resulting in fat cravings because the body is not receiving enough calories." To compensate, an unhealthy "50-80% of the typical raw food diet's calories are fat via over-eating of oils, nuts, avocados and other high fat foods. Adoption of a frugivorous diet emphasizing fruits and shoots (greens) can address this imbalance." Ms. Livingston's approach draws inspiration from Dr. Douglas N. Graham, a chiropractor and athlete who developed the "The 80-10-10 Diet". The method has at least 80% of total calories coming from simple carbohydrates via fruit and greens, and at most 10% from fat and 10% from protein.

Upcoming Events

Detroit Evolution Laboratory

Please visit Web site
<http://detroitrevolution.com/>
for the latest details.

Michael Dwyer

Introductory Class (free) – 7-8 PM,
Sept. 23 at the Crazy Wisdom Bookstore in Ann Arbor through Ann Arbor's People Food Co-op. Contact the Co-op to sign up by phone (734) 994-4589

Educational Session (\$35) – 7-8:30 PM, Oct. 8 at Whole Foods in Ann Arbor through Ann Arbor Community Education and Recreation. Contact them to sign up by phone 734-994-2300 x53203 or register online at <http://www.aareced.com/>

Ellen Livingston

Free Raw Potlucks - Third Sundays
from 1-3 pm: Sept. 21, Oct. 19,
Nov. 16, and Dec. 21

Arbor Farms Talks (\$10) - Third
Thursdays from 7-8:30 pm: Sept. 18,
Oct. 16, Nov. 20 and Dec. 18

Living Vibrantly Level 18-Week Course
– Starts September 27 (more details
available at <http://www.livingyoganow.com/>

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Gregg Newsom and Angela Kasmala of Detroit Evolution Laboratory

Michael Dwyer

for nearly anyone to get educated about raw foods. Mr. Dwyer comments, "Raw food is about more than just the food. It impacts the physical facet of well being, but also five other facets: spiritual, vocational, mental, psychological and social." Through classes that are typically a couple hours within his home or local retail sites, Mr. Dwyer explores numerous topics. The introductory class provides foundation information, while other workshops highlight food preparation tips in specific genres (cheeses, desserts, etc.) or examine food options that address health concerns (blood pressure, etc.). For persons interested in deepening their raw food knowledge, Michael also offers chef, instructor and teacher certification classes generally over weekends. Not interested in certification, but looking for an opportunity to spend an extended amount of time learning and practicing raw food principles with minimal distractions? Mr. Dwyer's fall retreats (www.2008retreat.rawdwyer.com) allow for focused study. Using a combination of hands-on workshops, lectures and other wellness-focused activities (massage, yoga, etc.), the retreats provide learners with a chance to integrate information into a holistic practice that can be continued back home.

An emphasis on maintenance can be found beyond Mr. Dwyer's in-person events via online media. Course attendees can register to receive periodic e-newsletters. They highlight upcoming classes, but also distribute information about upcoming raw food potlucks and area eateries with raw food options. The email blasts also give Michael a means to share details about recipes, sources for materials (locally grown foods, used juicers, etc.) and any other information that may be of interest to raw foodies. To help fellow raw foodists within the area connect and interact, Mr. Dwyer established the Southeastern Michigan Raw Food Meetup Group (www.rawfood.meetup.com).

"We use fruits instead of grains. Fruits are the highest quality carbohydrate source," states Ms. Livingston. Given the approach's stark contrast to the high fat, meat-focused or grain-based and refined food options that are the mainstays of most diets, it's understandable why Ms. Livingston introduces the concept in eight-week courses. Attending the fourth session of a recent course, I was surprised to see class begin with a review of a homework assignment. Students were expected to try a new fruit during the previous week and share their perspectives on the experience. Discussions expanded to include sharing of the triumphs and

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challenges from the past week that focused less on raw foods, but on efforts to make sound choices in the face of various obstacles and how to conquer those issues. Students also kept a food journal to chronicle their eating experiences. Listening to the dialogues, I realized that they were not extraneous filler for a cooking class, but an essential component to help promote lifestyle change. The discussions not only helped spread the word regarding local resources that could support raw food choices, but also exposed the emotional and psychological struggles that can be equally problematic when attempting a major life modification. By shedding light on those issues, the dialogues helped students become aware of how those struggles can impact their efforts and ways to manage those issues. After the homework review, the class transitioned to focus more on raw food preparation techniques and ingredients. From Ms. Livingston's extensive home garden, she offered samples of foods that could be cultivated by students or found by traversing Ann Arbor's green spaces. As the discussion broadened to



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explore year-around options for locally grown ingredients, the group assessed the challenges balancing support for local options with the economic attractiveness of mass-market options. Such exchanges reveal that raw food choices attract not only persons striving to improve their personal health, but also those making economic decisions that support the growth of local resources as a means to ensure access to quality food.

Although I greatly appreciated Ms. Livingston's very thorough approach toward raw food education, I did wonder how well I or any busy professional, parent, etc. could follow-through on a multi-week time commitment. With a combination of short classes sprinkled throughout Southeastern Michigan, monthly newsletters that highlight dining options from Muskegon to Toledo and a virtual community where local raw food enthusiasts can gain information and encouragement, Michigan-based instructor Michael Dwyer (www.rawdwyer.com) provides a means

(www.rawdwyer.com/192/) in 2006. Based in Farmington with over 170 members, the group has organized or promoted over 90 events, mostly informal potlucks and Mr. Dwyer's classes. The Web site also facilitates communications between members via message boards and photo posts, so raw food newbies through established practitioners can build a support network.

With a rich combination of classroom, potluck and online venues available to explore raw food options, there's something for nearly anyone looking for information on raw cuisine or interested in furthering their raw food experiences. After broadening my knowledge base, I'm not yet a 100% raw foodist or have begun my sprouting practice. I do make a conscious effort to have one raw item at every meal and seek out raw food eateries when I travel, so I figure I'm on a better path to health and wellness than when I started, which is good enough for me.