

## **Avocados, Potatoes, and Tomatoes**

My name is Hyrum. I was named after the ancient king, Hiram of Tyre, who helped build the mighty temple of Solomon. I, however, am no king. As a young child, I lived a quiet and peaceful life deep in the foothills of California, near the land where James Marshal first discovered gold. I often explored ancient groves divided by narrow streams. I wandered empty trails where once prospectors traveled. Only a few minutes' stroll from my home was an olive orchard. I visited the orchard often. I loved the smell of moss and fallen leaves. I would sit and think for hours on end. Sometimes, I would eat olives. Not from the trees, of course. I would bring olives from home. I savored the salty flavor while watching the sun set over a purple horizon. While I enjoyed olives, there were a few common food items which I would refuse to eat; avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

I was an obstinate child. I claimed that I did not like the taste of these three foods. My parents, however, were not so sure. I was a contrarian, and would often disagree simply for the sake of disagreement. My parents and I contended against each other on all manner of issues. It was a grand struggle. I refused to participate in family activities. I was unkind to my siblings. I would refuse to help around the house. My parents didn't necessarily care about which food I did or didn't eat, but in their mind, the three foods became emblematic of their struggles against their son. They believed that they would be able to help him learn kindness and empathy if they could only convince me to eat avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

My parents employed every manner of device to whittle away at my distaste. They would often secretly cook a meal with one of the three forbidden foods, I would enjoy the meal. The parents would gloat and tell me what I had eaten. I was crafty however, and would then explain to my parents that while I had said I enjoyed dinner, I was just being nice and did not really like

it. My parents and I sparred for years. After time, the flame of hope began to dwindle. They wondered if I would ever grow up. They began to wonder if I would ever be willing to eat avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

Yet, all was not lost. As I began my first year of middle school, my grandfather came to visit. The sun was obscured by gray clouds drizzling warm rain. The smell of clean wet earth drifted in through the door as grandpa walked in. I smiled; everyone hugged and laughed. For a moment, our family's troubles seemed distant. Grandpa sat down and began chatting with the parents. All kids know that grownups can talk for hours and hours without breaking. My siblings and I, lacking endurance, left one by one. However, I did not go far. I was able to hear them talking from the other room. I didn't listen much at first, nothing really interested me. However, before too long, I heard my own name. "Don't worry, he will grow. Soon, he will learn to enjoy avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes."

I was stumped. I had always trusted my grandfather. I spent the whole night wondering about what he said. Grandpa seemed so earnest. I continued resisting every attempt to introduce me to such foods, but it felt different. I often wondered, "Why would grandpa say that?" Weeks later, I sat at school, heart racing. My teacher had just told me that I had won a class competition. I learned that because I read more books during break than any of my classmates, I was invited to a special lunch meeting in the library. The principal was throwing a party for all the students who won the competition. I sat at my desk, waiting for lunchtime. Each minute seemed like an hour. My teacher had given me a sheet of math homework, but I was too jumpy to read it. I watched the clock like a hawk, each minute ticking by. Finally, the bell rang! Excited, I jumped up. I hurried over to the library. I was so excited that for the first time in weeks, I forgot about what my grandfather had said. I forgot all about avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

As I walked in, I was ecstatic. I sat down next to Thomas, a friend from another class. We began chatting. We both were so excited about the chance to win the competition. We talked about which books we read over the summer. We shared favorite moments and gave each other recommendations. As chatter began to die down, the principal got up to speak. He said, “well done kids! We are proud of you all for your hard work. In order to celebrate, we ordered lunch from a restaurant in town for all of you!” The library erupted in a cheer which would have certainly upset the librarian had she been there. Thomas and I high fived! We began theorizing which restaurant they would get food from. As we were talking, two teachers came in, bringing baskets of food. My breath caught in my throat as I saw what they carried. I was handed a plate of corn chips, with a great big scoop of guacamole. At that moment, all my worries about my grandfather came flooding back into my head. My mind filled with thoughts of avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

I was dismayed. I looked around, frantic but trying to hide it. Thomas began eating. I wanted to reject the food, but felt I couldn’t do it so publicly. Everyone around was clearly enjoying it. I thought and thought and thought. Suddenly, I found a solution. I realized that if I were careful, I wouldn’t need to tell my parents about eating the food here. I could keep this a secret. I reached for a chip, bracing myself, scooped up a minuscule bit of guacamole, and put it in my mouth. I chewed quickly, and swallowed before I could even taste it. I paused. “It wasn’t that bad” I thought. I grabbed a second chip, and put it in my mouth. I chewed slowly this time. I grabbed a third. Then a fourth. As I ate, I realized I was enjoying it. The guacamole was salty, smooth, and savory. I took bite after bite, and kept eating. Soon, the teachers were back, this time with tacos. I was given a taco, filled with chicken, cheese, and tomatoes. I was nervous, but boldly grabbed one and took a bite. The crisp tortilla crunched in my mouth. The fresh tomatoes

complemented the warm chicken. I kept eating. As the assembly drew to a close, I began to think. I realized that perhaps I wouldn't need to hide this experience from my parents. As I walked home, I made a resolution, "I will tell mom I want to eat avocados, tomatoes, and potatoes."

Later that day, my mom made mashed potatoes. She was surprised when I heaped a large scoop on my plate. As the family began to eat, my parents watched me closely. They were overjoyed when I told them I loved the taste. That night, I apologized to my parents. I told them "I'm sorry for always arguing with you. I now know that none of these things really mattered." As the days moved by, I worked to amend my actions. I tried my best to be an active participant in our family. I told them I would gladly eat avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.

My family did not live happily ever after. We had many more challenges and struggles. But we became a team. Whenever things got hard, we knew that we could trust each other. I'm all grown up now, and I'm probably still more obstinate than I should be. I suppose that I still have a long way to go, but I'm hopeful that I'll make it. I call my parents every week, we talk, share experiences, we laugh and sometimes cry. It's wonderful to have such a strong relationship with them. Nearly every week my mom shares a new recipe with me. It often includes avocados, potatoes, and tomatoes.