

# Epitaph for a peach essay



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David Masumoto in his book entitled “ Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm” chronicles his one year’s worth of efforts to hold on to his family farm. He is after all the fourth generation San Joaquin Valley farmer. It details his quest to save his family’s heritage of growing Sun Crest peaches. It also tells of the ways he employed in an attempt to preserve a way of life. It takes us on a journey where Mas, as he is known to his family and friends, struggle to grow traditional crops by using only organic methods.

It tells us how Mas chose to fight his battle in the competitive world of agribusiness he finds himself in. In Mas’ life, everyday is a battle with insects and the weather. The decision he took is a gamble to preserve the way his family operated their San Joaquin Valley farm. It is a fitting tribute to his family’s age old tradition. This book takes us on a glimpse of the life of a passionate farmer whose lifestyle directly involves a close encounter with the food, the land and the people.

The story invites us to see the world in the eyes of the San Joaquin Valley farmer as he commits himself to keep on producing his tree-ripened peaches for one more year although he knew too well that there is no assurance that he could keep on doing so after that. With every change in season, we bear witness to the planting of cover crops, the pruning, tilling and then harvesting. It talks about the author’s organic approach to orcharding but it must not be dismissed as a primer on fruit growing.

The book, as the orchardist Andrew Mariani puts it, “ within the modest narrative, one may find the universal in the particular, the profound in the ordinary. ” The Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm is a

lyrical narrative that reveals a warm colored wisdom reflecting the simple but rewarding farm life. It captures the beauty in the simplest of things in every day life. The very simplicity of it never fails to touch our hearts and souls in an effortlessly artistic way.

The story begins on the day when Mas decided to stop using herbicides and killed off all the weeds with a tractor, his “ farm looked as if the farmer has died. ” It made his neighbors think that something was going wrong. The story is about a farmer’s quest to save an older and obsolete variety of peach. As each season unfolds, Mas holds on to produce his Sun Crest peaches, the variety that are superbly tasty but aren’t packing and shipping friendly. It was the time when major supermarkets prefer the ones that are shipping and storage friendly.

The variety that is characteristically firm and flavorless as opposed to the tree-ripened peaches Mas produces. He then came to call weeds as “ natural grasses” when he found out that it doesn’t only include harmful pests, there are some that can indeed be beneficial. According to Mas, farmers must learn to know the weeds by name. Not all of them are evil. By learning to identify them, a farmer may be able to determine which ones are harmful and which ones can be helpful. But Mas doesn’t dismiss the fact that not all weeds must be tolerated. He cites for example Johnson grass, which is:

A stubborn root – spreading grass that will out-compete his grape vines and steal their precious water, his grandmother called ‘ abunai kuse,’ a Japanese for dangerous grass. Dangerous because if ignored, it can take over and dominate. So Mas worked hard to eliminate it by digging and cultivating, and

keeping after it. His work would be much easier if he used herbicides, but he won't. His entire farm is certified organic. (qtd. in Homeyer). During fall, farmers tend to ignore their fields after harvest. But in the case of Mas, he keeps himself busy by planting vetch, legumes and green manures in his farm.

By spreading fall leaves over the garden, erosion can be reduced, organic matter can be provided and weeds can be kept down. He does these things because he believes that it wouldn't do good to have a bare ground because "nature doesn't like to be naked." Although the fruit is rarely accorded as elite in the world of "peachdom," the Sun Crest peach is indeed a fine peach, an excellent one at that. The way Mas used word images in a manner as masterful as it is provocative, he was able to express what his Sun Crest peaches represent. In his own words, David "Mas" Matsumoto reveals that:

In trying to save my Sun Crest peaches, I discovered that they are more than just food, they are part of a permanence, a continuity with the past. People who enjoy my peaches understand what juicy, sweet ones taste like. Biting into one may send them back to the orchards of their childhoods and that warm sense of constancy of family found in their memories. Individuals leave for the city, but memories of farms stay behind to anchor personal family histories. My peaches find a home with these folks, a touchstone to their past. (qtd. in Mariani).

Organic farming is indeed more taxing as compared to conventional farming. It demands more labor and economical risks are involved. But it can also pose as a challenge. As Henry Homeyer puts it when he wrote his article

entitled Epitaph for a Peach, commenting on the book by David Matsumoto of the same title, he reminds us that: We need farmers who grow fruits that have real flavor, and who are willing to bet the farm that we'll buy them. Mas doesn't farm just to pay the bills. He wants the next generation of consumers to eat peaches with real flavor.

He wants people to have good memories of eating peaches. Peaches of sweet perfection, peaches so juicy they dribble down your chin. We all struggle to be different while not being an outcast to the rest of the world. We all have something special to offer. Most of the time, we tend not to realize such uniqueness. Yet it is the very thing that sets us apart from all the rest. It is the very thing that makes us who we are. It is not easy to thread the path most people ignored for the one most traveled by. We almost always chose to go with the flow because of the lesser risk it can cost us.

But we have to remember, the ones who dare to keep his beliefs even though everyone else doesn't agree are ultimately rewarded for his efforts. And quite honestly, we can say that they make their lives more worthy. Holding on to the good things you know to be beautiful is always worth it even though it takes time to actually realize it, especially by the ones who couldn't care less. The impact of this book has been felt not just among farmers but also with those who have the appreciation for the natural beauty that Mother Nature has to offer.

After all, it is a story of a farmer and his fruit grown for flavor. It is much like anything else we work hard for even in the midst of non-accordance to the

norm. It inspires us to keep on fighting for what we deem to be true and beautiful, even though the world will prefer the opposite. It is about passion, dedication and endurance especially during the time when it is much easier to just give up. As an orchardist like Matsumoto, Andrew Mariani's words quite captures the very essence of the passion that the author has manifested in the publication of the book as he writes:

It is through his writing that the soul of this farmer clearly emerges. We who grow fruits seem to recognize that what we do is something special, participating in the very process of creation engenders a sense of fulfillment that reaches beyond any satisfaction one might derive from material success in the corporate business world. It is to this ancient art of fruit growing, where nature's promise and man's hand conjoin, that the author pays homage. To the saying, " everything in this world bears God's fingerprints," one might add, " much like the fruit-gatherer's fingerprints on a tender, tree-ripened peach. "