



FREUDS

# The Future of Food

# A Wake-Up Call To The Spoon Masquerading As An Airplane

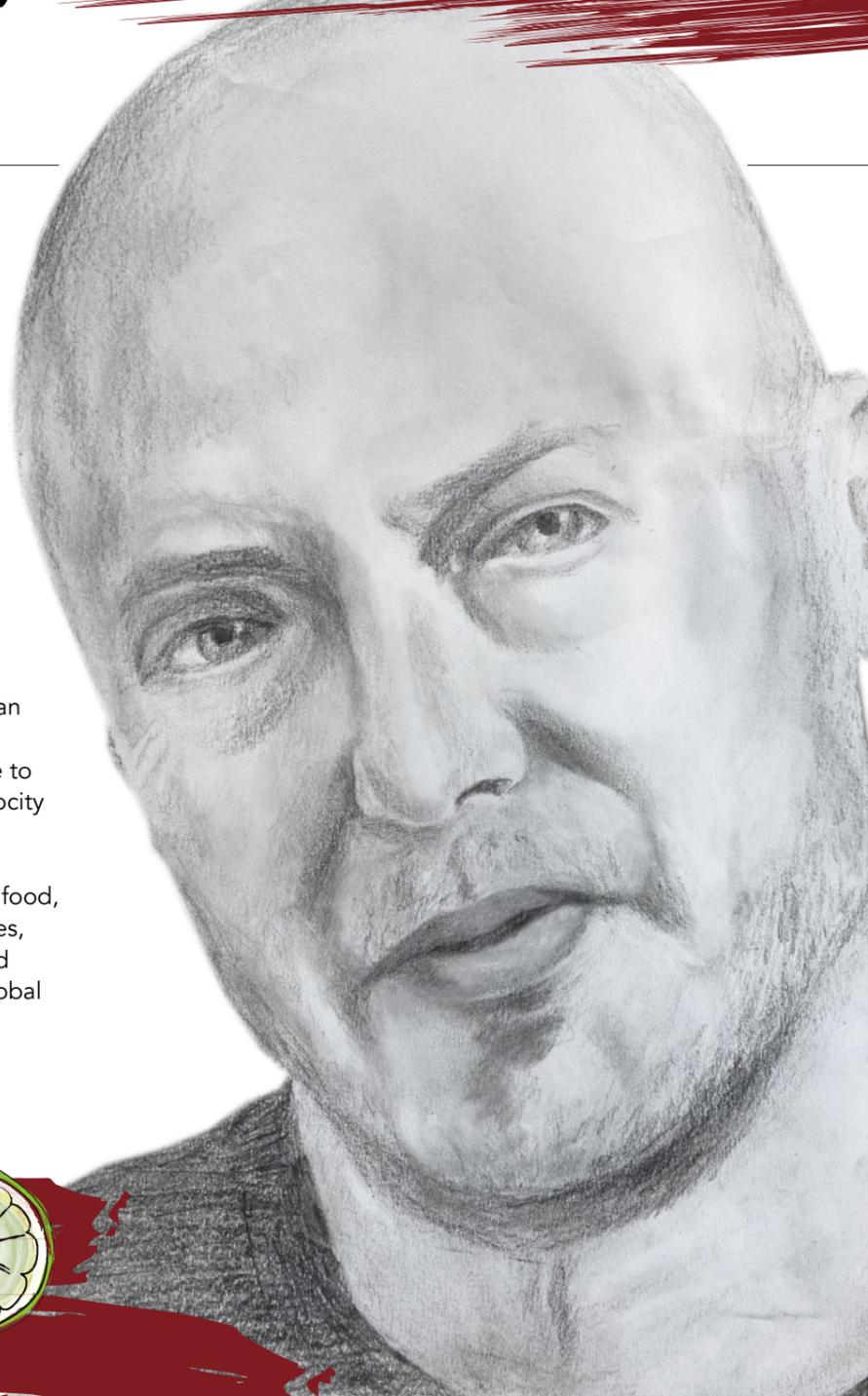
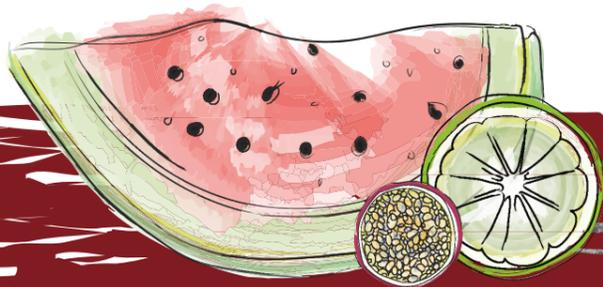
## MATTHEW FREUD

Chairman, freuds and The Brewery

Like others writing for this journal on the future of food, I am not dependent on a crystal ball to try and divine meaningful insights into how our dietary habits, supply chains and ecosystems are likely to evolve.

We know so much more about the subject than the previous generation's speculators; with more data and smart algorithms, it is possible to accurately predict the likely direction and velocity of travel.

Much has been written about the business of food, the cultural significance, the health imperatives, the efficiencies of production, distribution and supply and, perhaps most importantly, the global



imbalance of a world where half of us waste enough food to feed the other half.

But the area of specific interest to me has seen much less analysis and left few obvious signposts to a brighter future.

The psychology of food is my growing obsession.

