

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY
Nelson, B.C. Canada**

December 18, 2008

Title: Whopper Virgins / Backyard Chickens IV (Farming in the City VI)

**Producer/Host - Jon Steinman
Transcript – Pat Yama**

Jon Steinman: And welcome to Deconstructing Dinner, produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. This show is heard on radio stations around the world, and I'd like to welcome a returning radio station to our lineup of participating stations and that's CFRO Vancouver Co-op Radio.

Today's episode is the final *newly-produced* broadcast of 2008. For all of the participating radio stations carrying Deconstructing Dinner, you can expect *encore* presentations until we broadcast an all-new show for 2009 on January 3rd and airing on stations during the following week.

We'll end 2008 on a both some serious and inspiring topics.

On the first half of the show we'll examine a marketing campaign launched by fast-food giant Burger King. The campaign is called Whopper Virgins and is broiling up quite a bit of controversy throughout North America.

And in the second half of the hour, we'll air Part IV of our ongoing Backyard Chickens series, when we'll meet Madison Wisconsin's Tashai Lovington and Robert Lugai, the producers of "Mad City Chickens" – a recently released documentary film on the rapidly growing backyard chicken movement sweeping throughout North America. Tashai and Robert spoke to me over the phone from Madison and we'll listen in on some clips from their film.

If you miss any of today's broadcast, it will be archived on our website, at deconstructingdinner.ca.

increase music and fade out

JS: Well you may have already heard the buzz that's been stirring in newspapers and over the internet about the recent marketing gimmick launched by Miami-based global fast-food giant Burger King (BK).

The marketing ploy is called Whopper Virgins and is being waged via the internet and the website whoppervirgins.com, as well as a series of television ads directing people to the that site.

So what is all the controversy? Well Burger King hired PR company Crispin-Porter and Bogusky to take a film-crew and travel the globe with the purpose of introducing Burger King's flagship Whopper hamburger to people in some of the world's most far-flung places. The film which is posted on the Whopper Virgins website shows Inuit of Greenland, Transylvanian farmers of Romania, and the Hmong of Thailand as the subjects for the Whopper feeding experiment.

Of course it was hoped that Americans would be fascinated to see the reactions of such 'foreign' people tasting this homogenous staple of American fast-food - the hamburger.

Now of course the controversy is pretty understandable as this on-line film is essentially celebrating what so many people view as cultural genocide - the same cultural genocide that is said to have been taking place ever since American *fast-food* culture began spreading its influence around the world in the past few decades.

Here's an audio clip of one of the television ads and internet videos that is now directing viewers to the Whopper Virgins website.

Music in background

BKVG: What happens if you take Transylvanian farmers who've never eaten a burger and ask them to compare a Whopper versus Big Mac in the world's purest taste test. Will they prefer the Whopper? These are the Whopper Virgins.

JS: And here is another audio clip of the Whopper Virgins commercials.

Asian music in background

BKVG: What happens if you take remote Chiang Mai villagers who've never seen a burger. Who don't even have a word for burger and ask them to compare - Whopper versus Big Mac in the world's purest taste test.

The Whopper is America's favourite. But what will these people choose. The Whopper Virgins will decide.

JS: Located there on the campaign's website is an approximately seven minute video that showcases the film crew's Whopper expedition.

And so without further commentary to spoil your own opinions of this film, here is the audio of that film found at whoppervirgins.com. Now this clip has

been shortened to about six minutes because some segments of the film do not translate well from video to audio, and following this clip, we'll then listen in on a production that we here at Deconstructing Dinner put together that uses clips from this film, and by incorporating *other* audio, we hope that *our* version, tells a more revealing and perhaps truthful tale of *why* this Whopper Virgins campaign is causing so much controversy. But first, here's the original.

audio from www.whoppervirgins.com

Director: The hamburger is a culinary culture. And it's actually an American phenomena.

It's been very interesting to see their reaction to the hamburger because they've never seen such a foreign piece of food before and they didn't even quite know how to pick it up. And they didn't know how to, well from what end to eat it.

Marilyn: Well what we're doing is really talking to people who have absolutely no awareness of either Burger King or McDonald's advertising and have never experienced a hamburger, a typically very difficult people to find. And it would be impossible to find them in the United States.

James (Art Director): You can never really get an entirely pure taste test from a group of Americans because they've been exposed to so much advertising, burger culture, those types of things for such a long time.

Film Crew: You're going to go all around the world and find people that are really off the grid who perhaps don't have televisions, who don't have access to, you know restaurants and what not, who really live outside of things. And you're going to see how they feel about a taste test between the Whopper and the Big Mac.

