

Picking a turkey

If you are vegan or at all squeamish, you may not want to read this post.

There's a turkey farm relatively nearby where you can pick your own turkey and help pluck and prepare it. The birds are well cared for and fairly open range (they're contained enough that they have a lot of space but they can't just wander off) and the people who run the farm are good people. Xander and Katja went last year. I don't remember what I was doing, but I couldn't come. They enjoyed the time there, though she was slightly freaked out by the bird flapping at one point. She has talked about it regularly since then as something that she was interested in and, I think, still processing.

This year I got to come, too. It was somewhat easier because one of us could help with the turkey and the other could be in charge of Katja. Since I hadn't been there before, Xander mostly handled Katja so I could concentrate on the turkey.

There were four other people there by the time we got started. One was a couple. The woman had been there the year before, just to pick up a turkey, but her boyfriend hadn't been before, either. They decided to stay and watch, though the lady was very worried that she would freak out. There was also a father and son who hadn't decided whether they were just going to pick up a turkey or pluck one. The boy (who was maybe 10 or so) ended up helping with ours.

One of the farmers went into the enclosure and got a turkey. She picked him up by his feet (he knocked her glasses off in the process!) and, once she was holding him, he was completely docile. Didn't flap, didn't object. She came out and handed him to me while she closed the door and put her glasses back on. Katja came around the corner with Xander and was rather surprised to see me with a turkey, which was pretty funny.

We took the turkey over to the processing area. The farmer put the turkey in a metal cone with a hole at the bottom and the turkey's head came through the bottom of the cone. She thanked the turkey for its life and then cut its throat, quickly. The blood was really red, which I should have expected. The farmer explained that all of the turkey parts that we didn't use got left out and the other animals (cats, dog, chickens, etc) cleaned them up. The blood was very nitrogen rich so it helped the soil when it was absorbed.

The turkey flapped a little bit in the cone but stopped quickly. There was a very large vat of very hot water a few feet away, so once the final twitches had stopped we put the turkey in the hot water to loosen up the feathers. One of the other farmers also turned it over and got the feet into the water for a while to loosen up the scales. I helped move the turkey from the hot water to the cool water bath. I ended up getting soaked down my right side, but that's why we wore clothes that weren't delicate.

Pulling the feathers out was interesting. The big feathers were pretty hard to get out. The smaller ones just had to be pulled the right direction. Katja helped for a while, but eventually got bored with it. Xander helped a lot with the feathers, too. We finished faster than I expected.

We moved the turkey to a table with a metal top and I pulled the rest of the feathers out with pliers while Xander and the young boy worked on pulling the scales off the feet. Apparently many people are somewhat disturbed by the idea of using the feet in stock because they've been in the dirt and grime, but they don't understand that the scales are removed before the feet are cooked. The toenails also crack and come off; the quick looks like a fully formed claw, just soft. We also worked on loosening the crop so it could be easily removed later; this is where some of the food is stored. Katja was quite involved in helping with this part, holding back the skin and asking questions about everything. She wanted to know

what was in the turkey's mouth so I opened the beak and she got to see the tongue. She was a little surprised that it was pointed.

Once we had all of the feathers and scales off, the turkey was hung over a bucket and we removed the internal organs. These will be used for stock. I accidentally punctured the intestines, so it got a little messy, but I got the useful parts out and they were rinsed, first in water, then in a little vinegar just to make sure nothing was left. I peeled the lining off of the gizzard (it was almost rubbery, but since it has to contain pebbles to help with digestion, that makes sense; I just hadn't thought about it before) and put it in with the rest of the organ meat. We then rinsed the turkey, chopped off the head and feet, singed the carcass to deal with the pinfeathers, and then bagged the body and the organs separately.

