

Thomas Jefferson's Rice Quest

By Alex Jack

Part I: Nourishing Liberty and Terror in a Globalized World

"The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture, especially a [cereal] grain." Thomas Jefferson on introducing upland rice to America

As his countrymen met in Philadelphia in 1787 to fashion a new Constitution, Thomas Jefferson, the American minister to France, took time from his hectic diplomatic schedule in Paris to journey to northern Italy to obtain rice. During the American Revolution, the British destroyed much of the seed crop in the Carolinas and other rice-exporting regions. The French also preferred the Italian variety to imported rice from America because it was easier to husk. After an arduous journey by foot and mule over the Alps, Jefferson visited the Piedmont, the traditional rice farming region, and smuggled out several handfuls of seed. To prevent other countries from growing its signature crop, the Savoy authorities forbade export of rice seed under penalty of death.

Risking his own life as he had many times before, the author of the Declaration of Independence sent back the precious grains to America to help resurrect the South's principal food export and hence the infant Republic itself. This autumn, as America faced the twin perils of domestic genetically engineered food and foreign terrorism, I retraced Jefferson's footsteps in a modern day quest to help save natural and organic rice, network with organic and conventional farmers, and contribute to a more healthy, peaceful world.

"[Jefferson's] . . . exertions for the redemption of American captives at Algiers, for establishing a general coalition of all the civilized states against the piratical states . . . have seldom been equaled." Eyer Robert Coates, Sr., Life of Thomas Jefferson, 1834

Friday morning, I awake to news that Boston has been placed on a high alert for a terrorist attack following President Bush's address to the nation the night before. In his speech, Bush declared war on Osama bin Ladin, the suspected mastermind of the devastating attacks on New York and Washington, and the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan who were sheltering him. A few days earlier, the President vowed to launch a crusade? against Islamic terrorists (including those who provided food). It was an unfortunate choice of wording that harkens back to medieval holy wars and heightens global tensions between Muslims and Christians. As far as I know, no friends or associates were killed or injured in the attacks. However, the pilot of the plane that crashed into the first World Trade Tower was an organic farmer, and the Farmers Market in front of the WTC was destroyed.

Last night I arrived in Boston after bidding farewell to my wife, Gale, and family in western Massachusetts and stayed at the home of my mother, Esther, in Brookline. A spry 85 years old, she makes me oatmeal, homemade salt-rising bread, and bancha twig tea for breakfast. A native of Martha's Vineyard, she is a descendent of the Adams family and like Abigail Adams was the daughter of a minister. In the morning I run errands, going to the bank, post office, bookstore (where I turn at random to an auspicious passage in Dante's *Paradiso*), and Bread & Circus for some organic snacks.

In early afternoon, educator Michio Kushi calls, warning me not to travel because of the international situation. I assure him that I will be careful, but I am apprehensive. Michio is renowned for his psychic abilities, and earlier this year told me about advising someone not to fly. The plane went down, killing everyone aboard, and the man later thanked Michio for saving his life. At Logan Airport, where the two planes that had crashed into the World Trade Center had originated, security is intense. A state trooper interrogates a young man in the boarding line in front of me who is Middle Eastern and looks vaguely suspicious. A Northwest flight attendant apologizes for the long delays, announcing that the airline has just laid off ten thousand workers and the employees are in further shock.

The plane ride is uneventful. I had ordered the vegetarian nondairy meal, but it is soggy and microwaved, and I set it aside to chew on organic brown rice from California that my mother has packed me. May God, or Allah be with you, she smiled as I departed. As I drift off to sleep, I reflect that over 200 years earlier, when Jefferson first went to Europe to assume his ambassadorial post and join John Adams and Benjamin Franklin in France, he went by a sailing ship that took several weeks. In Paris, he was joined by his two young daughters, Patsy and Polly, and by Sally Hemings, the young slave girl, whom historians now believe became Jefferson's mistress in Paris and went on to bear him several children over the next thirty years in Virginia.

Day 2 - September 22, Amsterdam to Nice to Aix

I am constantly roving about to see what I have never seen before and shall never see again. In the great cities, I go to see what travelers think alone worthy of being seen; but I make a job of it and generally gulp it all down in a day.

Jefferson's diary

At Schiphol airport in Amsterdam, I am greeted heartily by Adelbert Nelissen, an old friend and colleague, who has arranged to accompany me on the journey as Virgilian guide, multilingual translator, and Bhagavad Gita-like charioteer. Adelbert is a pioneer in the natural foods movement in Europe, founding Manna Foods and importing the first organic rice into Holland. For the last twenty years, with his wife, Wieke, he has been co-director of the Kushi Institute of Europe and has a large family, consisting of five children and two grandchildren, who have all been brought up on whole foods. Their two older daughters are now cooking teachers. The papers today are full of news of threats to Americans in France. In Toulouse, not far from our destination, a large fertilizer factory has mysteriously blown up, killing 29 people. (It will later be linked to terrorists.) From

the airport, we take a domestic plane to Nice in southern France and pick up the complimentary rental car that comes with our flight. We have so much trouble locating the rental office of EasyJet.com, a no frills British carrier that operates exclusively through the Internet, that we rename the company NotSoEasyJet.com. Over two centuries ago, in contrast to our small diesel auto, Jefferson traveled in an elegant horse-drawn carriage that he brought with him across the ocean from Monticello to Paris. After leaving Paris, he proceeded up the Seine through Champagne and Burgundy and down the Rhone to the Camargue, the picturesque delta of southern France. In Nice he left his carriage and hired several mules and muleteers to transport him and his valet across the arduous cross-Alpine stage of the journey.

Before visiting Italy, Adelbert and I head west to the Camargue, which is the principal rice growing region in France today. Though rice was first grown in southern France from the 13th century following the arrival of Muslims from northern Africa, it was not until after World War II that it became a major agriculture industry.

As twilight descends, we hasten past Cannes and other fabled watering holes on the French Riviera and stop for the night in Aix, an ancient Roman city that Jefferson visited on his way to Nice. We find a room downtown at the Hotel des Augustins, part of an ancient convent whose most famous visitor was Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Reformation. I wonder if Jefferson also stayed here while he visited the local mineral waters for a dislocated wrist and to be nourished with the remains of Roman grandeur. In a local restaurant, we order some pasta with veggies, which along with French bread and wine, serve as our staples for the duration of our journey. Afterward, we walk through the maze of narrow streets with their tall Romanesque buildings and call it a night.

