

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits. Two bright orange carrots are positioned diagonally across the lower half of the frame. To their right, two thick stalks of green asparagus stand vertically. Scattered around these are several ripe raspberries with their characteristic red color and bumpy texture. In the background, a single red apple with a small stem is visible. The entire scene is set against a warm, textured wooden surface, creating a rich, naturalistic composition.

# Soulful Vegetarian Cooking

A Southern Girl's Meaty Love Affair and Romantic Journey to Natural Foods on Instagram™

by Cynthia E. Nevels



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Three years ago I was privileged to meet Cynthia and her family. A super single mom who gave up her life, as she knew it, to move her family to Houston to fight for the life of her son who was in need of a double-organ transplant. Immediately a friendship developed as we quickly discovered similar interests despite our vastly different upbringing. When it came to food, Cynthia's story was quite different from my own.

I was a preacher's kid who was raised a vegetarian by my parents. My grandmother who loved to feed me was not a vegetarian and loved to feed me chicken! Sundays were the best because she would take us to church, show us off to her friends, and then bring us home for the Sunday meal that almost always included some sort of chicken. That was my introduction to meat.

As I left home and became an adult, I chose to abandon vegetarianism for two reasons. One, I loved chicken. Two, eating meat was more convenient.

I always knew in my heart that one day I would return to vegetarianism but had no time frame in mind. Although I ate meat when I was out or at a friend's house, I never became great at cooking meat myself. So, I rarely cooked meat at home. Fourteen years ago I decided to stop eating red meat because I would feel so lethargic and my gut would feel heavy after eating red meat. That was the beginning of my journey to return to my vegetarian roots. I always felt vegetarianism was the healthier way of life for me so my transition was easy. But it would only take place when I was ready and not a minute before.

After her son's successful organ transplants, Cynthia and her family returned to Dallas. With unrelenting focus Cynthia, in short order, fully transitioned herself and her children to a vegetarian lifestyle. She soon learned that in order to remain a vegetarian she was going to have to get in the kitchen and add some spice, color and cultural zest to her plant-based meals.

I am in awe of what she has been able to do in the kitchen and with her pop-up restaurant, Soulgood. This book will share delightful authentic recipes that only someone with a love for preparing healthy and tasty meals could deliver.

Cynthia's delicious recipes and her passion to create tasty vegetarian cuisine using organic and local products have inspired me to return to my roots and a plant-based diet. I have no doubt that if you are thinking about, are currently in the process of making the transition, or are searching for recipes to prepare for your vegetarian friends when they come for dinner; this book will deliver some delightful savory meals that will put you on the A-list. Enjoy!

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This book is dedicated to NeceSSar and  
Doretha Clark for the memories, Summer  
fun, and food.

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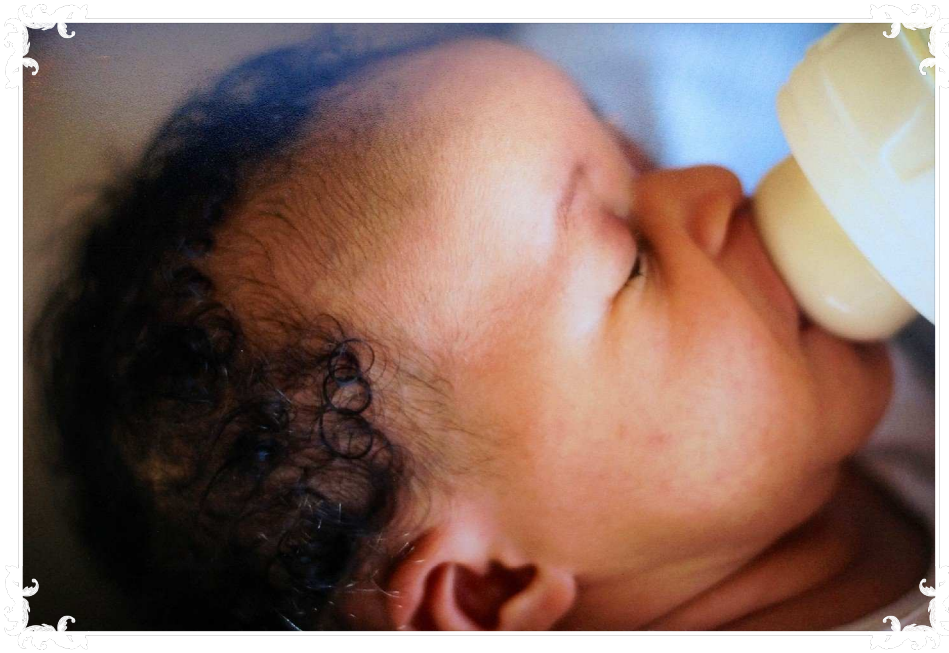