Marilyn: My role is to really make sure that the taste test portion adheres to strict claim substantiation rules and manner in which the research is conducted.

FC: Well we needed to do the taste test close enough to the store so that by the time the product was purchased it could be eaten within 15 minutes.

FC: I mean this is a big experiment. We're documenting it and we'll see what happens now.

Tester: Thank you for agreeing to take part in our product test. We will ask for your opinion on two hamburgers that you will be testing today.

FC: It was really interesting. We were able to see these peoples first bite of a hamburger.

(video clips of people inspecting hamburger)

FC: They come underneath and do the one hander and then they look at it. It took them awhile to understand the dynamics of it. And so that was fascinating to see because we take it for granted because we live in America where hamburgers are consumed, you know like a staple.

(clips of people eating hamburgers and indicating their preferences; mostly the Whopper)

FC: People seem to really like the Whopper. So going back to their villages and sharing things about both of our cultures is something we really want to do.

FC: We're going to be making food for people who have never seen hamburgers before and we're going to see what they think.

FC: How are we cooking for them? Like what, I mean, what...

(clips of the broiler journey and of it being flown by helicopter)

FC: Well, Anthony somehow arranged to get a real-life Burger King broiler, custom-made somehow to go portable. And we just asked a lot of them whether they ever had heard of a hamburger and they have not. They've never seen a hamburger, they don't know what it is.

I'm really curious to see their expressions.

(People being asked if they would like to try the hamburgers and showing them how to pick it up; comments of good)

(pics of getting the barbeque going)

FC: This is the number obstacles we've hit. You know like a/c outlets; every country has a different a/c outlet. Well every country seems to have a different propane adapter outlet and we're not being able to – we thought we had the correct outlet for this one and we didn't. We had the good one for Thailand but not here.

FC: I think we're all set.

FC: Has he ever eaten a hamburger? (No).

FC: They told us yesterday, no we want to experience other things in this world too, we want to taste other things, we want to see other people, we want to see other things. And they've been extraordinarily gracious to us.

Kevin (being helped on with new white coat): There is? How did I get this honour? It takes a month to make one of these, the guy just hands it to me.

(clips of staff eating native food and comments on how wonderful and delicious it is; natives telling staff to come again and that they are always welcome)

FC: A hamburger, have you ever eaten a hamburger? No? Okay.

Native: Good.

FC: How does that compare to seal?

Native: I like seal meat better.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner. And that was the audio of the film found at whoppervirgins.com – the website of a recently-launched marketing gimmick for global fast-food giant Burger King – headquartered in Miami, Florida.

Now while it was likely not the intention of Burger King or of its hired PR firm, this film has not only revealed the sheer ignorance found within our Western culture, but it has managed to proudly celebrate the cultural imperialism that North Americans have become so famous for.

Now perhaps for those who support the idea of the globalization of fast-food, this film is probably not offensive, but regardless of where one stands on this controversial topic, there are a few things that do require some critical questioning.

For one, in the early stages of the film, a member of the crew is recorded expressing his excitement at the de-virginizing of the Hmong people. He's heard saying, "They've never seen such a foreign piece of food before, and they didn't even know quite how to pick it up. And they didn't know how to, well from what end to eat it."

JS: Now Maybe I'm being a bit picky here, but, of course the Hmong of Thailand have not seen a 'foreign' piece of food before, that's what makes it 'foreign!' Yet this guy in the film is acting like he's come across the most amazing discovery – that there are people in the world who don't know how to eat a hamburger.

Now the ignorance of this individual from the film crew becomes even more pronounced when he tells viewers that:

FC: "You're going to go all around the world and find people that are really off the grid, who perhaps don't have televisions, who don't have access to restaurants and what-not, who really live outside of things."

JS: Now given how clearly western-centric the film-crew is, I think it's a pretty fair question to be asking who, of those represented in the film, are the ones "living outside of things."

soundbite

JS: Another point within the film that also caught my attention was the Inuit of Greenland who were one of the cultures targeted for the Burger King Whopper experiment. An elderly man is asked whether he has ever tried a hamburger before, and upon saying no, he is seen unwrapping the hamburger and taking a bite. But what may have gone unnoticed for many viewers, is that there in his other hand, was likely the first piece of non-reusable food-packaging waste that this Inuit man had ever been responsible for. But to take criticism of this film to another level, and as promised, here is a Deconstructing Dinner exclusive – in which we've taken the clips from the film that you just heard, and using audio from other sources, we've created what we believe to be a more revealing and *truthful* account of what the Whopper Virgins film *truly* represents. This is Deconstructing Dinner.