Day 3 - September 23, Arles and the Camargue

"You must be absolutely incognito; you must ferret the people out of their hovels as I have done, look into their kettles, eat their bread, loll on their beds under pretense of resting yourself, but in fact to find if they are soft. You will feel a sublime pleasure in the course of this investigation and a sublimer one hereafter."

Jefferson, diary

On the early morning drive through Provence, Adelbert and I talk about the contemporary state of natural food. In both America and Europe, the demand for organic food has climbed in recent years (about 20% annually), but the quality has declined. Not only are natural foods increasingly contaminated by GMOs (genetically modified organisms), but also pioneer natural foods companies have been bought out by large food corporations that view organics as a business rather than a way of life. On both sides of the Atlantic, sugar has invaded the natural foods industry and, in the form of sucanat, natural crystals, raw cane juice, and other varieties, is found in thousands of packaged food items. We reminisce about the founding of the natural foods movement and modern organic farming a generation ago and how purity and dedication to the earth were

heartfelt concerns, not marketing slogans. Until the early 1990s, sugar (a major cause of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases) was conspicuous in its absence. From Arles, the central city of the Camargue, we turn south and drive to the heart of the rice country. Located in a fertile delta, it is flanked to the east by the Rhone, one of the largest rivers in France, and to the south by the Mediterranean. The cold mistral wind from the Alps and the salty environment of the sea invigorate the crop, giving it the strongest energy of any rice in Europe. As we pass field upon field of golden ripening grain, Adelbert points out stands of rice that are pressed down and leaning at steep angles. These, he explains, are conventionally grown crops, whose roots have been weakened by chemicals, making them susceptible to collapse in the high winds, while organic crops with their strong root structures sway but remain upright.

About a half hour outside of Arles, we arrive at the Rizerie Bongran and Le Muse du Riz. The Bongran rice factory and The Rice Museum were founded by Joseph Bon, the pioneer organic rice farmer in the Camargue, in 1960. Bon had been a student of George Ohsawa, the founder of modern macrobiotics, who often traveled and taught in France. Ohsawa inspired Bon to grow organic rice, and Bongran (the family's label) has become one of the best known biologique (organic) suppliers in Europe. Their line of products includes Riz Rond Complet (short-grain brown rice), Riz Long Complet (long grain brown rice), Riz Parfait (brown rice with 15% lentils), as well as rice cakes, couscous, tabouli, chickpeas, rice bran soap, and other products.

By coincidence, it is the day of the annual Rice Festival and we arrive just as festivities are getting under way. About a hundred local people are in attendance, and Robert Bon, Joseph's son and manager of the family business, welcomes us warmly. Adelbert and I tour the Rizerie and take a series of snapshots of each other posing against a backdrop of gargantuan 1250-kilo containers of rice. In contrast to most modern rice mills, the hulling machinery is largely wooden. As we climb an assortment of rickety steps and ladders to the high eaves of the warehouse, we are amazed to discover that the silos are empty. Closer inspection discloses that much of the bagged rice is Italian in origin. Oddly, a thin layer of dust throughout the plant further indicates that it had fallen into disuse.

In the reception hall across the way, we join the luncheon, partaking in a joyous course of local dishes that includes a couscous and shrimp salad, boiled rice that had been partially milled (50% brown and 50% white), French bread, and an ever flowing river of red wine. We politely decline the main entree, a beef stew made with large chunks of meat from the famous black bulls of the region that charged over the landscape as we drove by. We are amused at how everyone groups together in small cliques over the course of the afternoon and recall Aveline Kushis description of the French as resembling clusters of grapes because they drink so much wine.

After the Mayor of Arles speaks, Robert Bon introduces us as special visitors. Adelbert explains that he has eaten riz complet from the Camargue for over 30 years and sired a large brood of children and grandchildren. His appeal to the patriotic duty of every citizen to be fruitful and multiply and spread the local culture earns repeated choruses of

applause. I bring greetings from organic farmers in America and describe how the first crop of GE rice in America and the planet nearly 5 million pounds of herbicide-resistant rice in Texas has been buried in a landfill outside of Houston this past spring amid fears of contamination. This too brings noisy cheers of approval, and several locals later congratulate us on our efforts to preserve natural whole grains.

In the adjacent Rice Museum, we inspect sickles, vintage rice hulling machines, and other farm equipment from an earlier era. The creativity, skill, and care that went into these handmade articles remind me of Jefferson's inventiveness and the various agricultural implements on display at Monticello. There is a colorful diorama displaying local rice planting, a movie poster for *Riz Amer* (a sexy film set against the backdrop of the rice fields), and art books with stunning photographs of rice around the world.

As the festivities conclude, Adelbert and I wind our way out through the clusters of families and friends playing bocche, a traditional game involving pitching small iron balls on the lawn, to tour the surrounding area. For several hours, we tramp through enchanted rice fields along the raging Rhone, photograph horses and sheep, and explore a large sea salt factory on the Mediterranean shore. Before long I am able to distinguish at a glance the organic fields from the chemical ones. They have delicate purple flowers and other weeds growing along their borders, birds fly overhead, and insects dart in and out among the golden panicles of rice with their long drooping heads.

As night falls, we drive back to Arles and find a hotel that overlooks the square where Van Gogh painted *Caf Terrace at Night*, one of his most famous pictures. As a boy, a large poster of this painting hung in my room. Now I am astonished to find myself walking across the same cobbled stones toward the brightly lit caf, an oasis of life amid the ominous blue shadows of the surrounding buildings. The night is overcast so we cannot see the large yellow stars swirling overhead that are the most mysterious element of Van Gogh's original. But finding ourselves serendipitously at one of modern arts holiest shrines crowns a perfect day. In his spiral-filled canvasses, highly influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, we discuss how Van Gogh captures the vibrational essence of life. His studies of farmers sowing and harvesting wheat present a timeless quality, especially today when whole grains are under siege by multi-national corporations and philanthropic foundations hastening to replace them with new hybrid and GE varieties.

At a cozy restaurant down the street, Adelbert and I dine on local veggies, including cauliflower, carrots, and potatoes. We are disappointed that rice is not available and order a small serving of cod instead to sustain us. As the night wears on and Van Gogh's stars peek through the firmament, we talk for several hours about the co-evolution of wild grains and humanity and how so much of human folly can be attributed to dietary imbalance. The restaurant staff graciously puts up with our impassioned conversation long past closing time, and we finally get back to the hotel, like denizens of Van Gogh's caf, and tumble into bed about 2:00 a.m.

