

## EDITOR'S CORNER

I read a really delightful book named *Safe Eating*, and asked an undergraduate student to read it and make a report. The report was so interesting that I am using it in the Editor's Corner.

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### Book Review

**Safe Eating.** 1998. David W. K. Acheson and Robin K. Levinson. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. New York

My first reaction after finishing the book *Safe Eating* was to go look for it at the bookstore so I could get it for my mom for Christmas. In my opinion, every household in America should purchase this book. I think it contains very good information and it is put in terms that any person can understand easily. I wish that I had read this book before the last test because I know I would have done better. The book repeats everything at least twice so people end up learning just by reading it once. In classes we learn the basics of safe food handling, but this book goes into great detail about almost every type of food.

When I was at my grandparents for Thanksgiving, I noticed a lot of unsafe practices used while preparing the meal. I'm sure if my family had read this book, not much would have been eaten. I will probably get the book for my grandparents also. They are getting older and their grandchildren are starting to have children, so there are very young and older people at every family gathering. Since these are the two groups in the most danger of food borne illness, I think it would be beneficial if they had the information from this book.

Three years ago over Christmas break I became very ill. I first got a fever, then stomach cramps and diarrhea about every five minutes. My stomach was cramped so much that I had to sit 24 h a day because I could not straighten myself out. When I went to the bathroom, I had to walk bent over. I also had blood in some of my stools. I never vomited though. My parents were very worried and tried to make me go to the doctor, but I wouldn't until I couldn't stand it anymore. By the time I finally got an appointment, the symptoms had become a little better. They took a stool sample and found *Salmonella*. They prescribed some medication, but the symptoms were about gone. I thought I was going to die during that time. I lost about 15 lb in five days and experienced the worst pain in my life. I didn't really

know anything about *Salmonella* back then. Now, I am very cautious with anything that could carry *Salmonella*. I believe that if my parents or I would have had the information from *Safe Eating* then, I wouldn't have become ill.

I think the book does a good job of talking about risks that many people do not think about. For example, I never thought bacteria could be transferred through cutting boards or dishes. I'm sure most people don't know that either. I have always stored eggs and sometimes milk in the door of the refrigerator. I will never do that again. I'm sure a lot of people don't think about encountering *Salmonella* in cookie dough or cake mix batter. Most people never think about contracting food borne illness at a restaurant, but the book covers many situations like that as well. Today I decided I would eat a fast food place. As I was walking toward the counter, I almost ran into an employee coming from the bathroom. I thought about asking him if he had washed his hands. As I got to the counter I was relieved to hear him say, "just a minute" and go wash his hands and also put sanitizer on them. Also, most people only think of chicken for *Salmonella* and hamburgers for *E. coli* and never think about any other microorganisms or foods that may be contaminated. This book does a great job of informing consumers of all the foods that are possible hazards. Until recently, I never thought about fruit or vegetable contamination. I always used to turn meat on the grill with a fork, not even thinking about transferring microorganisms to the inside of the meat. Although if I had thought about it, I would have known I shouldn't do it, I guarantee most people don't think about it. Things like that are why every household should have a copy of this book.

One of the parts of the book that really educated me was a part written by one of my former teachers, James Urban, on p. 252 and 253. It was the part where he talked about bug zappers transmitting bacteria and other microorganisms. This summer I worked at a food processing center doing research and development. There was a bug zapper in the hallway leading into the pilot plant. There were also bug zappers in the hallways of the pepperoni plant there. The bug zappers were right outside the coolers and processing equipment. Raw materials from trucks were transported by forklifts right by the bug zappers! I usually go back there every other month or so to visit everyone and next time I go I am going to observe how close a product is actually brought to the bug zappers and I might even say something to the plant manager and use the book as a reference. I doubt any bugs will be zapped because it is winter, but I remember hearing those things buzzing in the summer. I don't know if they will listen to me, but I think it is worth a try.

Another part that surprised me was the part about reptiles carrying *Salmonella*. My dad is a science teacher and we have had snakes our whole lives. Actually at the moment, my parents have all of my snakes and all of my sister's snakes for the upcoming holidays. My sister has a corn snake and a ball python and I have ball, Burmese, and reticulated pythons. When we are home, we always handle the snakes and I even wash the dishes with them around my neck. I usually never think about washing my hands after handling them (just like I never think about washing

my hands after petting my dogs), but now I will be sure to wash my hands after I come in contact with any of my pets. All of the snakes were captive bred and we keep the cages very clean so there is probably only a small chance *Salmonella* may be present. After my run-in with *Salmonella*, even a small chance is too much of one for me.

I think most people believe food borne illness is not very serious or it will never happen to them. I think if people read this book, they would think differently. I think the real-life examples used really do a good job of catching the readers attention and making them want to read more to find out how to prevent the same thing from happening to them or someone they know. I'm sure everyone in America could find one part of the safe food handling section that they do not do. I am guilty of it every day. I have never even thought about some of the practices, but I do now. I even try to instill food safety practices to the guys I live with.

Even though a lot of microbiology classes have the same information as the book, I think the book is a good supplement because it puts things on an everyday level. I have learned a lot of things about food microbiology over the last few years but I have never really thought too in-depth about them. Reading this book has really heightened my awareness about food safety. It seems like every time I eat something, I think of an example from the book. I have never thought about food contamination at the grocery store, but today I followed almost every step the book outlined about shopping for food.

I hope I keep up my current attitude on food safety. I like to cook and do most of the cooking for the guys I live with and we constantly have guests for dinner. By knowing all of the things in the book, I can almost assure that I will be serving safe meals. Up until now the food safety and sanitation practices at our house haven't been the best but that is changing.

I know that we are probably the least likely group to get a food borne illness, but it happened to me when I was in great health and shape so I know first hand that it can happen to anyone. I have some friends that probably have weak livers from drinking too much so I will make sure they know the risks of eating raw seafood. One of my roommates just accepted an accounting position with a firm in Kansas City and he told me that they had raw oysters one of the times the firm took him out. I let him read the parts about raw oysters and I don't think he will be eating them again any time soon.

I really did learn a lot from this book. Although I had learned most of the scientific things through class, I think the book will make me remember them longer. I have a new point of view about a lot of foods and food handling practices. I think if every person in America read this book, the incidence of food borne illness would be greatly reduced. I especially think expecting parents, day care providers, and foodservice workers should read this book. I think the end of the book is good so people know where to get information if they desire to know more. The glossary is also good for people that may not be familiar with some of the

terms used in this book. You might suggest reading this book in class. I don't know if people will, but it is worth a try. I know a few people in my family who will be receiving this book for Christmas this year. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to read this book and write about it. I know I will do a lot of things differently regarding food now and hopefully I can convince other to do the same.

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