ABC News: A fast food ad cooking up a lot of controversy and it's still campaign Burger King went all around the world to find people who had never tried a Whopper or a hamburger in their lives. Now that taste test is getting bad marks from critics around the globe.

BKWW: What happens if you take remote Chiang Mai villagers who've never seen a burger. Who don't even have a word for burger.

Fast Food Nation: The obesity epidemic that began in the United States during the late 1970s is now spreading to the rest of the world with fast food as one of its vectors.

BKWW: These are the Whopper virgins.

Film Crew: You're going to go all around the world and find people that are really off the grid who perhaps don't have televisions, who don't have access to, you know restaurants and what not. Who really live outside of things.

George W. Bush: America has need of idealism and courage because we have the unfinished work to be master of the world.

BKWW: Burger King brought burgers to the farmers in the Transylvania region of Romania, to tribesmen in Iceland, even a remote area of Thailand, with a film crew in tow.

FC: We're going to be making food for people who have never seen hamburgers before and we're going to see what they think.

Fast Food Nation: The values, tastes, and industrial practices of the American fast food industry are being exported to every corner of the globe helping to create a homogenized international culture that sociologist, Benjamin R. Barber has labeled "McWorld."

FC: Hey, would you like to take a bite? Did you try it?

Fast Food Nation: The fast food chains have become totems of western economic development. They are often the first multinationals to arrive when a country has opened its markets serving as the avant-garde of American franchising.

GWB: And the soul of a nation finally speaks the institutions that arise reflect our own.

FC: Would you like to try a Whopper? Like this.

GWB: America's ideal does not mean independence from one another. Our nation relies on chains.

FC: We just asked a lot of them have they ever heard of a hamburger and they have not. They've never seen a hamburger, they don't know what it is.

BKWW: These are the Whopper Virgins.

GWB: Did our generation advance with humiliation of peoples of the world.

Fast Food Nation: And that very interest serves the rest of our own dominant corporate society. It creates a willingness, it creates a receptivity, it creates a certain type of a proclivity of certain more affluent classes around the world which then thrusts those other societies in directions that are probably very dysfunctional to the rest of their population.

Fast Food Nation: Here they are spending millions of dollars going around the world trying to find hamburger illiterate people and the Food and Agriculture organization can't even raise a thirtieth of the funds that it needs in order to end hunger permanently on the planet.

FC: We're going to be making food for people who have never seen hamburgers before. We're going to see what they think.

BKWW: These are the Whopper Virgins.

Fast Food Nation: As the fast food industry has grown more competitive in the United States the major chains have looked to overseas markets for their future growth. The McDonald's Corporation recently used a new phrase to describe its hopes for foreign conquest – global realization.

GWB: And the leaders of government would long have it's a control need to know. To serve your people you must learn to trust America. Start on this journey of American economic progress and justice and America will walk at your side.

FC: It was really interesting. We were able to see these peoples first bite of a hamburger.

Fast Food Nation: The U.S. State Department now publishes detailed studies of overseas franchise opportunities and runs a Gold Key Program at many of its embassies to help American franchisers to find overseas partners.

BKWV: These are the Whopper Virgins.

GWB: We felt the unity and fellowship of our nation when we came under attack and our response came because we consider ourselves a chosen nation. And we can feel that same unity and pride whenever America acts and the victims encountered America chains.

FC: It's been very interesting to see their reaction to the hamburger because they've never seen such a foreign piece of food before.

GWB: The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of America's vital interest in all the world.

BKWV: What happens if you take Transylvanian farmers who have never eaten a burger and ask them to compare a Whopper versus a Big Mac in the world's purest taste test.

Fast Food Nation: Between 1984 and 1993 the number of fast food restaurants in Great Britain roughly doubled. And so did the obesity rate among adults.

Fast Food Nation: The missionaries who came in 1820 attacked our traditional system. So they replaced that system with a new system and transformed our language to meet their desires, which of course was coercive assimilation. So we were compelled to think and behave like them. And that continues today. When the Americans officially took over in 1898, they banned our language having already destroyed or attempted to destroy our religion.

GWB: Some I know have questioned the global appeal of America's vital interest though this time in history, four decades defined by the swiftest advance of destructive power ever seen is an odd time for doubt. Americans of all people, should never be surprised by the power of our ideals. We do not accept the existence of other culture because we do not accept the fates of other people.

FC: Hey there, would you like to take a bite? The Whopper challenge? Did you try it?

FC: I'm really curious to see their expressions.

BKWV: These are the Whopper Virgins.