Day 4 - September 24, Arles, Marseilles, and St. Juste

"I am never satiated with rambling through the fields and farms, examining the culture and cultivators with a degree of curiosity which makes some take me to be a fool and others to be much wiser than I am.

Jefferson, diary

After breakfast, we return to the Rizerie Bongran in mid morning to talk with Robert Bon, a jovial middle aged man with strong features and a healthy sense of humor. He confirms that the family has sold its company, and the new owner, an American by the name of Stanley, is married to the daughter of the head of Hoffman-La Roche, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant. The loss of this small, family-owned farm and rice mill is an object lesson in the global trend toward consolidation of the organic foods movement. Seventy percent of France's energy comes from nuclear power, and radioactive waste has seeped into rivers and lakes. The Rhone has become something like the antichrist to the healing waters of Lourdes, poisoning everything it touches. In recent years, natural foods distributors throughout Europe (including Lima Foods, the pioneer macrobiotic food company bought out by a larger health food company) gradually shifted to Spanish or Italian rice because of suspected contamination. Though the most recent tests show no sign of radioactivity in the Rhone, French rice and other organic products have suffered from a toxic aura. Meanwhile, the World Wildlife Federation endowed a large nature sanctuary in the area, and environmentalists have started a campaign to protect flamingoes that like to nest or nibble in the rice paddies. As a result, local rice production has fallen, and even Bongran now imports rice from Italy and Thailand. Only twenty of 300 rice farmers in the Camargue are organic, producing about 300,000 kilos of rice on 1500 hectares. Most of the organic crop is sold to Nestle, the Swiss multinational. Though best known for its chocolate, Nestle markets a line of organic baby foods that features rice.

Genetic engineering is not perceived as much of a threat in France since Jose Bov, the French activist best known for organizing protests against McDonald's in Montpellier, destroyed a field of experimental GE rice two years ago. Lightly fined, Bov was hailed as a national folk hero for thumbing his nose against American cultural imperialism a subject very dear to the Gallic heart, liver, and stomach. Since then, GM rice has been virtually a dead issue in France, though CIRAD, a French government agency, is reportedly doing GMO research. However, the European Union is now making the laws, Robert underscores, and is more open to American influence. He points out that while labeling of GMO ingredients is legally required, it is often in 6 point type that is so small that people can hardly read it. The EU is also moving toward allowing 1-2% GMO contamination of organic and natural crops and may even disallow labels that say GE Free."

From the Camargue, we head for Marseilles, the large port city, about 2 hours? drive east. A teeming metropolis of several million people, Marseilles is the main port of entry for immigrants, refugees, and illegal aliens from the Middle East, North Africa, and other foreign shores. Adelbert explains that its local government is notoriously reactionary, and racial and religious tensions are among the highest in Europe. As we drive through the vast downtown shopping district, I notice small side streets opening

into large, sprawling slums. At one intersection, an Arab woman in black garb comes into view, and images of grinding, age-old poverty fill my mind. However, when she turns around, I am surprised to see that she is talking into a cell phone. Soon we are thoroughly lost in a warren of back streets and stop for a snack (an onion sandwich) and directions.

A man with a wide grin who has been sitting on a stoop comes up to the car and remains mute when we ask directions. He starts to come around the drivers side and indicates menacingly that he wants to take the wheel. Noting that the man is missing half an ear, Adelbert diagnoses the man as disturbed. We peel out, leaving this erstwhile Van Gogh of the Marseilles streets to his own personal labyrinth. As twilight descends, we finally arrive at our destination, Le Resto-Bio (Organic Restaurant). The proprietors, Daniel and Ingrid Yoassonfian, greet us warmly. We met them at the Rice Festival and they invited us to stop and visit them along our way. With his thick handlebar mustache, Daniel looks like a revolutionary farmer or artisan and Ingrid, with her infectious smile, appears like the good German housefrau that she is. Their quiet 14-year-old son, Stephene, is doing his homework on a back counter, as the last customers of the day scurry to collect their goods.

I am delighted to find the French edition of several of my books on their shelves, including *One Peaceful World*, which I wrote with Michio Kushi in the mid 1980s. It is a heartfelt appeal for peace, beginning with the personal and radiating to the family, national, and planetary levels. In the Far East, the word for peace, wa, is made of the ideograms for grain (cooked rice) and mouth. Ancient people intuitively knew that by eating whole grains in a spirit of gratitude, we create strong, steady physical energy; a calm, clear mind; and a harmonious spirit. In the West, the biblical injunction and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their shields into pruning hooks points to the same truth. Weapons of war are transformed into implements of peace, especially agrarian implements. It is a sentiment that Jefferson also instinctively expressed throughout his life and forms the foundation of his future vision of America: a nation of self-sufficient farmers and artisans enjoying the fruits of peace and nourished by the world's diverse cultures.

Enjoying our first balanced meal of the trip, Adelbert and I sit down to a delicious repast of brown rice, vegetable tempura, broccoli, fruit compote, and bancha tea. The restaurant is actually closed (it is only open at lunch), so Daniel and Ingrid join us in animated conversation. Adelbert describes to Daniel and Ingrid how bright, enthusiastic young people from Czechoslovakia are the backbone of his center in Amsterdam and are eager to volunteer long hours in exchange for classes. He suggests that the Youssonfians expand their activities by utilizing the skills and thirst for knowledge of young people from North Africa. But it soon becomes clear that the racial situation in the city is so polarized that this would be risky. It appears that the most that can be done is to help sponsor a local festival celebrating the Cathars, the medieval Christian sect that embraced Muslims and Jews in an earlier era of religious intolerance.

As night falls, we make our departure and drive for another couple hours toward the Italian border. Espresso gets us as far as St. Juste, a picturesque city on the Riviera,

where Van Gogh, in the throes of mental illness, killed himself. How easily we forget our biological roots! In the artist's case, potatoes gradually replaced wheat and other grains as his staple, his health suffered, and he lost his mind. In the Camargue, the old man who pioneered organic rice now suffers from memory loss. Adelbert visited him a decade ago and discovered that he had long abandoned macrobiotic practices. Uncovering a dusty stack of George Ohsawa's writings, Adelbert helped him recover his health and gave compresses to his wife for her edema. But illness again has returned. Ironically, a lasting solution is as close as the whole grain rice growing in their fields, and now these have also been lost. I came as the reincarnation of Ohsawa and now leave as a ghost, Adelbert quips. After finding a room at a local hotel on the moonlit bay, we fall asleep to the serene lapping of the surf in Middle Earth (Medi Terre).

