

From the Kitchen

8 September 2010



What can we believe of what we are told? How do we judge the truth? It is not easy.

In Victoria, the law says that a producer of orange juice may add cane sugar to the packaged juice and proudly write on the container: “100% pure orange juice. No added sugar”. This is to make up for any amount by which a batch of oranges may fall short of containing a specific amount of natural sugars.

It is fair enough to add sugar to orange juice to ensure a minimum level of sweetness. But why lie about it? And why enact a law which makes that lie acceptable?

What else are we told lies about because the law allows it?

We may consider the case of orange juice inconsequential. But what leads supposedly sane people to pass laws in this country to classify Aborigines under flora and fauna? Yes, they did! Until, in 1976, Aborigines were to be included in the national census in Australia, in NSW at least they were counted as fauna¹.

Then there are the lies we tell all the time without thinking, because these lies are entrenched in the language. One of the most insidious, and ultimately one of the most dangerous, is the term ‘junk food’. It is an oxymoron. The items it refers to are not food – they are at best a confection and at worst a poison.

‘Food’ should be reserved to describe those things which nourish us and maintain or improve our health. ‘Food’ should not be used to refer to things which diminish or challenge our health. Thus, fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, fresh fish and meat, whole-grain bread and unadulterated water are clearly foods. They give us what we need for health – the nutrients our bodies need for growth, maintenance and repair. Some processing, such as cooking, will not change their status as food.

Take a nourishing, whole grain and strip out all the fibre and nutrients and make the remaining starch into bread and you no longer have food – you have a confection. Consuming this confection requires nutrients for metabolism without giving the body anything valuable in return other than some carbohydrate.

We tell a lie when we call this ‘food’.

When we buy a meal from a fast-food provider, we are not buying ‘junk food’, we are buying junk or confection. To continue to use the words ‘junk’ and ‘food’ together, lends the legitimacy of the latter to the former. While such meals may contain some things our body needs, on balance its ingestion may demand more from us than it gives.

We are told lies about the meaning of ‘natural’. We believe that because something is natural it is good for us, and advertisers work on reinforcing this belief. Cyanide is natural, as are foxgloves and oleanders and uranium and sugar cane. All but the last of these is poisonous.

Sugar cane juice is a highly nutritious (natural) food. It contains minerals and vitamins which the body needs to metabolise the sugars it contains. Unfortunately, what we are sold as the manufactured product of this natural food source is a highly refined sugar with, usually, no nutrient value. Again, metabolising it requires our bodies to supply nutrients. 'Raw sugar' is not raw – it is white sugar with some colour (and sometimes flavour) added.

These days 'corn flour' often isn't; it is usually highly refined and finely milled wheat starch. It may tell you this on the packaging, but why should the 'manufacturer' be allowed to call it 'corn' flour at all?

We are sold things with labels such as "vitamin enriched" or "nutritionally enhanced". What we are usually buying is something which has been stripped of its nutrients and has then had a fraction of these nutrients added back in. Why? Because in doing so the producer/manufacturer makes a bigger profit and can make the product sound more desirable.

We are told that tuna is an excellent source of omega-3 essential fatty acids – vital to our health. Fresh tuna is. However, we conveniently buy tinned tuna which does not indicate on the packaging that much of the oil has been squeezed out, to be put into gel capsules and sold separately for a fortune (around \$170 to \$250 per kilo).

We are told repeatedly that cow's milk consumption is important for its calcium content to promote healthy bones. What we are not told is that the calcium contained in cow's milk cannot readily be used by the human body and may in fact contribute to osteoporosis because of its phosphorus content; and that there are other, vegetable, sources of calcium which do not have this negative effect². And it has been published in the medical literature that the higher the *per capita* consumption of cow's milk is in a country, the higher the incidence of osteoporosis.³

And then there are the political lies: boat people throw their children overboard in order to be taken in; governments need to curtail our rights and freedoms to protect our way of life from terrorists⁴; protecting the earth from our polluting activities will harm the economy and reduce our standard of living. It goes on and on.

These lies we are told and the ones we tell ourselves are the greatest threat to our health, wellbeing and sanity and to the cohesion of our society. How much is the truth worth? Does any value still lie in the truth?

1. see for instance: www.smh.com.au/news/national/when-i-was-fauna-citizens-rallying-call/2007/05/22/1179601412706.html
2. see for instance: www.news-medical.net/news/2005/09/12/13120.aspx
3. see also: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1985, Vol. 41, p. 254
see also: "Lunar Osteoporosis Update", November 1997^a
4. see for instance: [*The Quest for Justice*](#)
 - a. "[O]n a nation-by-nation basis, people who consume the most calcium have the weakest bones and the highest rates of osteoporosis. ... Only in those places where calcium and protein are eaten in relatively high quantities does a deficiency of bone calcium exist, due to an excess of animal protein. ... This increased risk of hip fracture was associated with dairy calcium. If this were any agent other than milk, which has been so aggressively marketed by dairy interests, it undoubtedly would be considered a major risk factor."