I am not a doctor, nutritionist nor a dietician. I am a natural food enthusiast, a mom, a blogger, an entrepreneur, an amateur chef, and an amateur Instagram photographer. In 2009, I launched a personal journey to live a healthier lifestyle and to become a vegetarian. I wanted to fulfill my commitment to a whole foods, plant-based diet; one meal at a time while living in the Deep South, finger licking bar-be-que country called Texas.

As a divorced single-mother of three, one of whom was born with Cystic Fibrosis, I have found this journey to be a steep hurdle filled with loops, turns and deep fried temptations that I could not have imagined when I started this journey.

I wrote this book to help others find ways to be successful with their transition. Those who are in their 30's and 40's who have eaten meat with their meals two, three and sometimes four times a day. It is designed for those who may have recently gone to the doctor to hear your lab results are abnormal, you are flirting with diabetes, or your blood pressure is way too high. Perhaps, you have been overweight for years after having your children and you are sick and tired of basically being sick and tired. Maybe, you just want a change because your taste buds have changed and frankly the Colonel just isn't doing it for you anymore. There are millions of people who are thinking about or are in the midst of progressing to a healthier meatless lifestyle. This simple book provides a look into my discoveries along the journey to transition from a carnivorous diet to a vegetarian lifestyle. If nothing else, I hope you have fun with the recipes and a chuckle at my revelations about how personal food is to each one of us.

I shared my journey on Instagram as a means of turning this journey into an artistic expression and inspiration to others. I hope you enjoy the story and the photos from my life.



My daughter Alexandra at seven days old. Courtesy of Kristin Greenlee Photography

Why did I make the decision to remove meat from my diet? Most people ask me this question when they learn I don't eat meat. The question that follows, "Are you doing it for religious reasons?" Initially, I had two reasons for the lifestyle change. The first was simple; it had everything to do with my children.

In 2007, at the age of 37 I found out I was pregnant with my

third child. After the initial shock and awe I began to do the math and calculated a number that simply made me sit down in my chair at the kitchen table. I realized when my third child turns 18 I would be 55. My mouth was to the floor. What was I going to do with a teen in my fifties? I realized then, I had to make a change.

Before I learned the news of the pregnancy, I had successfully

lost 70 pounds through diet and exercise. I have always struggled with my weight since high school and so it was easy for me to gain weight due to my love of all things bready, buttery and sugary.

What I didn't know in high school is that I was living with Graves' Disease. Thus, getting pregnant meant my hormones would be out of control and so would my weight. I began researching ways I could help sustain my healthy lifestyle, healthy eating and exercise while keeping my hormones in check without taking too many prescriptions while I was pregnant. I wanted to take more control of my health, to build strength and endurance to keep up with a newborn and decrease my dependency on prescriptions. I began to read research and books on vegetarianism and veganism. I had not heard of whole foods nor of plant-based diets in 2007, but I had heard about the vegetarian lifestyle and I was curious about it. I was curious to see if I could drop the pork ribs slathered with sauce.