Fast Food Nation: In order to diminish fears of American Imperialism, the chains tried to purchase as much food as possible in the countries where they operate. Instead of importing food, they import entire systems of agricultural production.

GWB: We are led by events and common sense to one conclusion. The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the destructive power in other lands.

FC: We're making food for people who have never seen hamburgers before and we're going to see what they think.

Fast Food Nation: It seems wherever America's fast food chains go, waistlines start expanding.

FC: How are we cooking for them? Like what ...

FC: Well Anthony somehow arranged to get a real life Burger King broiler, custom made somehow, to go portable.

GWB: By our efforts we have lit a fire. It warms those who feel its power. It burns those who fight its progress. And one day, this untamed fire will reach the darkest corners of our world.

Fast Food Nation: The traditional German restaurant is rapidly disappearing in Germany. Such establishments now account for less than one-third of the German service market. McDonald's Deutschland Incorporated is by far the biggest restaurant company in Germany today more than twice as large as the nearest competitor.

GWB: Now is the urgent requirement of our nation's security and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to dictate culture, and support the growth of tyranny in our world.

FC: It's been very interesting to see their reaction to the hamburger because they've never seen such a foreign piece of food before.

GWB: We will inform other governments by making clear that American success will require their own people. America's dictators will guide policies. There is no justice and there can be no human rights without servitude.

BKVV: These are the Whopper Virgins.

GWB: Today America speaks anew to the peoples of the world. All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know the United States will promote our culture, our own style of government, and economic oppression. When you stand for our ideals, we will stand with you.

Fast Food Nation: The obesity epidemic that began in the United States during the late 1970s is now spreading to the rest of the world with fast food as one of its vectors.

GWB: Because we have acted in the great tradition of this nation tens of millions have died in a wave upon wave upon wave upon wave upon wave. Millions more will find it.

JS: This is Deconstructing Dinner. You were just listening to a short production we produced as an alternative take on the recent Whopper Virgins marketing gimmick launched by Burger King. The global fast-food giant employed a PR firm to take a film crew around the world and feed their flagship hamburger – the Whopper, to remote populations who had never before seen or even heard of a hamburger. That film is posted at whoppervirgins.com.

And the re-worked version that you just heard used clips from the seven minute Whopper Virgins film, alongside segments from a speech by American President George W. Bush, which Deconstructing Dinner re-worked to tell what is a more revealing story than the original speech. And you also heard passages from the book "Fast Food Nation" by Eric Schlosser and clips from an ABC News segment about the Whopper Virgins campaign. The last two pieces of music were the works of Denmark's Rumpistol and San Diego California's, The Album Leaf.

And as a conclusion to this first half of the show that has been critically analyzing this latest public exposition by Burger King's marketing department, I will propose that Whopper Virgins ranks as one of the greatest displays of unintelligence ever seen in the world of marketing, and not even because of the content of the film, but because of the *name* of the campaign.

The word 'Virgin' is most often used to depict purity and something uncorrupted. And so by choosing the title 'Whopper *Virgins*,' Burger King has indirectly admitted that the introduction of the Whopper to people who have never tried one, amounts to corrupting what was once pure.

And I for one, surprisingly agree, with Burger King.

audio clips from Whopper Virgin test

Deconstructing Dinner Advertisement:

Female: The average cable or satellite TV bill runs a viewer on average \$45 per month.

Male: The average daily newspaper subscription - \$30.

Female: Internet - \$35.

Male: Magazine subscription - \$30.

Female: A book a month - \$24.95.

Male: Deconstructing Dinner's weekly one hour episodes – free.

Female: We believe in media being accessible to everyone, regardless of income. And for those of you who are able to support this radio project, please donate when you can or become a voluntary monthly subscriber by visiting deconstructingdinner.ca. Or for more information on how to send a cheque or money order, call 250-352-9600.

Male: Deconstructing Dinner, helping ensure a perpetual harvest.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a syndicated weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio, CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. If you missed any of today's show you can visit us on our website at deconstructingdinner.ca, and you can drop us an email at deconstructingdinner@cjly.net.

Now as the industrial food system continues to prove its failures to the world through the ongoing recalls of meat products due to food safety concerns, an alternative to the industrial food system has been brewing at the grassroots level, and is one that we've been covering here on the show since March 2008.

The ongoing Backyard Chickens series here on the show, is a sub-series of the Farming in the City series – one that has been sharing innovative ideas for creating a more transparent and local food system. As grassroots movements never receive quite a lot of mainstream exposure, perhaps the turning-point for *any* grassroots movement is the day when a film is produced about that moment that effectively shares the stories of those involved.