Day 5 - September 25, Turin and Milan

“I took a peep only into Elysium. I entered it at one door, and came out of another . . .”
Jefferson, letter to Maria Cosway

In contrast to Thomas Jefferson, who took six days on foot and mule to traverse the towering Maritime Alps, we travel through northern Italy on a high-speed highway, arriving in Turin (home of Fiat and the Shroud) after about a six-hour drive. When he reached the Po plain, Jefferson exchanged his mules for a 2-horse carriage with a postilion and a cock, or extra, horse and proceeded on his way in luxurious style, leisurely visiting Renaissance gardens, cathedrals, universities and other sites, imbibing architectural styles (that later surfaced in renovations at Monticello and the University of Virginia), and impressing local bankers and tradesmen with the superiority of American whale oil. Our first stop downtown is at NBC New Bio Concept a natural foods broker. On the office wall are prints of Klee's dove and Munch's The Scream two iconic prints that symbolize the faces of health and sanity, freedom and terror, natural and artificial in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Diana Brancato, a marketing executive, welcomes us, offers us strong Espresso, and explains her company doesn't specialize in rice. She seems more American than Italian, and I discover that we grew up in the same town in metropolitan New York City, in the early 1960s. She offers us some other leads, and we exchange arrivaderchis.

In the parking lot, Adelbert doubles up with stomach pains from the strong coffee. From my travel bag, I offer him some tekkaa condiment made with sauted miso, lotus root, burdock, and ginger and drive to the center of the city to find a bench for him to lie down and rest. Across the ancient cobblestones, an outdoor fashion show is rehearsing, and young models are strutting their stuff on a makeshift runway. After a half hours rest, we set off and, fortified by roasted chestnuts from a street vendor, explore the nearby Reale Palazza, the fortress of the Savoy monarchy that Jefferson visited on his trip. It has changed little from the 18th century, its vast square plaza and symmetrical geometrical lines a monument to the Age of Reason. In contrast, Adelbert points out several existing buildings from the 15th and 16th centuries that also face the main square. They retain

their distinctive logarhythmic structure, with each successive story about one-third smaller than the one below it. The difference reflects the change from a predominantly plant-centered diet (and the vertical thinking of the Renaissance) to a more animal-centered diet (and the horizontal outlook of the Enlightenment). A McDonald's, with its archetypal plastic facade, décor, and food, is situated at the far end of the bustling thoroughfare, a startling reminder of how far we have come from Jefferson's time, not to mention the arcadian groves celebrated in classical literature and verse.

Working the cell phone, we locate a vegetarian restaurant and stop for a delightful buffet meal of vegetable pie, onions, zucchini, fruit salad, and bancha tea. We also ask for a special order of risotto integrale a funghi (brown rice with mushrooms), which is surprisingly tasty. On the wall behind us are framed colored engravings of a carrot, broccoli, and other vegetables that look spindly and oddly shaped. Adelbert identifies them as traditional produce of two or three centuries ago. To the modern eye, accustomed to high-yielding hybrid and genetically engineered varieties, they seem like crops from another planet. Yet compared to today's commercial seeds, which break easily, sprout weakly, and are easily infected, these heirloom varieties form the true cornucopia of health and vitality.

Back on the road, Adelbert is still feeling under the weather, so I take the wheel for the final two-hour lap to Milan, through the rice country, in pitch darkness. By now I am getting used to the small, efficient design of European cars, and it is a welcome change from driving on highways at home clogged with SUVs, tractor-trailers, and other outsize vehicles. The sharp contrast bears eloquent testimonial to Europe's strong support of the Kyoto Convention on global warming versus America's defiance. It is not hard to fathom why other people around the world, including our staunchest European allies, regard us as supremely arrogant. In Milan, our hotel on Washington Street has an American Revolutionary ring to it. We pull in about 11 p.m. and fall quickly asleep, dreaming of how beautiful the Piedmont's golden grain Jefferson's rice will look in the morning light.

Part II - In Jefferson's Footsteps Nourishing Liberty and Terror in a Globalized World

Day 6 - September 26, Milan, the Piedmont, and Vercelli

“I determined to take enough [rice] to put you in seed: they informed me however its exportation in the husk was prohibited; so I could only bring off as much as my coat and surtout pockets would hold.”

Jefferson, letter to Edward Rutledge, 1787

I spend the morning cleaning our small rental car, which has turned into a makeshift office and mobile rizerie, with long sheaves of freshly picked organic rice filling the trunk and packaged samples and seeds sprouting in the front and back seats. Adelbert leaves early for a dietary consultation. One of his clients, a middle-aged Italian businessman with leukemia, has arranged to see him. He has been advising the man and his wife by phone, and our journey offers an opportunity for direct guidance. Milan is a

leading center for international cancer research, including a new study on how a macrobiotic diet can substantially reduce the risk of getting breast cancer. Note: Alex Jack is an author, teacher, and dietary counselor. His books include *Saving Organic Rice*, *Biowisdom*, and *The Mozart Effect* (with Don Campbell).

I also read a few chapters in a new book, *Jefferson's Pillow* by Roger Wilkins (Beacon Press, 2001), a meditation on the founding fathers and the dilemma of black patriotism. The title refers to Jefferson's earliest memory of being carried on a pillow by a black slave, and the book explores the inherent contradiction between Jefferson's immortal proclamation that "all men are created equal" and the crushing reality of slavery in Monticello and throughout the original thirteen colonies. At midday, Adelbert returns with Theresa, the wife of the man with cancer, and she presents us with long uncut sushi rolls that she has lovingly prepared. She is familiar with some of my writing, including the Italian edition of *The Cancer Prevention Diet* that I wrote with Michio Kushi, and thanks me warmly for my work. Downtown, we park and walk to Santa Maria delle Grazie, the refectory of the ancient Dominican convent in hope of seeing Leonardo da Vinci's newly restored *The Last Supper*, but the next public viewing is not until late afternoon. Instead, we stop for a quick lunch of pasta and veggies at a sidewalk cafe and hasten to the central palace of the city. As we enter, I see a standard bearing Milan's ancient coat of arms featuring a coiled snake. At first, I welcome it as a symbol of healing and the Hippocratic art. But I later discover that it served as the standard of the First Crusade nearly a thousand years ago. According to legend, an archbishop presented Christian soldiers a banner with a large serpent of biblical origin to carry as a symbol of divine protection on their journey to the Holy Land to take Jerusalem from the Muslims. The snake came to signify death and destruction of infidels, especially when crusaders later inserted a defeated Saracen in its jaws. Today such an image would be an intolerable affront to Italy's several million Islamic citizens and Arabic refugees, and the Saracen is wisely omitted.

