

Windfall

An avocado can stop a bicycle, if it's a big enough avocado.

I found this out climbing up an old, skinny, twisty road through a green, drippy Hawaiian rain forest, me on my bike, my husband behind me on his, and the avocado, suddenly, in the middle of the road—big as three or four avocados put together, with a smooth, neon-green skin.

I got a good eyeful but kept on going, laboring slowly uphill, while Jim asked *what was that?* and we decided it was indeed an avocado and that it needed Jim to go back and get it, although this meant he would have to climb the hill a second time on his camping-gear-laden bike.

The avocado weighed a couple of pounds. It had fallen from a tree and rolled to a stop, unbruised, hard as stone. We carried it around on our bikes with us for a week and a half, checking on it every day, and when it finally ripened we made a grand bowl of guacamole, a simple one with garlic, lime juice, chili pepper, things we were able to pick up along the way and carry with us while we waited on our Big Green Friend. Even mashed, the flesh had a creamy but remarkable density, different from avocados we had known, and its color was another surprise: an extraordinary, lemony, yellow-green.

This was not a rare or even unusual specimen—Hawaii is overflowing with avocado, mango, the ubiquitous papaya, and we came to know them all well. We had a month on the Big Island on our bicycles (I make that sound like a casual boast but it was

a stunning, astonishing trip, a triumph for a non-athlete like myself, a life-changer, a crazy dream), and by the end of it we'd eaten plenty of tropical fruits but we never lost our sense of wonder for that found avocado in the road.

Back home, later, I stood with Jim in our kitchen, trying to identify ours from the 117 different varieties pictured on our "Big Island Avocados" poster. I had seen this poster somewhere in Hawaii and got a copy after we returned. It has long vertical rows of photos of avocados, each fruit shown intact and next to this a second picture of it split open. There are big ones, little ones, round ones, oblong ones, pale ones and dark ones, rough ones and smooth. Kind of like people. Some of the avocados have a large amount of flesh in proportion to the seed; some have an enormous seed and only a slender jacket of flesh around it. In addition to the 117 varieties pictured, there is a list of 72 more. That's 189, all found on the Big Island of Hawaii; the well-known Hass is one of them, tucked at the bottom of the poster's middle row.

The poster offers a graphic representation of years of research by the University of Hawaii's agricultural experiment stations, and is the creation of photographer Ken Love. A note in the corner explains that avocados may have been introduced to Hawaii as early as 1794, with 200 years, and a cornucopia of microclimates, producing all that fantastic diversity.

We couldn't decide which one was ours—was it a Yamagata? A Sharwil? A Malama? It doesn't matter. I like the idea of a mystery avocado. I loved everything about our avocado, the windfall randomness of it, the portaging of it like a baby in a papoose, the magical waiting for it to ripen, which gave a whole new meaning to the term slow food. It's not too much of a stretch to say it fed us long before we ate it, as we

rolled uphill and down, through mango jungles and lava deserts, along coast roads with endless views of bluer-than-blue ocean. The avocado's found-object status made it special—like found art or a found poem, it was a stroke of serendipity, offering itself for our invention. What will you do with me, now that you've found me? What will you make of me? (Answer: guacamole, but more than that too.) Our relationships with loved ones are the ultimate examples of found art—in my case, my relationship with Jim, revealing and reinventing itself every day as our bicycles wheeled along together—and they pose the same questions. What will you do with me, now that you've found me?

The answers are in the avocado. Patience, open-mindedness. Carry me, care for me, see what happens, you will be rewarded. Pick up some garlic and lime while you're waiting. Abide with me, says the avocado.

Jim and I cook in our small kitchen, a long, long way from the beach campsites of Hawaii. Above, behind us, the poster hangs on the wall. If we turn around for a bowl or a spice or a spoon, and happen to glance up, it is there to remind us: there are so many avocados in the world, more than you ever dreamed. Yours is in here somewhere.