Released just this year is the feature-length documentary film – “Mad City Chickens” is the product of two and a half years of work by Tashai Lovington and Robert Lugai of Madison, Wisconsin.

“Mad City Chickens” is the first feature-length film by the duo and having now viewed the film on a number of occasions, it's clear that their work is

likely going to be helping communities throughout North America and encouraging them and others to take up backyard chickening, or, as was the case documented in the film, encourage local governments to overturn what many have been calling outdated bylaws that prohibit the raising of poultry within city limits.

Tashai and Robert spoke to me over the phone *from* Madison, but before we hear from them, here's a quick clip from the film that nicely captures the high energy that "Mad City Chickens" brings to what is still a relatively quiet backyard hobby.

audio clip from Mad City Chickens: "And yet make note of a most singular phenomenon now taking shape across suburb and city. From backyard eggs to man's new best friend, the chicken is forging a fresh place in the pecking order of human importance."

Robert Lugai: There have been a handful of films on chickens. Most of them are "how tos," like how to do the basic information, how to raise chickens. There hasn't really been anything that focused, as far as we're aware of, that focused on the backyard chicken movement and on the people who keep chickens in the city. So we do have some "how to" information in our film so people interested in learning how to do that, there's some basic information in there. But the focus is definitely on the people and the movement.

Tashai Lovington: And the backyard chicken movement, kind of in general.

JS: The movement that Tashai and Robert speak of was that of the Madison Chicken Underground as they were *once* called. Now I say once, because, it wasn't long ago that the City of Madison prohibited the raising of poultry within city limits. But in 2004 that all changed, and Mad City Chickens began to form.

TL: We had backyard chickens in the past and we found out how fun they are and that they can be just like a pet, a regular pet like a cat or a dog and also give you food. So that was kind of the start of being interested in it ourselves and it kind of evolved from there. And then finding out about the Chicken Underground in Madison and that people actually had chickens in the city was huge. It was a big eye-opener for me and I thought that was really awesome and I wanted to be a part of that.

RL: And we tried to contact them. They're a loosely knit organization called the, it wasn't an organization just a group of people that called themselves the Madison Chicken Underground. And basically they were in hiding, it was not legal in Madison to keep chickens within the city limits. And so people hid the chickens in their garages or in their backyards. There was an article that was in the local newspaper about them and so we tried to, through the newspaper, get a hold of these people and they wouldn't give out the names

which is wonderful. They wouldn't tell and so we weren't able to contact them.

TL: It wasn't until after the law had been changed that we were able to get in touch with these people.

RL: And they came forward, they were definitely were interested in talking about their chicken experiences and stuff. So that's how it got going.

chicken tweets

audio clips from movie:

Female: People were hiding their chickens and keeping them for in-production and having this chicken underground.

Question: Did you have chickens before they were legal?

Answer 1: Yup.

A2: Yes I had chickens before they were legal.

A3: I have chickens I've had for a very long time.

Q: And how long have you had chickens?

A1: (laughing) Way before they were legal.

A2: That was 12 years ago.

Q: And how many did you have?

A1: I don't know, I don't want to say. I think I had, let's just say I had around 20.

A2: I had a carpenter friend make a little coop in the back of my garage and I had a few chickens there and I talked to my neighbours and they were like fine with it. In fact they thought it was kind of cute. I didn't know anybody else had chickens in town and then years and years later when it still was not legal I had a garden for one of the non-profit organizations and people would go on the garden tour and they would see the chickens and they thought that was really cool. And it's amazing how many people said – oh you have chickens too. So I thought if that many people are saying, "you have chickens too" there must be a lot of chickens in Madison.

JS: The changing of the Madison bylaw is shared early on in the film to help capture just how young the backyard chicken movement is. One of the most

exciting clips in the film was footage *from* Madison City Hall, when the bylaw was changed. And here's Tashai Lovington introducing the clip.

TL: The people in Madison were actually pretty lucky. They did get together and have meetings and sent some e-mails to alders and things like that. But they were able to get an alderperson on board with them early in the process and so that really helped them out. And they were also able to contact, we have a big university here, so they were able to contact the Poultry Science people and they got on board as well. They wrote a letter to the City Council and so that really helped out to have some people kind of behind the scenes and in the government themselves, for it. I think if they didn't have that support it would have taken a lot longer. I think they probably could have done it still but it took a year and I think it would have taken a lot longer if they didn't have that support.

Female: We're geared up to get the ball rolling in Madison and get our own laws changed here.

Male 1: We weren't really certain what we had to do to challenge the law or to change the law. We did get a number of folks together who were chicken owners under the name the Chicken Underground.

