

WILD Feast Launch

Opening Speech

Jeanette Sutherland | March 4, 2023



Feast After Love

Good evening, everyone. What a beautiful evening. Thank you for choosing to spend it with us, as we launch WILD Feast. – a platform to promote Wholesome, Indigenous, Local, and Diverse foods. For the launch we chose to feature sorghum – an African grain that is not only steeped in ancestral and cultural traditions but also replete with health, nutritional, and environmental benefits. On Thursday we had a dialogue in which various stakeholders from the food value chain participated to discuss opportunities for expanding markets for sorghum. This evening's gathering is an example of one such market, which we are seeking to expand. But we are here to feast. So, I won't bore you with technical details about markets and sorghum. The recording of the dialogue is available on the internet, for those of you who might be interested.

As I thought of how best to relay a brief message to you on the relevance of the WILD Feast platform without getting into stuffy technical details, the work of two internationally acclaimed literary scholars came to mind. One is from your continent – the beloved Chinua Achebe, the

other from the Caribbean, where I'm from, the 1992 Nobel Prize in literature recipient, Derek Walcott.

Many moons ago, in one of my former lives, I used to teach literature. So, permit me to indulge for just five minutes as I make two literary references to create an appreciation, hopefully a lasting one, of the relevance of WILD Feast. As a caveat, I should note that the interpretation of literature is very subjective. So, I might be taking some creative licenses in citing these authors' work to highlight the importance of our Feast.

In literature, food often symbolizes much more than just pure nourishment. This is the case in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the author's debut novel. One day, the story's protagonist, Okonkwo, threw a large feast for the village. During the feasting, the oldest elder gave a speech, in which he took pains to point out that:

"A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast

Does not do so to save them from starving

They all have food in their own homes

We come together because it is good

For kinsmen to do so"

One could interpret the elder's intervention as an attempt to highlight the importance of creating and strengthening social bonds, social ties. The importance to the individual and to the village as a whole. In fact, wide ranging research suggests that strong social ties are linked to a longer and better quality of life. Studies have found that social contact or social bonding releases hormones and brain chemicals that not only make us feel great but also have other biological benefits.

So, you have invested in your health and well-being, and that of those around you, with the decision to leave your homes to come together here today as kinsmen and kinswomen to feast on our lovingly and skillfully prepared menu, **Sorghum Reimagined**.

Allow me two more minutes to take you on a quick trip across the Atlantic, to meet our beloved Derek Walcott, whose infamous poem *Love after Love* can provide yet another insight into the value of WILD Feast.

"The time will come

when, with elation

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror

and each will smile at the other's welcome,

*and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you*

*all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,*

*the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.”*

Love after Love is an unusual love poem, which advocates relearning to love the self, the inner self, following the failure of a relationship. Its main theme is that of becoming whole again through self-recognition, a kind of healing that works by mindful invitation.

The speaker in the poem encourages heartbroken people to bond with and nourish the part of themselves they have neglected during their last relationship—the inner "stranger" who knows and loves them completely. The speaker then urges them to dispose of the mementos of the failed relationship: the love letters, photos, unhappy notes, and, metaphorically, the self-image they embraced from the experience.

Well, if we are being honest, we, as a society, have been in a toxic “love” relationship with large multinationals, who provide us an on-going supply of addictive, highly processed foods that are practically void of nutrients. This relationship has made us un-whole. Deaths, linked to the consumption of these foods, have been increasing exponentially, even as I speak.

Just as the Poet urges the readers, who have been disappointed in love, to get back in touch with their authentic selves, to find healing and happiness again. WILD Feast issues a call to action for a food revolution. A call to be your own hero and dispose of all the mementos of this toxic relationship with large food industry. A call to reclaim your healthy food heritage...like that of sorghum. A call to be radical. A call to eat WILD – Wholesome, Indigenous, Local, Diverse)...one Feast at a time.

This call to action is to ensure that we not only heal our bodies and that of the planet but also the bodies of our children and to ensure that we leave the planet in a state that will be habitable for them.

So, on this note ladies and gentlemen, kinsmen and kinswomen, we invite you to sit here. Eat. But don't just eat the food. Feast on it. You deserve it. Enjoy!

Thank you