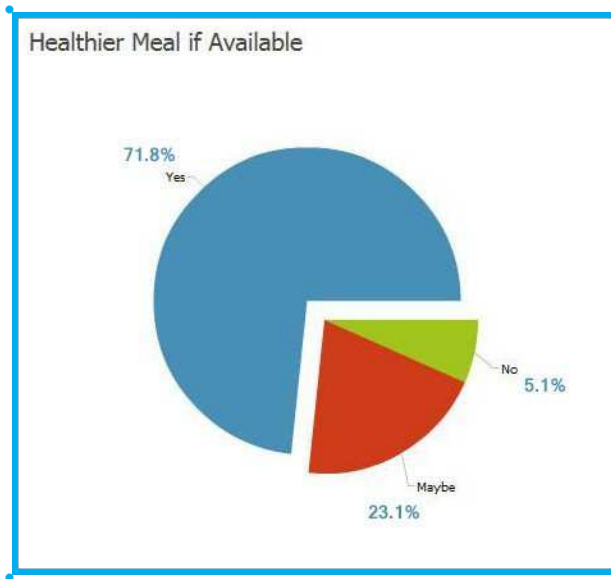
My daughter was born in 2008. In 2009, I watched two movies that changed how I looked at food and nutrition for the rest of my life. I watched Food, Inc. and Fast Food Nation. I was horrified by the treatment of animals, by the damage we are imposing on the Earth, and how filthy meat processing can be - figuratively and literally.

As a mom of a special child, I have to keep a keen eye on sanitation to keep germ transmission and infection to a minimum for my son with Cystic Fibrosis. It made me sick to learn how meat is processed and the stages it has to go through before it hits my plate. I was disgusted and frustrated!

Why did I change? Why did this have such a profound impact on me at that time? I changed because I wanted to be able to

live a healthy and strong life. To live long enough to see my daughter grow up. I wanted to be able to minimize my chances of having a stroke, becoming a diabetic or having high blood pressure. I wanted to do my part with my modest home to have a positive impact on the environment.

If my \$200.00 in meat purchases every month was cut to \$0.00 and re-directed to purchase locally grown organic produce; then I felt I could contribute to help improve the environment in some small way. That was something I could get behind. These were life decisions that seemed rational to me at the time.



71.8% of respondents said they would eat healthier if more options were available.



When you are young you eat what your parents give you. If you are in the Deep South, you eat meat. I grew up in the city. In the city, we ate meat and lots of it. We would have fried chicken, chicken fried steak, Salisbury steak, ham steak, bar-be-que ribs (which are sacred in the South) chicken nuggets, meatballs, meatloaf and liver. We ate it all growing up. We had no choice. We didn't know anything else except what our mother put on the table and if we didn't like it – too bad. You ate what your parents fed you.

So, I grew up loving the smell of fried chicken and grilled steak. Don't get me started on the intoxicating smell of bar-b-que. The smell of bar-b-que makes my mouth water instantly. I would eat ham and cheese sandwiches with Kraft mayo almost daily in my Scooby-Doo lunchbox. I ate fried bacon and pork chop sandwiches when I visited my great aunt, Lorraine, in Fort Worth, Texas. Every meal consisted of a meat or two that was filleted, broiled, baked, fried or grilled. In the '70's and '80's in my home, in my neighborhood, and in my city vegetarians weren't seen nor heard of outside of an occasional comedy sitcom on television that may have mentioned an herbivore in a punch line. I had never heard of the word vegan nor did I know what the word meant until I reached the age of 37.

It takes 27 days to turn action into a habit. It takes 37 years to develop a love affair with meat that is truly difficult to sever.



*My younger brother, Clarence Nevels, II and I eating beef tacos  
after a long Saturday filled with pee wee league soccer,  
cheerleading and football in 1979.*

In the summers, I would leave the city and head to rural Marshall, Texas to stay with my grandmother and grandfather. We didn't have a farm, we didn't have a great deal of money but what we did have was a large family. My grandmother had fifteen children and a couple of my aunts were close to my age. Well one aunt is a month older than I am. There were numerous mouths to feed and the best way to feed a large number and ensure they were all satisfied and full was to incorporate fiber and carbohydrates. We ate a lot of beans, potatoes and bread in Marshall, Texas.

I can remember it was rare to see a tomato, lettuce and I never saw brussels sprouts at my granny's –

which was just fine by me. But, I did see rice, corn and sugar. Meat was not as prevalent in rural East Texas for us because it was too expensive to feed steak to ten to twelve people at every meal so we were fed more grains, legumes and sugars. What I remember is that I never gained weight in the summer at my grandmother's. I would usually be thinner when I returned home to the city. I now equate that to a leaner diet and extensive outside playtime and exercise with my family and friends.

We would play hopscotch, red rover, baseball, jump rope and had foot races from sun up to sun down. I remember the adventures and play time fondly and realized as I got older I never

really missed eating meat very much when I was away from the city. Today, I love beans and legumes of all kinds. Perhaps, that stems from my time at my grandmothers.