M2: So I got involved and went down to the City Council to a couple of meetings with Brian and we signed our petitions and were there for support.

M3: We did e-mail the alderman who had a neighbour who had had chickens for years and he was very interested in helping us out.

M4: The alder at the time I think was Matt Sloan was the one that actually pushed it through.

City Council Meeting Chair: The City Council meeting of May 4th, 2004 is called to order and the clerk will call the roll. Then on to Item 8 - Creating Sections in the Madison Ordinances relating to keeping of four domestic fowl as an accessory use to a single family dwelling, Alder Sloan.

City Council Meeting Matt Sloan: On nearly every measure, if you put a chicken up next to a dog, we'd be crazy to allow dogs in this city. They're louder, they're more aggressive, and they put out a lot more stuff that's a lot more toxic than your average chicken. So if we're going to be a reasonable city and think about people living close to each other and the problems that we may create, I think if we are not going to allow chickens we may want to start getting rid of some other animals that we currently allow. So I know some of you are not going to vote for this and I certainly respect that. I hope the majority of us do and maybe next year for the holiday party we can have omelet's.

City Council Meeting Chair: Thank you Alder Sloan. The motion is to adopt with the amendments. All in favour with alder Sloan say "aye" (ayes). All those opposed "no" (nos). Chair believes the "ayes" have it. The ayes have it, the ordinance is adopted.

soundbite

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner, where you're listening to clips from the recently released film "Mad City Chickens" alongside segments from my interview with producers Tashai Lovington and Robert Lugai.

Now while the film does centre around the backyard chicken movement in Madison Wisconsin, there are many other cities in North America where backyard chickens are deemed illegal by municipal bylaws. Tashai and Robert explain.

TL: The major cities in the U.S. like New York, L.A., Chicago, places like that actually do allow chickens and have allowed chickens for as long as I know. Madison is unique in the respect that they're one of the first, not the first but one of the first that had changed their laws. They were illegal and they had changed their laws recently to now have backyard chickens be legal.

RL: There certainly are what we call chicken cities where there's organized groups of people who are big time supporters of backyard chickens like Seattle and Portland and Austin, San Francisco. They all have backyard chickens and they either have gotten the laws changed or the laws were never there to prevent them from having chickens. But since Madison was able to get the laws changed and the way the bylaws were written with the four hens, no roosters, certain distance from neighbours yard - your coop has to be placed certain feet away, because of that it has definitely been an inspiration for other cities in the U.S. Like just recently, Ann Arbor and Michigan and Fort Collins, Colorado passed similar chicken laws and they based their laws on what Madison had done. There's still the majority of cities in the U.S. do not allow city chickens but there's a huge movement, people contact us all the time asking for help in getting their laws changed. And it's not just the U.S. We've been contacted from coast-to-coast, in Canada, in the U.K., in Australia, it's a world-wide movement. And we had some folks in Halifax, Nova Scotia trying to get their laws changed. We've certainly been contacted by a number of people in British Columbia, in Vancouver area and other cities and locations in British Columbia interested in getting the laws changed to allow backyard chickens. So it's a huge, huge movement right now.

JS: Now while maintaining a flock of backyard chickens within a city is receiving heightened attention here in North America, raising backyard chickens was once the norm, and especially during the Great Depression. Now perhaps this topic is even timelier today, as it's predicted that we are

about to enter into a depression, yet again. And here's Tashai and Robert along with a clip from "Mad City Chickens."

RL: Certainly during the Great Depression there was a huge migration of people from rural areas to the city looking for work, looking for money. And they brought with them their animals and so chickens, goats, things like that. That was the norm. People had backyard chickens, people raised chickens for meat and eggs, and they'd sell their eggs for money. They'll barter with other people.

Female: As the Depression came on in the 1920s, more and more people were interested in raising chickens and bartering back and forth because money was tight and so he was able to actually create a pretty good business out of a hobby. Which for him was very fortunate because in 1929 there was a run on the bank. If you've ever seen "It's a Wonderful Life" you'd know exactly what happened when George Bailey, when people come in to get their money out and the moneys loaned for people for other businesses or other housing projects and the banks' doors closed. So my grandfather had a wife and five children to feed and he was very lucky he was able to turn the chicken business into something that could support him and his family.

RL: And then, after World War II life got a lot more busier. People were working more and there was more activities going on and also people became more concerned with having a green lawn and a pink house and a "nice looking neighbourhood." And so the chickens and other animals fell out of favour. And so the zoning laws came in and they were classified as agricultural animals and so they weren't allowed within the city limits. That is one of the hopes for our film is to help change outdated laws so that small flocks of chickens are actually not considered agricultural but more like backyard pets.