I was surprised that it didn't bother me at all. The lady who watched but was very worried about it said that she had a new respect for her food and understood more now than she had. Once she got over the initial unhappiness about watching something die, she was actually okay with the process. Katja didn't have any issues with it. We feel that it's very important that she knows where her food comes from. A turkey isn't just a big round thing on the shelf in a grocery store. It was a living creature that went through a long process before it came to our table.

I know that a lot of people will not agree with this particular parenting decision, especially since Katja is only four years old. On the other hand, by doing it now we are avoiding making it into a huge deal. I have a few friends who grew up on farms and saw animals slaughtered from when they were very young. Life and death are intertwined and, for them, they understood that. One of them became a vegetarian until she could grow her own food and make sure that the animals were well cared for. I can understand and respect that. I'd

like Katja to understand what she's eating. I don't want it to be a shock or a terrifying thing when she figures it out at nine or ten. She knows now that she's eating animals. If she decides at some point that she's uncomfortable with that, it will be a well-informed decision.

We don't eat much meat. What we do eat, almost exclusively, is free range, well cared for, and we've met the people who take care of the animals. It's something of a luxury, but one of the reasons we don't eat much meat is so we can be careful about the meat we do eat.

It was an interesting experience and we will definitely be back next year. It is, to me, a good thing to do. Also, the turkey tastes amazing!

Not just an ally

Several years ago, an acquaintance of mine asked if I'd bought my car used.

"No, I bought it new. Why?"

"Well, there's a rainbow on the back and I wasn't sure you knew what it meant."

I started laughing. I couldn't help it. I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area; I'm not sure I could have ignored the meaning of the rainbow symbol if I tried. There was more that needed to be said, though, once I caught my breath.

"I'm not straight. The rainbow is on my car because I support people who are LGBT, but also because I'm bisexual."

"You are? But...but...you're just dating a guy!"

I managed to keep from laughing that time.

“Well, bisexual doesn’t mean that I’m always dating more than one person. It’s a common misconception and it is really irritating. I tend towards monogamy. It’s less complicated. If I’m single, though, it could go either way. I lean a little more towards men, but I had a serious relationship with a woman, too.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re bisexual. You can’t do monogamy.”

For some reason, that acquaintance didn’t blossom into a friendship.

I have had various people tell me that I’m just confused, that I can’t be bisexual, that I must be interested in sleeping with anything that moves, and that at some point I’ll grow up and realize who I really am. The most provoking part of this is that I’ve gotten it from both the straight and queer communities. I don’t feel much like I fit in either place because both groups want me to just settle down and decide. I don’t fit into their boxes.

At this point in my life, I mostly don’t make a big deal out of it. I’m married to a man. I’m happy with him. I’ve never cheated on him and I won’t; I love what we have together and I wouldn’t jeopardize it for the world. When I’m in a relationship I don’t look outside it for completion. I work, as he does, to make our life together as good as it can be. From what most people can see, I’m a straight woman. They don’t look farther than that because, chances are, that’s all I am.

I’m not just straight, though. I loved a woman. It was a good relationship in many ways, too. It’s over now, but that

doesn't make it meaningless.

I haven't had many relationships in my life. I am pretty comfortable with that. I do know, however, that if I were single again (which I don't want to be – I love my life!) that it really could go either way. I guess that's what makes people uncomfortable. I'm not as predictable as I seem to be. I'm a stable, reasonable person in general (well, I think I am, anyway) but if my life changed, they might not be happy with me if I showed up with a date for a dinner party. The other person might not be who they expect.

I don't talk about this much. I'm not embarrassed by it, but it isn't a huge part of my life right now. It is a part of my identity, just as being Daniel's sister is, or being right handed. It's part of me, but I don't see it as a huge revelation. Once in a while I catch people off guard with an offhand comment that I'm not straight because it happens to come up in conversation. I've lost a few friends that way. That's life.

I'm a married bisexual woman in a strong relationship. I exist. I'm not that weird.