The Palace itself has been turned into a museum, and we walk through one wing, admiring centuries of sculptures, jewelry, and other arts, including a Michelangelo *Pieta*. Compared to the Turin fortress, the Milan palace is adorned in softer, more pastel hues and presents a more open feeling. The organic, curvilinear form of the old part of the city resembles a living plant, whereas its northern counterpart and so many modern cities are laid out in straight lines like a pasture. Once again, echoes reverberate of the age-old dichotomy between an agrarian and nomadic culture. From the conflict between the Israelites and Canaanites in the ancient Holy Land and the rivalry between the cattle ranchers and homesteaders in the American West to the clash between organic and biotech farmers today, use of the land for cultivating whole grains or producing animal quality food is the principal theme unifying the spiral of history.

From the Palace, we head toward the Piedmont, the great plain that extends from Turin to Milan, and within 15 minutes from the center of the city find ourselves surrounded entirely by fields of ripening grain. Italian rice is full, rich, and spectacular in the mid-afternoon sun, and soon our little car (powered by 150 diesel mules) is parked by the side of the road. A delightful onrush of energy greets us as we enter the ripening

fields, inspect the amber heads, and snap photos. Several times, we absent-mindedly plunge a foot or two into the muddy paddies and get soaking wet. Before the afternoon is through, I am barefoot and my slacks are caked in mud. But I feel joyous and fulfilled, something like I imagine Jefferson felt when he finally arrived at his destination. Near Vercelli, the historic capital of the rice country, he obtained several large handfuls of rice seed and concealed them in his coat to be smuggled out and sent home to America.

This past spring, my mother unearthed some new information about our family tree dating back to Jefferson's time. We discovered that we had a forebear named Merrick Pease, who was born in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1789, just two years after Jefferson's journey and the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. In the 1820s, he moved to Geauga County, Ohio, which was then part of the Western Reserve, and grain was so plentiful that he put up a whiskey still. His father, Isaac, also farmed and owned mills, including a distillery that ran 15 bushels of rye and corn per day. Merrick and his two brothers, Chandler and Anson, served in the War of 1812, when the White House was burned by the British. I knew that I had relatives who had served in the Civil War and the Adams side of my family went back directly to the Revolution, but until now I had not known about the grain connection, especially in liquid form! My great-grandparents, George and Isabel Pease, whom old photographs show holding me up as a baby, lived on a small farm in Huntsburg, Ohio. They grew vegetables, made home-made bread (a tradition passed down to my mother), and lived into their late nineties. Grandfather Pease's native ingenuity led him to invent the square metal container used, still today, to hold maple syrup. (Before that, it was circular.) For all of my intellectual pursuits, practical agrarian humors and Jeffersonian resourcefulness flow in my veins. Standing in the sunny Italian rice field, with my trousers rolled up like Huck Finn, is an ancestral revelation.

Not far from here is Corona, the little town renowned for its violins, especially the Stradivarius. As I breathe in the invigorating ki of the fields, surrounded in the distance by the high alps and nourished by the central Po river, I understand intuitively why the violinmakers in this region produced such sweet sounds. They were eating nourishing whole grain rice and the ancient vegetables we saw depicted in old engravings. No wonder no one has been able to duplicate the rich, vibrant sounds of the Stradivarius. The scientists and musicians that have tried are not in harmony with the fields, orchards, and sky that produced it, nor eat heirloom foods that the ancient music makers ate.

On the way to Vercelli, we stop at the Riseria Monferrato, one of the biggest rice mills in Italy. It can process up to 6 tons of rice per hour. New construction inside the vast multi-acre site shows that business is booming. Though we arrive after office hours, Armando Vignola, the scion of four generations of rice millers, greets us. When we first mention the GM situation, he mistakes us for biotech salesmen and commiserates at how unscientific claims are scaring off producers and consumers in America and Europe. But when we make clear that we are opposed to GM, he shifts gears as smoothly as his sporty car out front. Like the agreeable broker he is, he sympathizes with our concerns, pointing out that unlabeled GMOs are widely used in European flavorings and starches.

Most of his company's rice turns out to come from Thailand, including 90 percent of the white parboiled rice sold in Europe. A small amount of organic basmati rice is sold under the family's Sun Clad label. He explains that Thailand, the world's largest rice exporting nation, has taken a strong stand against GM and is promoting natural and organic jasmine rice and other fragrant varieties. He gets animated talking about the tiny village and valley in northern Thailand where the organic rice is grown and says that his company will be happy to make it available to consumers.

We invite Armando for dinner, but he has a date with his girlfriend. He loads us up with samples of his wares, and we push on to Vercelli. After securing a room at a local hotel, frequented primarily by soccer teams, we dine on risotto and plan our itinerary for the morrow. About midnight, I call home and talk to my wife, Gale. She reports that the Kushi Institute has had to cancel programs because people are afraid to fly in the wake of the WTC attacks. Everyone in the family is fine. It's amazing how carefully my 17-year-old daughter, Masha, is eating since she had her baby two months ago. For years, she has eaten organic brown rice and other whole grains and veggies daily and never been sick. But because she is so strong and healthy, she tended to eat widely; take too many sweets, chips, and soft drinks; and grew very adventurous. Since her baby was born and started nursing, Masha discovered that what she eats immediately affects the baby. Suddenly she has become super strict. If the baby cries or keeps her up at night, she knows exactly what foods or drinks are affecting her breast milk. And to make it stronger and calm the baby, there is nothing better than brown rice.