In the absence of any formal qualifications in this area (and a tangential surname most definitely doesn't count), I can only base my observations on personal experience and some insight gleaned from discussion and the relentless internal dialogue that I (and everyone else?) have every day.

I start almost every morning with an emphatic and determined commitment to eat well. There is a long list of exclusions and it is with confidence that I pledge to adhere to whatever skinny-inducing regime I am convinced will reintroduce my ribs as a visible part of my body. But apparently I am not in charge of what I eat. Some ethereal force likes fat and salt and sugar apparently much more than vanity and health. On a good day, sometime after dark, all good intentions evaporate (there is some correlation with alcohol consumption and irritation), I will indulge in regretful quantities of verboten food groups and tasty portions of self-loathing.

Why?

What is going on in my sub-conscious that overrides the agreements that I commit to with a usually

forceful tenacity?

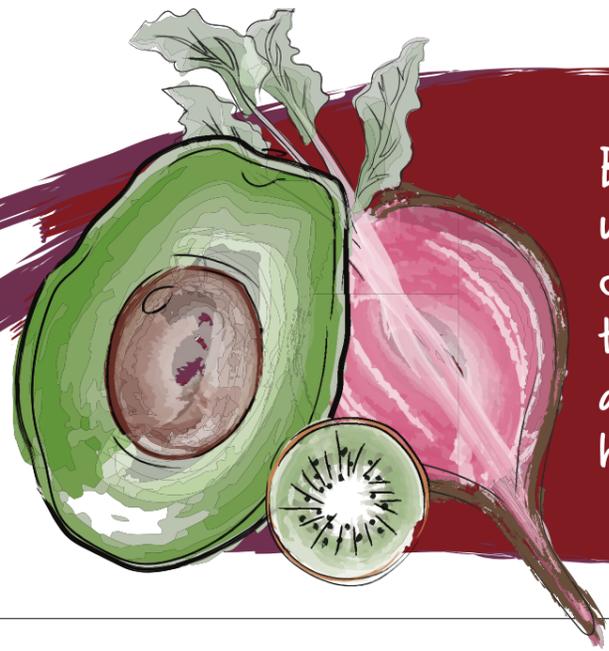
I mean, it's just food, right?

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The clues to this Gordian riddle, I believe, lie in early childhood.

Looking back at my own kids' early relationship with food, I was struck by how thoughtlessly we teach our young to eat; and am convinced that the almost endemic corrosion of our relationship with food, and its devastating consequences on physical and mental

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health, can be averted in future generations with greater parental awareness.

I am guessing mothers can attest to the complexities of the earliest interactions with babies and food, but my experience begins with those first attempts at persuading a six-month-old to open his mouth to accept a spoon. "Not unless it's an airplane! With accompanying sound effects." The negotiations have begun.

Perhaps the first dawning awareness that these tiny beings have some power, some control, over the benevolent giants that attend to them. How many of us had children who fell into the "I'm so sorry, she only eats pasta with butter and cheese. Just hates vegetables. I'm sure she will grow out of it, I just haven't got the energy for the fight"?

Oh, and how we fight, and cajole, and bribe, and punish, and reward.

Food isn't food in early childhood, it's currency. Having established in the airplane days that we won't force feed them; children understand that their entire power dynamic revolves around what they will and won't accept as nourishment. We become expert at the art of the deal: three more mouthfuls or you can't get down from the table, eat your peas not just the chips, if you don't finish your plate there will be no pudding, just try it - I don't like it - you haven't tried it

- it's disgusting - please try it - I want some sweets - if you try it and you don't like it you can have

some sweets - I tried it, I don't like it - no you didn't - aaaaaaarrrrrrggggggghhh.

Make no mistake, this deal is with the devil, in its proxy form of sugar - for centuries the western world's drug of choice and with a highly motivated dealer network of exhausted parents.

Is it surprising that so many young people develop eating disorders at a point in their lives where they feel powerless? Those early experiences must inform our adult relationship with food. Food is a reward, a punishment, a freely prescribed medicine for almost all ills. Surely if sweets and snacks are such a frequent consequence of tears and pain, those associations must leave a behavioural legacy. Comfort food isn't actually a food group, it's our way of restoring those early experiences of recovery from trauma.

And there is so much more. By creating food as a universal but restricted currency, we give our children their introduction to theft and duplicity, to secret habits, to guilt and shame. Throw in those raised eyebrows when a child whose weight is outside the norm eats or doesn't eat that extra donut and I believe we create a toxic cocktail that gives most children no shot at a healthy relationship with food in later life.

At how great a cost?

Eating disorders, obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease are all part of what had bought health systems to their knees before COVID. But the really unbearable cost is surely in mental health. Those screaming internal dialogues that play out daily as we recreate childhood negotiations of what we will eat and when and how much, not massively helped by the near 200 billion dollars per year spent by food companies who almost exclusively encourage us to eat more, more often.

The final sucker punch to all this is that conventional talking therapies are largely ineffective at treating food related issues as so much of what influences us is informed by experiences so early that they are mostly pre-language, and reprogramming feelings without verbal coding is near impossible.

My hope for the future of food is a societal wakeup call that our children's approach to parenting will not succumb to the spoon masquerading as an airplane, the gateway drug to years of well-intentioned abuse of the power of food.

Personally, having finished this article I am going to reward myself with a Curly Wurly, don't expect to see my ribs anytime soon.



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