I realized I hadn't written about this before. I thought, somehow, it was about time. We're working on raising Katja to know that families are made with love, not with rigid guidelines. She already knows people who are not in straight relationships and she will grow up being comfortable with that. It shouldn't matter very much. In some areas it doesn't. Just because I ended up with a man does not mean that the LGBT community is no longer important to me. I'm still part of it. I'm just not very visible at the moment.

So, yes, in case you didn't know before, I'm bisexual. Doesn't actually change anything, does it?

Reframing Life

I've been doing some things differently recently. Running is one, and I love that I ran three miles on Sunday without stopping. I just kept going and it kept feeling good. My pace was reasonable and I was happy with my time, so it's going well.

Another thing I'm working on is reframing how I think about things. On weekends I am often catching up on housework and spending time with Katja, and the overlap between those two things has caused me some problems. When I'm playing with her I feel like I ought to be doing other things and when I'm, for instance, doing laundry, I often feel like I should really be paying more attention to Katja. This constant pull on my attention is frustrating and I often end the weekend feeling tired and stressed out.

I thought a lot about how I want to be able to enjoy the time I have, whatever I'm doing. I don't mind doing laundry, but I don't like feeling as if I should be doing something else. All of last weekend when I caught myself feeling bad for not doing something else, I thought, "Is there anything else I should be doing that's more important than what I'm doing right now?" The answer was always no, and I could let go of feeling like I ought to be doing something else. By the end of the weekend, almost all of the normal things had gotten done. All the necessary things were done, at least, though the sheets, while clean, were not folded and put away. I ended the weekend feeling happy and relaxed, and if unfolded sheets are the price, I can live with that. They'll get folded at some point during the week and we don't need them to be folded right now.

It's hard for me to put things into perspective. Making sure

everything runs smoothly in our busy household is sometimes challenging and I have been letting myself get caught up in the minutiae. I get stressed when things are left undone, but it doesn't help anything. I have lists of what should be done, but the world won't end if one doesn't get done immediately. I need to enjoy what I am doing while I am doing it, and the only limitation to that enjoyment is what goes on in my head.

Reframing everything seems to be helping. I like spending time with Katja. She's a neat little person and she's learning and growing so much that it's fascinating watching her develop personality and curiosity. I also enjoy running, and she loves spending time with Xander while I do. Running is good for me physically, mentally, and emotionally. It gives me a sense of accomplishment, clears my head, puts things in perspective, and is something that I'm doing just for myself, which feels very good on many levels. I like cleaning house, too, strange as that may seem. It's nice seeing something go from chaos to order and I enjoy seeing the results of something I have done.

There are very few things in my life right now that I dislike. That's important. I just have to keep holding that in mind and enjoying life as it comes. I cannot walk away from the work that needs to be done, but the work is not drudgery and there is joy to be found there.

Every time I feel impatient or irritated at where I am and what I'm doing, I think, again, "Is there anything else I should be doing that's more important than what I'm doing right now?" It's quite impressive how often the answer is no. So far it hasn't been yes, and life is much better since I started asking that question.

I think I might be a runner

I started a training program a few months ago and I'm getting rather excited about it. I didn't think I'd make it through when I started, but I have learned that I am enough of a cheapskate that if I put money into something, I will almost definitely use the service. I do not like to waste money. As a result, very soon after I joined [Nicole's 0 to 13.1 training program](#), I also signed up to run a half marathon in June.

This is not something I would have imagined myself doing a year or even six months ago, but Katja has changed my perspective on a few things. I'm 38 this year. I'm not a young mother, to say the least, and people have actually asked if I'm Katja's grandmother a few times. This amuses rather than offends me, but it does bring the point home that I'm older than many women who have a very young child. I could also stand to lose some weight, which I've been rather successful at so far (twenty pounds in six months and working on the next twenty now). I want Katja to have a healthy, happy mother. I want to see her graduate from high school. I want to get to enjoy her company as an adult. That means I need to take care of myself now.