JS: Much of the "Mad City Chickens" film is shot in Madison, Wisconsin. But the film does take audiences to other parts of the United States. And here's a brief segment featuring producer Robert Lugai and clips from the film.

RL: When we first started to make the film we were just thinking well it'll be nice local film on Madison and the chicken folk.

TL: Maybe 20 minutes long.

RL: Yeah. But then we, through them we started to make connections and we were able to connect with the McMurray Hatchery, which is in Webster City, Iowa and they are well-known for having rare breed chickens. They're one of the largest hatcheries that ship by mail so lots of people know about them. So we were able to go there and get some rare footage of behind-the-scenes at their hatchery and go through the whole process and interview the people there.

McMurray Hatchery:

Male: We ship in a minimum of 25 and we do that because we need that many birds in a box for the birds to be warm and to make it through the mail in good shape. But on a cold day we may put 27 or 30 birds in to make sure that they're warm.

Elizabeth: Hi I'd like to place an order.

MH: Okay, what town are you in?

E: We live in Madison, Wisconsin.

MH: Your first name?

E: Elizabeth.

MH: Okay. And what can I get for you?

E: Well we'd like two Silver Laced Wyandottes. All females.

MH: Okay.

E: Two Buff Orpingtons.

MH: Okay.

E: And twenty-one Araucanas.

MH: Okay.

E: Will the chicks be shipped to my house?

MH: No, they're going to go to the Post Office and the Post Office will call you when they arrive.

RL: And from there we met Cheryl Long who is the Editor in Chief of Mother Earth News Magazine and she invited us down to her home in Topeka, Kansas and so we went there. Through other people we learned of the Austin chicken movement in Austin, Texas and we went down there and interviewed some people. And right during the middle of our film production, the bird flu issue hit the media and everyone was concerned about chickens. In fact we even considered stopping the movie or whatever because we thought well you know this is too big an issue, people aren't going to be interested in chickens or they're going to be too scared. But we decided to go ahead with it and through Cheryl Long from Mother Earth News, she connected us with Dr. Michael Gregor who's one of the leading experts in the world on bird flu and he's based in Washington D.C. But we contacted him and he happened

to be travelling doing a speaking tour so he was in Michigan which was one State over from us here in Wisconsin and we were able to drive over there and connect with him and do an interview with him.

JS: "Mad City Chickens" does also take audiences to other parts of the world where raising chickens within urban settings has long been the norm. I asked Tashai and Robert what *they* learned by exploring the role of chickens abroad.

RL: Well that chickens are no big deal. Keeping chickens, it's part of every day life, children grow up raising the chickens and collecting the eggs and selling the eggs and selling the chickens.

TL: Also that they're huge and they are kind of the world food economies. Almost every, I don't know about every country but every continent definitely has chickens. They're big.

RL: So the difference between us here in the States and Canada where we have cities that say no chickens you know, the difference in thought is that here the chickens are considered agriculture whatever and not pets. And not that they're necessarily considered pets in these other countries where we interviewed the people but they certainly are part of the system, part of life, part of the way of life.

TL: Even in the cities, they're not segregated.

RL: Yeah, that's the biggest difference is that we tend to want to separate the agriculture from city life and that's not how it is. We interviewed a gentleman from Gambia, we interviewed someone from Sri Lanka, Mexico, and France and all the countries there wasn't that separation of agriculture from everyday living.

soundbite

Male: Chicken is something, which is very important. Like for me, coming from Africa everyone has chicken. And how important chicken is I'm going to tell you that. When you have a very important stranger the first thing you're to do is this – give him a chicken. Yes, give him a chicken.

Female: And there, there would be my cousin who was a farmer and he had chickens, plenty of chickens. And during the day they would be free and every night, the wife of my cousin would gather them. And I'm talking about like 15 years every year I would go so every year there would be this ritual for two weeks to see this woman going out and gathering the chickens. And what I noticed that this woman who worked for maybe 40 years with chickens started to kind of have the shape of a chicken, like this round shape and little legs and it was very, very disturbing almost like to see this kind of woman taking a shape of a chicken. And also when she would gather them

she would have this kind of same walk. And then the voice would be like almost tuned to the chickens. And the chickens would really know so they would come and go to the place where she wanted them to go. And it was like hilarious to see.

JS: Now that last clip was one of the funnier moments from the film, and it did spark some tongue-in-cheek concern. Is it true that when being around chickens quite often, one may *become* like a chicken. And so I asked Tashai and Robert what they think about such a prospect.