Beyond the impact of food, Masha has started to listen to classical music because it soothes little Hanz. Before she would always pop a heavy metal or rap music cassette into the CD player in the car, but now she says, Dad, would you put on the Mozart tape?? Mother and baby are one in a way that males can never know. I now realize why woman has higher intuition than man. She experiences instant karma while breastfeeding. If the biotech companies get their way, new improved? GM varieties will replace natural and organic strains that nourish half the world's mothers and children. The effect on human health and vitality will be devastating.

Day 7 - September 27, The Piedmont, Italian Riviera, Nice, and Amsterdam

“I cultivated [rice] two or three years at Monticello, and had good crops, as did my neighbors, but not having conveniences for husking it, we declined it. I tried some of it in a pot, while I lived in Philadelphia . . . It produced luxuriant plants . . . but no seed; nor do I believe it will ripen in the United States as far as Philadelphia.”

Jefferson, 1801

Our day begins with an early morning visit to the Riseria Provera in nearby Santhia. A major rice grower and distributor, Giancarla Provera welcomes us and proudly gives us an organic cook's tour of the facility that has been in her family for four generations. Compared to the primitive husking machines that Jefferson inspected on his

Italian tour, today's automated rollers are light years faster and more efficient. We are impressed with how immaculate the factory is and how modern scanners can separate out the green immature grains, red and other dark grains, and other impurities from the freshly hulled crop. The Italian market for organic food is growing by 20% a year, accounting for slightly less than 1% of total food sales. Ordinary supermarkets are increasingly stocking organic produce and processed foods. According to industry figures, Italy is the most organic country in the European Union, producing 40% of the continent's organic food on 1 million hectares of land, a fourth of the total EU organic farm acreage. About 25% of the total organic production in the country is devoted to cereal grains, including durum wheat for pasta, barley, soft wheat, and rice. Most of the organic fruits and vegetables are grown in south Italy.

Our next stop, the Ente Nazionale Risi, is located in a small modern office complex. The Italian government's National Rice Institute has laboratories and field stations scattered throughout the region. Although the chief researcher is away at a conference, the attentive staff loads us up with literature and books, including the weekly rice bulletin that has many articles on the GMO situation in Europe and internationally. Two years ago, scientists at the Catholic University of Piacenza (outside of Milan) developed a new strain of GM rice designed to help resist an insect called *chilo supresalis* in paddy fields in France and China. However, strong anti-GMO sentiment in Italy, as witness the campaign against globalization that reached a peak at the G-7 Summit in Genoa this past summer, appears to have put a temporary end to GM rice experimentation.

In Lomellina, a remote village deep in the heart of the rice region, we pull off to the side of the road and once again plunge into the fields awaiting harvest. Large birds rise up over old barns and outbuildings, make wide circles, and swoop low over the profusion of golden stalks, indicating the crops below are organic. Adelbert has me hoist large handfuls of rice stalks overhead and scream Save Organic Rice? for what he calls a ?poster boy? shot. In turn, I snap photos of him in the victory pose with his arms extended to the heavens. Laughing like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn at how silly we look, we vow to return next time with our wives and daughters for a really photogenic shoot. We figure that will get people's attention.

The dusty village appears to have changed little in the last few centuries, and a few minutes later we arrive at our destination, La Gallinalla, a large organic rice company. We are greeted at midday by Fulvio Turone, the sales manager, who ushers us next door to a little restaurant. With his black sweater, cherubic face, and unflappable manner, he reminds us of a country priest, and over lunch he proceeds to initiate us into the mysteries of Arboria, Carnaroli, Roma, Barlido, and other varieties of Italian rice. In north Italy, people customarily consider risotto, a rice and vegetable dish, as their staple, while in the south they revere pasta, pizza, and other wheat-based products as the staff of life. About 95% of Gallinalla's crop, harvested from its own fields and purchased from neighboring farms, is organic brown rice. Of this 60% is small or round (i.e., short-grain) and 40% is long. Long is further divided into semi-long, extra-long, and superfine, a specialty often preferred for risotto.

The Piedmont with its arc of high mountains in the distance reminds me of the Sacramento Valley in California, site of 80% of the organic brown rice grown in America. Ringed by the Pacific Ridge, Mt. Shasta, and the Sierra Nevadas, the Sacramento Valley is irrigated by the Feather River and its tributaries that flow from the mountains through the high dam in Oroville. Here in Italy, the Po river coursing through the plain serves the same function. In the 1840s, an engineer by the name of Cavore oversaw the construction of a network of canals that brought water from the Po throughout the Piedmont, stimulating rice production. Before the advent of mechanized seeding, hundreds of Italian women known as Le Mondine seeded the paddies by hand. Work songs helped ease the monotonous, backbreaking work. In their conical hats, the women could easily pass for Asians, at least according to old photographs. Today all rice planting and harvesting is automated, and the fields, lined by stands of tall, thin poplar trees, stand out amid the congested industrial cities of the north as oases of tranquillity. La Gallinella takes its name from the wild chickens that we saw swooping as we arrived. Another denizen of the rice fields is the chiconia, a blue and grey bird, that at least in fairy tales brings babies, like the stork. The frog, another traditional inhabitant of the Italian rice country, appears on the logo of the Riseria Provera in green next to a golden sheaf of rice. The ecological awareness of both family farms unifying the animal and vegetable kingdoms is a unique form of native spirituality that I suspect reaches back to Roman, Etruscan, and neolithic days. Fortunately, both rice companies are north of the Po, whose life-giving flow is now contaminated by chemicals from nearly a thousand industrial plants around Turin. Crops to the south of the Po, nourished by the network of irrigation channels, are at the mercy of this toxic runoff.

After lunch, we meet with Erminio Brustia, the owner of La Gallinella, an elderly man with the compassionate countenance and large weathered hands of someone who has worked outdoors most of his life. He scoffs at the threat to natural and organic crops, reassuring us that, unlike Americans, no farmer in Italy would be crazy enough to grow GM foods. Adelbert points out that the first McDonald's in Rome and Paris failed miserably, but that now there are thousands of fast food restaurants throughout Italy, France, and the rest of Europe. Traditional cultural and culinary values, he explains to the rice mill owner, are no match for the financial and political clout of the World Trade Organization and the genetech lobby. Erminio finally admits that he is worried that GM soy may get into the rice fields that are rotated with other crops during fallow times.