In addition to all of this, I'm a happier person when I'm exercising regularly. Some people in my family have issues with depression. I am lucky enough to be able to control it in two ways: exercise and get enough sleep. For a while right after Katja was born, I wasn't getting either one of those things. I decided it was time to get back on track and do what I wanted with my life, and Nicole's program showed up at exactly the right time.

The program is interesting in a few ways. Nicole built it thinking about people, like herself, who wanted to run despite not being currently active. She also included a trainer who helps answer questions as they come up, and both of them have

been extremely responsive. There is a Facebook group where we can share the highs and lows, which is really nice. I have made a couple of friends there.

It is an online community, which works well for me since I usually run at times that normal people are tucked comfortably into nice, warm beds. Nyx and I have run in cold weather (my limit is ten degrees Fahrenheit, below which I will find a treadmill at a gym), snow, rain, fog, and once in a while really nice weather. Nyx has taken a while to settle into running, especially since my speed is a trot for her. She still sometimes gets distracted by a scent, but she's getting better at not stopping, at least. She is also much better at not responding to other dogs than she used to be. I like having her as my running buddy, though I worry a little about how the longer distances will work for her.

I ran a 5k race a couple of Saturdays ago. To my surprise, I actually enjoyed it. I did walk some, but I'm comfortable with that. My speed was faster than I'd been running in prior weeks. That made me very happy. I didn't come in last, though I did get lapped twice. Most of the people in the race were high school students. I wanted to know what a race would be like and now I know that I can hold my pace despite being passed. I learned a few things, too. I need to bring my own food for the end of the race. They had Quaker chewy granola bars which were much too sweet and made me a little sick to my stomach. They had bananas, too, but they were very green and difficult to peel. The orange slices were a good idea, though.

I think I might end up being somewhat picky.

I have been reading a lot about marathoners and ultra runners, and one of the comments that showed up in a few of them was that they eat real food while they run. I really like this idea. I have a hard time stomaching the gels. I'm sure I could learn how, but pita and hummus sounds like a much better way to go, especially since I know exactly what goes into that

food. There's a mountain biker, Gary Fisher, who eats things like burritos, nuts, and bananas. I will experiment as I run longer distances to see what my stomach can take and what works best for me, but I think that gels are not really my thing.

I have made one other decision since I started this program. I will run a marathon by the time I'm forty. It's a somewhat scary declaration, especially in a public forum, but I'd like to do it and I think it's a good goal.

Running does not come easily to me. I spent much of my life with patellar tendonitis. That has gone away because I've been running in Vibrams, referred to in our house as toesy shoes. I'm not fast, I am probably not graceful, and I sweat a lot. On the other hand, I keep going. I'm on week ten of the program now (I had to take a break and then go back a week due to the gallbladder surgery). I like running most of the time, even when it's cold and nasty out. I come home feeling like I've accomplished something. I also come home in a much better frame of mind, more likely to be cheerful and helpful. Nyx is happier, too, because she gets regular exercise, even if she isn't quite sure if there's a point to running around in circles.

This is good for me. Strangely enough, it is even kind of fun. I ran 1.6 miles this morning, which isn't far, but it's 1.6 miles farther than I would have run had I stayed in bed, so that's something. It was 22 degrees out, too, so I felt just a tiny bit smug about being tough enough to run when it was below freezing. Once I get over my latest cold I should be moving a little faster. Even if I don't, though, even if I stay slow, I'm getting to the point that I can settle into a rhythm and just keep going. That's something I have never been able to do on land before. I could do it while swimming, but this is a first for running. It is starting to feel natural, easy, and comfortable, even on days that aren't good.

Running has never been my thing, but I think I am beginning to think of myself as a runner. That's kind of cool.

[Open Adoption Roundtable #41](#)

There's a website, [Open Adoption Bloggers](#), that has gone a long way towards educating me on open adoption. The Roundtable is a periodic writing prompt designed to get people thinking about adoption. I don't always participate, mostly because we are so new to open adoption, but I thought I would take a stab at this one.