TL: Well they say that some people start to look like their pets (laughs) and I think that there are definitely people who, I don't know if they look like chickens but they definitely like birds.

RL: Here's the fear, not that they'll look like the chicken but that they will become addicted. There is really something almost hypnotic about having a small flock of chickens in your backyard especially you know if you're living in the city and it's not a normal thing which usually it isn't. There is something magical almost about chickens and if you watch a lot of television you can probably get rid of your TV because it's chicken TV. You go back there and you can watch them for hours. They're very humorous creatures and the way they behave because you know if you have a dog or a cat, they're both predators you know. But chickens are prey animals so they're kind of quirky and skittish and yet at the same time, extremely friendly. And if you're sitting in the backyard and if you're feeding the chickens every day and stuff they get to know you and they know you mean food and so they'll come if you're sitting in the backyard. I've had our chickens come and sit in my lap or sit on my shoulder, whatever or do a dust bath right next to me if I'm sitting on the ground. It's a wonderful experience, it really is. And so that is the fear is that you will become addicted to your chickens and you'll only want more and won't be able to do anything else in your life because you'll be hooked. You'll be hooked on your chickens.

TL: Yeah you become a chicken person. You may have picture of your chickens in your wallet that you show people and they talk about chicken TV and how much you like watching your chickens. And people who don't have chickens might think that's a little odd.

JS: "Mad City Chickens" has screened at a few film festivals already, and if you yourself would like to *watch* "Mad City Chickens" or host a screening in your own community, both Tashai and Robert are encouraging people to contact them.

TL: Well we had a premiere at the Wisconsin Film Festival here in Madison this year. Recently in November it played at the Urban Issues Film Festival in British Columbia and was also accepted to the Victoria Film Fest that runs January 30th through February 8th. We submitted it to several others, now

we're still waiting to hear back. And we're planning a DVD release in the spring of 2009.

RL: We hope to have a limited theatrical run too. We will certainly have a showing here in Madison and there are several other people who have expressed interest. There's no set dates yet. We're looking maybe Santa Barbara, California and Austin, Texas, San Francisco, mainly chicken towns we're looking to have it screened. And of course we are certainly open to - if there are organizations or groups or universities that want to have a public screening they can contact us and in that they pay our travel expenses we will come along with the film too and speak and answer questions.

JS: And here's Robert Lugai on the feedback that has been received since the film was released.

RL: It's been quite positive actually. We're thrilled. From what people have told us and what we've experienced. Like at the Wisconsin Film Fest it was a huge hit and people still come up to us talking about how they've never experienced a film at the Film Fest quite like that. We hyped it up too, we had fun with it. We handed out buttons and we handed out little marshmallow peeps and chocolate eggs and stuff. It was really a fun experience. People had really liked the film and other people are anxious to get it screened in their towns so they can get their laws changed. We keep hearing that all the time so that's coming. People can start contacting us now and definitely the public screening, it wasn't available for awhile but now it is.

JS: And in closing out this Part IV of the Backyard Chickens series, here's Tashai explaining how since the film was released, the City of Madison was inspired to expand their backyard chickens bylaws. Tashai is followed by a clip from the film.

TL: Our film actually was the inspiration for the Madison laws to be expanded this year. They actually expanded it. It was just single family homes that could have chickens and they actually expanded it to be multiple family homes as well, like apartments and condos, if the landlord agrees.

Male: We need to stop intensely confining these animals and move back to more traditional methods and raising a few chickens in a backyard isn't going to hurt anybody.

Female: I think the future is really going to be the small-scale backyard farmer.

M: I love being able to go out there and walk back in with food in my hands. That's the same reason we do the garden. Just having those trees, just the connection to the land.

F: If we can, if we can get enough of these breeders, enough small flocks going, we can recapture even genetics that we thought were lost.

M: My whole experience with chickens I think has changed my life in that I had never really been part of the political process. And our work to change the law made a real believer out of me. I really didn't think that was something that was possible for someone like me to challenge the city and make a difference.

JS: And that was Tashai Lovington and Robert Lugai alongside clips from their film "Mad City Chickens."

You can learn more about the film by visiting the film's website which will be linked to from the Deconstructing Dinner website at deconstructingdinner.ca and posted under the December 18th, 2008 broadcast.

And you can stay tuned for more installments of our Backyard Chicken series in early 2009.

ending theme

JS: That was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner produced at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host, Jon Steinman. I thank my Technical Assistant, John Ryan.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener. Support for the program can be donated through our website at deconstructingdinner.ca or by dialing 250-352-9600.