Alarmed at how quickly time has passed, we hastily excuse ourselves to catch our plane in Nice. With another dozen samples of organic Italian rice in hand (including the variety that Jefferson probably obtained), we get back on the road. Adelbert handles our little car like a Ferrari, weaving down the country lanes, passing everything in sight, and merging onto the superhighway that bypasses Genoa and makes a beeline to Nice. We have just under two and a half hours to make the usual 4-hour trip. As picturesque villas and orchards fly by at breakneck speed, I would like to linger and explore the leisurely Riviera byways that Jefferson took back to Nice. In his day there was no coastal route because the Sardinians feared an invasion by the French. But Jefferson predicted that someday along the margin of the sea a road would be built creating one continued village

allowing travelers to bypass the Alps. Making a pit stop for about 15 minutes to take a dip in the Mediterranean, Adelbert emerges reinvigorated to such an extent that he flies through the fast lane rather than wait for the line of cars backed up at the toll booth. Caught ticketless, at the French border, this deft maneuver catches up with us, and we have some karma to pay. But we make it to the Nice airport in the nick of time. In fact, it is anticlimatic because a terrorist alert in the Netherlands has delayed our flight. We end up killing time and arrive in Amsterdam two hours late. Though all hand luggage must be checked, we triumphantly get off the plane carrying our large sheaf of rice from the Camargue (the French rice-producing region) and Piedmont. Thanks to the EU, national borderlines have been effectively erased, and none of the guards or customs officials gives a second thought to our cargo of priceless rice. Horriah, Adelbert's daughter, picks us up and explains that all the bridges and tunnels into Amsterdam have been sealed off by troops following a threat against the government for supporting the American campaign against bin Laden.

At the Nelissen family home in Castricum, Wieke welcomes us with a late-night feast of soba noodles in broth with shiitake mushrooms, corn on the cob, steamed hokkaido pumpkin, and bancha tea. We talk until well past midnight when sleepiness sets in, and the home stretch of our historic journey ends. For all of our wonderful contacts and adventures, I realize that in today's mechanized agricultural world, we never saw a single farmer in the fields!

Days 8-10 September 28-30 Amsterdam

“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”
Jefferson

Over the next three days in the Dutch capital, I rest up at the Nelissen, attend the family birthday party for their son Koji, a student of film making; and give a workshop on the GM rice situation at the Kushi Institute downtown. Wieke's strong, balanced cooking energizes us after a week on the Mediterranean diet. I realize I have had more wine in France and Italy than I've had in ages. Jefferson was an aficionado of the vine, as his diary entries about gulping down the vistas and sites along his rice journey attest. Throughout his life, he imported the best European wines to his mansion in Virginia and later the White House when he became the nation's third president. In addition to rice, he introduced several other foods and food preparation methods to the new nation, including olives, figs, and the first pasta machine and ice cream mixer. Each day, Wieke prepares one of the samples of brown rice that we brought back. The French rice is small, chewy, and energizing. The Italian varieties are soft, smooth, and very delicious. We also enjoy Spanish whole grain rice from the Pyranes that she and her husband import for their students from Spain. It is on the hardy, activating side. While Adelbert and Horriah give a seminar on osteoporosis and women's health, I stay home and take the opportunity to go online. Through their Internet connection, I am able to access my email. Gale has been checking it while I'm gone, deleting as much as possible to prevent it from overloading. I answer the most pressing requests and then check out my favorite GMO news sites. Back

home in the States, I learn that the University of Arkansas has just patented a gene to prevent rice blast, a major disease, and plans to license it to biotech companies. In the Philippines, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is promoting trials of GM rice. Backed by the Rockefeller Foundation and other philanthropies, as well as the biotechnology industry, it is developing GM golden rice for release throughout Asia. Over the last generation, according to indigenous farmers and critics such as Dr. Vandana Shiva, the Indian environmentalist, the IRRI-orchestrated Green Revolution resulted in the loss of thousands of heirloom and natural varieties of Asian rice seeds. Golden rice threatens to displace the few strains that remain.

As I scroll through updates on the terrorist bombing and America's mobilization for war, an item about Condoleezza Rice, the White House National Security Adviser, catches my eye. In a flash, I realize that she is a central figure in my story about the Jefferson Rice Trail, as well as the global drama now unfolding. She is the Sally Hemings of the early 21st century, a black woman in the closest position of power to a sitting president in two hundred years. Not only that, but her last name suggests that her forebears were slaves on a rice plantation, perhaps going back to Jefferson's time! Checking out my hunch on several search engines, I quickly discover that my intuition is right. Her great-great-grandparents on her father's side were slaves. On her mother's side, she had a great-great-grand-father who was an Italian, immigrated to America, and bought slaves. Harkening back to this blood tie, her name *condoleezza* is an Italian musical term meaning to perform with sweetness. Did her forebear visit Monticello, which in Italian means little mountain or mingle with the Jefferson clan? It is an intriguing possibility.

As a child Condoleezza Rice experienced several harrowing events. One of her classmates died in the bombing of a Birmingham church in 1963 that claimed the lives of four little girls, a watershed event of domestic terrorism that catalyzed the modern civil rights movement. Her father, a minister and high school teacher, once formed a shotgun brigade after local racists hurled a gas bomb through a neighbor's window. When asked why she became a Republican, she replies that local Democrats would not let her father register to vote in Alabama. In fact, they disqualified any black from registering, she explains, by administering a poll test with arcane questions such as, who was Thomas Jefferson's great-grandmother. I found a party that has love of liberty at its core, she told the Republican National Convention in 2000. In a moving speech that brings tears to my eyes as it scrolls up on the computer screen, she relates how Granddaddy Rice grew cotton.

Some critics dismiss Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell, who is also African-American, as modern day house slaves in the Bush Administration. In principle, I oppose military action, especially a war in Afghanistan that could leave millions of people vulnerable to starvation. But I'm glad that Rice and Powell are in the corridors of power and have the president's ear. I feel they will be more aware, compassionate, and likely to perform with sweetness than the joint chiefs and other atherosclerotic white males that make up most of the inner circle.

In the early days of the propaganda war, Ms. Rice meets with American media executives and convinces them to withhold videotaped footage of bin Laden preaching from his mountain lair. He may be using the mass media, she warns, to send a pre-coded signal to sleeper disciples to unleash new violence. While some civil libertarians scoff at this as a transparent excuse to muzzle the press, I recall that on rice plantations in colonial Virginia and the Carolinas enslaved blacks used drums to communicate clandestine messages over wide regions and coordinate uprisings. Soon drumming was prohibited.