However, when my brother and I returned to the city a week or two before school started in August, we would return to our fast food habits and love affair with meat. Burgers and fries, pizza with double meat, Kentucky Fried Chicken, beef tacos, and chicken fried steak with cream gravy on Sundays. By the time Christmas arrived, my brother and I were two sizes larger and a great deal less active. I retreated to my room to read books and we both would spend four hours every Saturday morning from 8:00 a.m. to noon watching cartoons and eating two bowls of Captain Crunch with whole milk and bacon.

When I talk about a whole food and plant-based lifestyle or my vegetarian menu items at my pop-up restaurant I find there's an emotional response that is triggered in many. My restaurant was created to serve carnivores and herbivores. All are welcome in my opinion. The common responses I hear are, "I can't give up 'my' meat," or "I have to have 'my' meat," or something interesting like "...that sounds healthy and good for me, I should try it but I have to have 'my' meat."

Aside from bread, there is no other food or food category that intimately connects with us than meat. It becomes a part of who we are and represents so much about our personal selves.

Eating meat and the select cut of the meat is very personal. Many of us have learned over 15, 20 and 30 years which meat part we like and which part of the animal we prefer. At meal time, there are some people in your family for whom you can guess which meat part they prefer – wing, thigh, breast or shank. Like a spouse who knows which side of the bed belongs to her husband. It is simply a part of you and it is personal.

Have you ever heard someone say at a back yard cookout, "I just gotta have my legumes?" What about, "I can't live without my eggplant!" Those foods aren't as personal as a grilled pork chop over mesquite wood. So, the choice to go from carnivore to herbivore is challenging because it requires a bit of emotional and psychological reprogramming.



*My grandfather and grandmother lived in Marshall, Texas. My brother and I visited in the summers and enjoyed the freedom rural life offered.*



Soulgood's meatless chik'n nuggets sold at our pop-up restaurant.

Case in point, I recently returned to Marshall, Texas for my grandmother's funeral (God rest her soul) who lived to be 86 years old. Following the funeral, we all returned to our family's church for dinner. As soon as I opened the main doors to enter the church's dining hall the aroma hit me like a ton of bricks. Boom! The smell of southern fried chicken sent my mind into nostalgia. Memories of my childhood where on Sundays my grandfather would prepare fried chicken for us all after church. Those were the special days during my stay at my grandmother's when we would have meat.

Immediately there was a sense of happiness which filtered into my mind. As a vegetarian working to become a vegan, I have to admit I was tempted for five seconds to just have a taste – a leg for old time sake.

But, I did not. I made my request in the buffet line for “vegetables only, please,” and the church ladies looked at me and one asked, “You must be one of those vegetarian people?” I politely answered, “Yes ma'am,” and she stacked my plate with veggies and red beans and gave me a smile. The next lady serving in the buffet line said, “You want a wheat roll, right?” and I politely answered, “Yes ma'am,” and she responded, “I figured that,” and she placed two

Soulgood's Showdown BBQ Burger.

wheat rolls on my plate. She had a confident look on her face as if to say, "I have read Oprah's magazine missy I know what you city folk like." I will never forget that look. I sat down to enjoy my overcooked broccoli and cauliflower medley, ranch style beans, corn and wheat roll. I enjoyed every morsel and lovingly thought of my grandmother as tears welled in my eyes.







The notion to eat "whole foods" never crossed my mind before 2009. Believe it or not, admittedly, I did not know what "whole foods" meant when I saw the phrase and I certainly did not know what it meant when I visited the grocer with the same name. I simply thought it meant a higher priced head of iceberg lettuce. So, what does "whole food" mean? Whole foods are unrefined foods that have their natural nutrients without chemical additives or minimal processing. Foods such as whole grains, legumes, dark green and yellow/orange-fleshed vegetables and fruits, nuts, and seeds are examples of whole foods.





*Twenty years ago, I did not have a clue what the words  
organic, vegetarian or vegan meant. In my  
neighborhood you ate what your parents fed you.*



Soulgood's Rootin' Tootin' Veggie Burger sold at our pop-up restaurant.