The prompt this time is "Are you approaching openness differently in 2013? What experiences from in the past year influenced you most?"

We're still feeling our way through what, exactly, open adoption means to our family. Katja isn't big enough to provide an opinion about how much contact she wants to have. We live a few hours away from her biological family, so just dropping in is really not an option. We're going to see them this weekend, though, and we are going to make sure we see them at least once a year as long as it is logistically possible for everyone concerned.

A long time ago I wrote a post about little-f family and big-F Family. Little-f family is made up of the family you are born with, the ones you don't choose. Big-F Family is made up of the people you choose, the ones you absolutely know will always support you, and the ones you call first when something happens. Sometimes you are lucky and they overlap. I learned this definition from friends in San Francisco when I was in college. They were two gay men who had little-f family who walked away from them when they needed them most. They had a

huge a loving big-F Family, though, and I was lucky enough to be part of that.

B and E are Katja's family. They are our family, too. I'm not sure if they will end up being Family, since it's hard to get really close to them with the distance involved. We stay in touch through the internet and phones, though. I send pictures, Katja's website has pictures and information, and we are in contact through social media. I don't feel like I need to shove Katja at them, but I want the option to be there. They are good people. We're not likely to end up living really close by just because of what our life is like, but we don't live near other people we are related to, either. They will keep being part of our lives.

What will be different in 2013? I don't know. This year will be busy and full of change. There are several interesting things on the horizon, all of which are tenuous and mostly undefined right now. We'll see B and E soon, though, and we'll get pictures of Katja with them. We'll hopefully get to see them in June, too, when I run my half marathon. We don't see them in the winter because of driving the passes; we don't drive in snow unless we absolutely have to for safety reasons. I think, though, that we will come a little closer to defining what this open adoption means for us, how we will continue to interact, and a little more of what to expect over the next few years.

There isn't a road map for this. Open adoption is created by each group of people, be they family or Family. We're figuring out where we fit in their lives and vice versa, what kinds of contact we will continue to have, and what we want to see. Katja will define this for herself as she gets older. In the meantime, we are responsible for doing what we promised and staying in touch.

How many is enough?

We were asked recently if we wanted to adopt another child. The answer was “No.”

When we first started thinking about children, Xander only ever wanted one. I went back and forth between one and two. I didn't want an only child to be lonely, I was worried about socialization, and I wasn't sure I would be good enough, in some way, to provide everything to make sure an only child had a full and enriching life.

It's not that my childhood with my siblings was wonderful. We fought a lot, in many creative ways, and I wasn't really close with anyone except my youngest brother until I became an adult. Even now there is sometimes some discomfort when I say the wrong thing. It has gotten better, but I haven't ever had the “My sibling is my best friend ever!” kind of relationship, and I am not sure I could raise two children differently enough from how my parents raised us to avoid that kind of rivalry. I'm not sure why I was considering more than one, but there were moments when I felt rather strongly about it.

Since Katja came home, though, I have been almost imperceptibly migrating towards Xander's position. When the question came up again recently, my response was “No.” I was sure that was the right answer.

Katja has a habit of picking up a book, bringing it over to me or Xander, and holding it up. Whoever she hands it to takes the book, sits down, and reads it to her. While we're at home, as long as we aren't in the middle of cooking, we have worked our schedules out so we have time for each other. That matters to me. I like being able to sit down and read anytime she

wants me to. I couldn't do that as easily with a second child in the house. This coming year would be much more challenging if we were to try to adopt again; the process is very time consuming, and I'd like to spend that time with the daughter we have, not chasing some idea that may or may not work out. I don't want to have to focus as much on making sure another family is okay. I drove down to California at least a couple of times a month and sometimes more often than to visit, bring food, and provide transportation. It took a lot of energy. I want to be home with my family now.

