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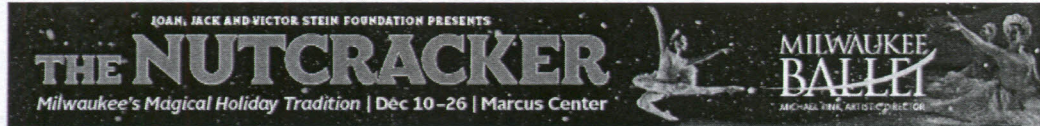
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The Ultimate "Do-It-Yourself-er": Deborah Niemann visits Milwaukee

November 3rd, 2011 | By Jennifer Kaufman
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Deborah Niemann

Recently, I've embraced the domestic arts, crafting and living a more frugal and sustainable lifestyle. I've been making my own soap and other bath and beauty products for nearly four years. I have a fledgling herb garden on my window sill. And I've become obsessed with cooking, baking and locally grown produce. But I'm an amateur compared to long-time homesteader Deborah Niemann.

Niemann and her family live on a 32-acre farm in rural Illinois. They built their home where they raise goats, cows, llamas and chickens, which provide a majority of her family's meat, dairy, eggs and fiber. Niemann and her family cultivate an organic garden and orchard. Niemann also finds the time to make her own soap, cheese, canned goods and bread. A long-time speaker and writer on homesteading, Niemann is now sharing her expertise and experience in the

primer Homegrown and Homemade: A Practical Guide to More Self-Reliant Living.

Homegrown and Homemade is divided into several distinct sections, which include information on everything from sustainable gardening to maintaining backyard chickens. Each of these sections provides detailed steps from initial planning to the use of one's bounty for household and family needs.

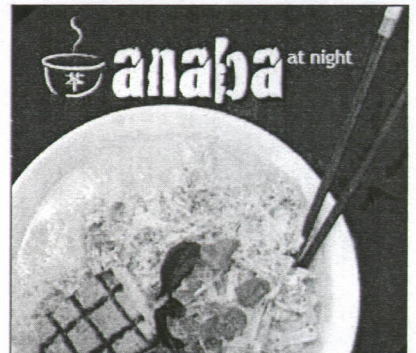
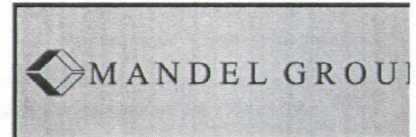
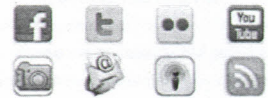
Her advice is practical, down-to-earth and thorough and she probably does more in one day than I do in an entire month. While reading Homegrown and Handmade, I wondered if I could ever amend her teachings to my city slicker ways. I made mayonnaise using Niemann's recipe, and I was very impressed with the results. It was so simple! I will never buy mayonnaise from the grocery store again.

Fortunately, I was able to learn more about Deborah Niemann's life, farm and her book, when she visited Milwaukee's Boswell Book Company on Tuesday, Nov. 1.

To an intimate gathering, Niemann began the discussion saying she didn't start her life farming. Her parents grew up on farms but wanted to be more "modern," thinking that farming was for the less educated. So they embraced a very different lifestyle, which included eating a lot of convenience foods. Niemann told the audience she was sickly as a child, and she did not have any raw vegetables until she was older.

It was her first pregnancy that prompted Niemann to focus more on a better diet. She once thought eating a cheeseburger with pickles was sound nutrition because she was getting all four food groups in one meal. But soon was reading food labels with a more discerning eye and began baking bread from scratch.

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As her family grew, she and her husband decided to move their brood to Cornell, Illinois where they live on a farm called Antiquity Oaks. Her husband kept his job as a professor and Niemann focused on the farm and homeschooling her children.

Niemann erroneously thought running a farm would be easy. "People have been doing this for over a thousand years; how hard can it be?" she joked. As she soon discovered, running a farm isn't easy, she said, but it is rewarding.

Niemann discussed reasons why many have embraced growing and making food from scratch, the main reason being their health. Though living a more sustainable lifestyle has gained a lot of attention, Niemann doesn't think it's going to be a fleeting fad. As both gas and food prices continue to increase, people are going to look for ways to stretch their dollars. She also said this lifestyle isn't just for those who live in rural areas, naming several cities (including Milwaukee) where people are raising chickens and maintaining urban farms. Ultimately, "It's about attitude, not acreage," she said.

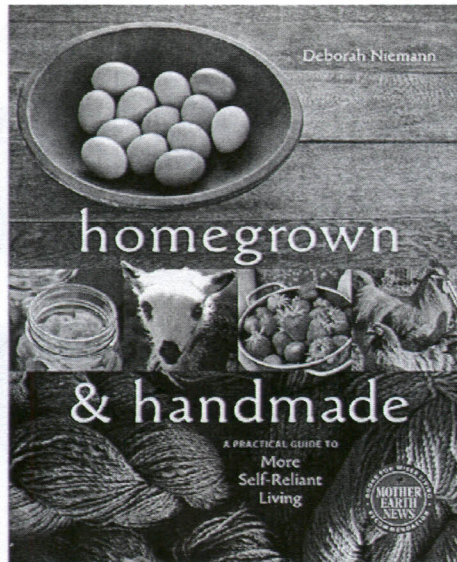
After Niemann's discussion she kindly answered questions from the audience. She said the next project she wants to tackle is aquaponics, building her own fish farm. She also admitted, that yes, she does buy some things at the store including coffee, vinegar, sugar and flour.

Whether one is merely curious about this lifestyle or has already embraced the "homegrown and handmade" way of life, Niemann's book and her visit was interesting, informative and inspiring.

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