

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

The First-Year Papers (2010 - present)

Trinity Publications (Newspapers, Yearbooks,
Catalogs, etc.)

2018

Salt of the Earth

Dana Parker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Parker, Dana, "Salt of the Earth". *The First-Year Papers (2010 - present)* (2018).

Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers/85>

It was the end of my week in Qatar with my mother, her cousin Peggy, and their uncle Jerry. I had never met Jerry before the trip but he had shown us the entire country in just a few days. This afternoon in particular felt like something out of a wild dream. The dry heat was scorching at 100 degrees as we drove through the endless Qatari desert. We had stopped at a local market to pick up lunch for the day, as we would not be near civilization until after dinner. We bought handmade pita bread, cucumbers, hummus, olives, feta cheese, dates, and lamb jerky to accompany us on our adventure; nothing rich or fancy, just food that we could easily fit into our bags. All of these foods, maybe with the exception of the lamb jerky, I had eaten countless times before without thought. But now when I eat any sort of Mediterranean dish, I cannot help but nostalgically float back to my afternoon in Qatar.

I was exhausted from the constant heat and adventure by the time we reached the salt fields and, quite honestly, was growing bored of the hyper-intellectual conversations between Peggy and Jerry. I had actually elected to return home rather than continue venturing further into the desert toward our next adventure. Luckily, my desires had been overlooked. I stepped out of the car onto the cracked, brown, hard ground. The heat hit me when I slid out of the air conditioning, but without humidity it was bearable. The ground seemed to travel on forever; I felt as if I had reached the end of the earth. Jerry led us to a patch of Earth where the ground had dropped into what looked like the home of a stream; a stream that had once run deep through the clay and hardened its sunken shape, but then dried up to never return. Jerry jumped into the carved-out Earth and pointed to the salt beds that peeked through the holes and divots. The salt gleamed in the sun like crystals and geodes, growing in the place of grass or weeds. Jerry used his hands to dig the salt grains from the earth and sprinkle them on top of his blanket of hummus. The salt crunched like a carrot when he bit into the big grains. The delicate beds of salt could have been easily overlooked had we continued driving on the designated path; I could have missed this experience had I gotten my way and returned home early.

It is the salt, not the warm soft pita, or creamy flavorful hummus, or the crisp cucumber, or the chewy jerky, that is forever ingrained in my mind. We harvested the salt that was poured from the innards of the earth and carried it, along with the adventure, oceans away to our Midwestern home. I never would have thought that something as simple as salt would evoke such a beautiful and complicated appreciation for the world around me. My mother still calls this day a spiritual experience; it was as though the universe had led us to its raw and hidden trove of salt it had been saving just for us.

There is both a peculiar and renowned habit of twenty-first century people to aim for genuine simplicity in the most complex, elaborate, and manufactured ways. We have created it to seem as though it were difficult to return to our roots. The most elemental foundations of human life appear so out of reach when in reality people choose to ignore their own capabilities of cultivating life's most basic experiences. It is true that our relationship with the raw and unaltered world is weakening with every detached, technological endeavor. Everyday lives are tainted with the effects of modernization: we drive man-made cars or take man-made transportation to work, looking out the window at man-made buildings and factories that are producing more man-made products to integrate into the already busy and efficient everyday. We talk on our man-made cell phones and exist in an ever changing, fast paced, technologically

driven world. Authentic human connection dwindles as we replace conversations with man-made applications of social media. We rarely find the opportunity to escape from the city or suburbia and relish in the remains of a once untouched civilization. But the possibility of indulging in our more wild surroundings is not out of reach. Nor does one have to be in the middle of the Qatari desert to experience the uncultivated. The beauty, luxury, and simplicity of more primal experiences can be found hiding within everyday routines. Rather than how or where we experience a touch of the underlying and elemental features of human essence in society, it is the emotional impact that matters most. To carry a remembrance and recognition of our most primitive efforts is both humbling and eye-opening. My afternoon in Qatar left me wondering, how many salt beds had I overlooked before?

Salt beds exist everywhere — they are outside in my backyard where my ten year old brother Fin plays after school; they are in the woods of Holliday Park where I all too often turn down a morning walk with my mother; they exist in the neighborhoods of my native city of Indianapolis that I have never explored; in the shops and restaurants I have mindlessly walked past; and within the people whose faces I have glanced over while in line at the grocery store. It is not often that I stop and simply accept the naturalness that exists in the life I live. I over-complicate plans, rush through important conversations with my parents and grandparents, and run through my daily “to-dos” in order to feel a sense of accomplishment. When I finally slow down and, as my mother says, “take a breath”, I remember that my greatest satisfaction comes from the utter simplicity that I often forget I am missing. I find beauty and blessing in building fairy houses after school with my brother, in long, Sunday morning walks with my mother, in under-discovered, authentic restaurants and street stores in my home town, and in conversations with strangers while in line at the store. The world intertwines endless wisdom and enlightenment if we chose to appreciate the simplest of moments. In acknowledging the smallest gifts that the our minute, everyday, experiences offer, we grant ourselves insight to the power of both ourselves and the space we occupy.

I never could have imagined that wholesome grains of salt would convey the most simplistic cliché: it is truly the little things in life that can make the greatest difference. Living in such a fast paced environment, the appreciation for and the enjoyment of life’s simplest wonders are all too often overlooked. The most influential and transformative experiences do not have to occur on an expensive, extravagant vacation or at a highly anticipated party. Instead, removing yourself from normal routines and opening your eyes to possible hidden beauties spurs self exploration and reflection. Whether or not you are able to carry a tangible reminder with you of a raw, unique, mindful, moment in time, the message gathered from the experience will enhance future endeavors.

We are fortunate to still have tupperware containers filled with Qatari salt grains hiding away in our cabinets in Indiana, which serves as a tangible reminder to look for salt beds wherever I go. Along with the harvested salt that my mother and I transported home, we carried the remembrance that sometimes we are surprised by the smallest, seemingly most insignificant of wonders if we allow ourselves to seep into the cracks of the wild, primal world. While salt is not eaten on its own, it certainly is crucial for the enhancement of flavor; we grind the salt in a mortar and pestle to sprinkle on eggs, roasted vegetables, grilled fish, or even chocolate brownies. Every time I bite into an unground grain of salt I am transported back to my adventure in Qatar where I discovered the salt of the Earth.