For Jefferson, the sacrificial spilling of blood was the price of liberty, as one of his most famous passages states. But one persons tyrant is another persons emancipator. Terrorist or freedom fighter the ultimate verdict is history. Washington, Adams, and Jefferson would be remembered as traitors and rebels if the British had won the Revolutionary War. To the descendents of his slaves, if not the slaves themselves (who revered him as kindly), Jefferson is regarded today as a benevolent despot. From a dietary perspective, Jefferson's wide gourmet way of eating helps explain both his sympathy and detachment from the plight of black people. On the one hand, he was an avid vegetable farmer and enjoyed cultivating and consuming rice and other plant foods. Especially in his younger years, he could feel the injustice of the peculiar institution, as it was euphemistically known, and spoke out prophetically against slavery. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, he thundered, than that these people are to be free. On the other hand, as he matured, especially after the Revolution and his ambassadorial posting, he ate richer, more elegant food, including excessive sweets, dairy, and wine, which helped numb him to the oppression in his own region, state, and household.

Contrary to the image still presented in many American history books, African blacks were not living in the jungle in a primitive or barbarous state of nature. The majority of slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries were farmers from the Rice Coast of West Africa who were kidnapped because of their highly developed agricultural skills. As Judith A. Carney explains in her absorbing new book, *Black Rice* (Harvard University Press, 2001), a sophisticated system of rice farming emerged in Africa over the millennia independently of that in the Far East. Southern slave owners later perpetrated the myth that the native genius of Virginian and Carolinian landowners and European engineers created the American rice industry and used Africans only for their brawn. As *Armistad*, a recent film about the notorious uprising aboard a slave ship in the 1850s, portrayed, the majority of the Africans on the ship were rice farmers who had been kidnapped from their fields or marketplaces. In their defense, former president John Quincy Adams eloquently pointed out that they had highly developed cultural and spiritual traditions that put the American South and much of the North to shame. In one of its most noble verdicts, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the rice farmers' right to be free and allowed them to return peacefully to Africa.

But all that lay in the future. I wonder what young Sally Hemings was doing in Paris while Jefferson was dashing about the Italian countryside in his horse-drawn carriage. Did she or her brother James, who was the chef at Jefferson's residence in the

French capital, cook any of the rice that Jefferson brought back and did it kindle the immortal passion that historians, novelists, and the American citizenry now find at the core of America's revolutionary history and racial identity?

In today's post-Cold War world, the ideological struggle is between two visions of the future: 1) the artificial as epitomized by biotechnology, the World Trade Organization, and global terrorism and 2) the natural represented by the organic community, the environmental movement, and human rights and fair labor practices alliances. Ironically, these twin futures echo the historic struggle between Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, who wanted to create a national bank and put the new republic on a solid economic foundation, and Jefferson, the first Secretary of State and champion of a nation of small, independent farmers and self-reliant artisans. Siding with Hamilton, President Washington decided to centralize the new federal government, a fateful choice that Jefferson's acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the new nation, later reaffirmed.

In the future, the line between the artificial and natural, the centralized and decentralized, will blur. Do I condone the pulling up of GM crops by French activist Jose Bov and the crop resisters in Oregon and Vermont trashing Monsanto's experimental fields. Absolutely not, but privately I cheer them on. They are Davids taking on the Goliaths of the modern world. But at some point, someone inevitably will be hurt, innocents will die, and the moral calculus that justified Guernica, Dresden, Hiroshima, and the World Trade Center attacks will come to haunt us. David, lest we forget, eventually became a Goliath himself. If we are to keep our humanity, violence at all levels must be renounced, once and for all, as Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King so eloquently taught. Chewing whole grain rice, nourished in the ancient soil of the Gauls, the Goths, and the Moors, I rededicate myself to the spirit of peace or shen wa the harmony that begins in our own heart and mind and radiates outward into the family, community, and planet, eventually filling the entire cosmos.

Day 11 - Amsterdam to Boston

“What you seek in vain for, half your life, one day you come full upon, all the family at dinner.”

Thoreau

At the airport, Adelbert and I exchange fond farewells. After picking up a present for my 85-year-old mother (a T-shirt emblazoned with three fancy Dutch cats) and some souvenirs for Gale and the kids, I prepare to board the plane for home. Security is heightened, and we are taken aside individually by an airlines representative and questioned about the purpose of our travel and where we have been. I would like to explain:

I have come to Europe to trace an epic journey that began generations ago with the Jeffersons, the Hemings, and Condoleezza Rice’s forebears, as well as the Adamases, Peases, and other relatives in my own family, who bravely left (or were abducted) from their homelands; brought rice, wheat, peas, and other seeds on their harrowing voyage; and passed down recipes over the generations for Hoppin John (rice with black eyes peas), squash rolls (Abigail Adam’s speciality), salt-rising bread (my mother’s favorite), brown rice and wild rice croquettes (done to perfection by my wife), rice crispy treats (my daughter’s gem), and other health-giving staples.

Rice and wheat are the twin towers of the plant world, the king and queen of global agriculture, the giant redwood and sequoia of all the fruits of the earth. Like a great tree of life, they have stood tall from time immemorial, nourishing virtually all of our forebears and ancestors and sheltering hundreds of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Natural and organic brown rice, whole wheat, and their products (including amasake, mochi, rice cakes, rice syrup, rice miso, rice bran oil, sake, shoyu, spaghetti, pasta, couscous, bulgur, sourdough bread, pita, bagels, doughnuts, cookies, cakes, pies, pastries, and many others) may come to a sudden, violent end if GM varieties are introduced into their midst. We must speak out and help prevent the world food supply from being hijacked.

I am concerned that patenting of genes, seeds, and plants will turn into a new form of slavery that will disenfranchise millions of farmers and their families around the world. I am deeply worried that my new grandson, and other children around the planet, may never have a chance to savor these foods when they grow up, nor pass on the same immortal spirit and dream of generations past. That is why I am flying today and the purpose of my visit.

But the moment of truth passes, and I dutifully declare that I am traveling for a combination of business and pleasure.

The flight itself, praise be to God or Allah, once again is uneventful. The plane touches down at Logan Airport on schedule and, like Jefferson, carrying a contraband spray of amber rice from the Piedmont, I am waved through customs. I devoutly pray that our natural and organic rice crop will survive the GM threat, and a fresh transplant of Jefferson’s rice onto American soil will never be needed.

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