Sometimes being a good parent means I have to be selfish. On an airplane, they always say "If you are traveling with a child and the oxygen masks drop, make sure your mask is secure before putting a mask on your child." I have to take care of myself first to make sure that I can take care of Katja to the best of my ability. I've changed my exercise and eating habits since she was born. I'm running more and enjoying it. I'm not eating as much as I used to and we're paying more attention to what we eat because we need to make sure she gets proper nutrition, too. I keep housework on a schedule so we don't get behind, since there is less time to catch up on it.

I feel a little bit like not wanting another child is selfish. I don't want to put forth the time, effort, and emotional energy required to make an adoption work. I don't want to fill out all of the paperwork again. I don't want months of home visits. I don't want to deal with it anymore. We have a wonderful daughter and we are happy. Why mess with that? Maybe Katja would be better off with a sibling. I don't know. She's a remarkably outgoing little person, though. She gets lots of interaction with other people at her daycare and she clearly enjoys her time there. She enjoys her time at home, too, and likes being able to come over for a snuggle or a book whenever she feels like it.

I don't want to change this. Life is good. We're doing well. I'm being selfish, perhaps, but I can live with that. I like

what we have and I love our little family.

No Santa, no Christmas

One of the most common comments we've gotten this year from well-meaning people about Katja is "Oh, this Christmas she'll really be able to enjoy it!"

We don't celebrate Christmas. I'm still learning how to respond to that comment, so I'm quite happy that it will all be over and done with in a few days.

It's not that we won't have a holiday celebration. We'll have a four day long celebration, in fact. One day is the feast day, specifically a goose, which we've been doing for years. One day will be for presents. One is for service, volunteering time and donating what we don't need. One day will be spent making goodies for people we care about. I figure that basically covers all the bases and it de-emphasizes all of the Christmas consumerism that makes me so very angry.

I want Katja to have a winter celebration. As an atheist family, we're not willing to bring religion into the house just because everyone else does it. We decided to create our own and build it around the things we feel are important. She will have a celebration that emphasizes sharing food, making gifts for others, and doing good. Presents are part of it, yes, but not the only thing.

I have heard people talk about the "war on Christmas" and complain that Christians are being persecuted in the US. I have several issues with that statement, but one of the most obvious is holidays. Christmas is a day off for the whole country. If someone has to work on Christmas, they get paid

extra. Christmas trees go up in practically every city and town. Christmas stuff gets sold from the day after Halloween. I tell people we don't celebrate Christmas and I get funny looks. I've even had a few people tell me that we're not being fair to Katja because we're not buying into this celebration that has become all about how much stuff people can get. I know, I know, the celebration is supposed to be about the birth of Christ, about giving and kindness and all that jazz. Look around, though. Do you see a holiday focused on kindness? Do you see people going out of their way to help others, to love their neighbors? Or do you see riots over toys and prizes on Black Friday, people stomping on each other to get to the front of the line? How about the TV commercials written to make you feel guilty if you don't buy the perfect gift? Fear, uncertainty, and doubt are wielded to make you worry about whether your family will love you or be disappointed after they open their gifts.

No, I don't like Christmas. I like what we will be teaching our daughter about what is important. I like that we can create our own little corner that is separate from all of the craziness. I like that our daughter will learn that it's important to give to others, to care about people less fortunate, and to help where we can.

I believe in a lot of things. I believe in people, in kindness, and in hope. I just don't believe in a god, or in Santa, or in some virgin birth. If you have problems with that, I don't mind. You don't get to tell me that I'm doing wrong by my daughter, though. She'll be raised knowing that the important part of the winter holiday is not the part where she gets stuff; that part is minor. It is about family, sharing, love, and helping people. She'll get some neat presents, but that's only one day, and I hope that the full celebration will have more depth than just the "Gimme!" approach that Christmas seems to engender in so many people.