Why are whole foods so important to our bodies? Well, it is all chemistry - really. Remember in science class when you had to learn the periodic table and understand how each element would interact with the others? Whole foods are important to the human body because when consumed in their natural state, without external processing that extracts or kills the natural nutrients or without added additives and preservatives, they can create disease fighting chemical reactions. Some research shows whole foods contain high concentrations of antioxidants, fibers and other phytochemicals that may be protective against chronic diseases.

When I first began my transition from the carnivore diet to a vegetarian lifestyle in 2009 I was hit with an immediate problem. The problem was I could not find satisfaction in the flavors and the taste of my food.

My love for Latin inspired spices, my craving for salt, sugar, and my hankering for a bar-b-que made the initial transition physically and mentally demanding. As a busy mom of three children, a 16-year old who played football and weighed 225 pounds all muscle, the 15-year old with Cystic Fibrosis who required a high calorie, high fat diet and a newborn whom I was raising as vegetarian was quite strenuous. The lack of healthy fast food choices, the expense of organic fruits and vegetables and the physical demands of breast-feeding could knock the toughest competitor off her game.

You are not going to find tasty, organic and healthy meals fast – well at least not with abundance and variety. Your choices are salads, cups of squashy fruits and fries.

If you are accustomed to the fast food “dine and crash” cycle then progressing to a whole foods lifestyle can create tremendous stress when you are working, picking up kids, going to afterschool events and/or attending late business meetings.

The limitations of the market forces those of us who want more whole foods and healthier choices in our diets to become creative and to learn to prepare our foods at home. Have spinach will travel packs.

Let food be thy medicine and  
medicine be thy food.

- HIPPOCRATES





As a busy entrepreneur, I often travel to conferences, meetings, award ceremonies and luncheons. As a vegetarian, I have one beef with caterers and chefs who fundamentally do not understand what a vegetarian or vegan wants when they are away from home.

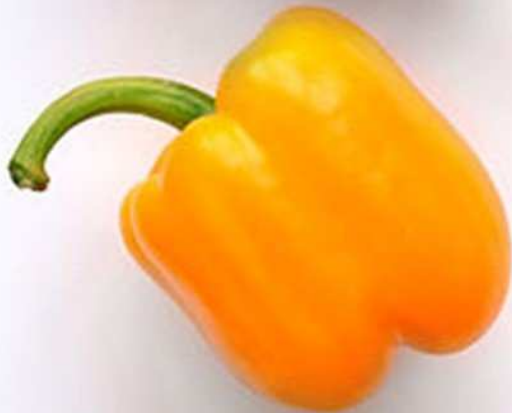
I recently told a friend, who happened to be contemplating the idea of progressing to a vegetarian lifestyle, “If I see one more grilled cucumber with black pepper on a dry tortilla I’m going to scream out loud right in the middle of the buffet line. I swear to bob!”



Have you ever had grilled cucumber? It is not a pretty picture nor is it flavorful and tasty. As a natural food enthusiast, it's almost criminal to me. But, that's my Afro-Latin culture sneaking its head around the Southern soul food curtain. What I am really trying to say is vegetarian food does not have to be bland, colorless and black peppered to appease us.

I feel for vegetarians and vegans who are forced to eat a plate of pasta without sauce 15-minutes after the entire table has began their meal because we had to send

our plates filled with rubber chicken, sweet baby carrots and garlic mashed potatoes back. All we want are delectable goodies, just like everyone else, that are filled with colors that nature gave them and to know the chef put a little creative thinking (oh and seasoning) into the meal.



Colors derived from nature are extraordinarily beautiful – naturally. From the Mexican **capsicum** or sweet peppers we know as bell peppers to the beautifully royal **Solanum melongena** also commonly known as eggplant.

I am neither a dietitian nor a nutritionist. I am simply a natural food enthusiast who gets excited about colors. Scientists will tell you the more colors you add to your plate the more nutrients you provide to your body when consumed.

Colorful foods, for the most part, contain valuable nutrients the body needs from antioxidants you obtain from your rich blue and purple food items to the vitamin C from your yellow and orange foods; or lutein and indoles in your green food items that help to protect your eyes and protect against cancer.



Try to eat whole foods that are rich in color as often as you can afford.

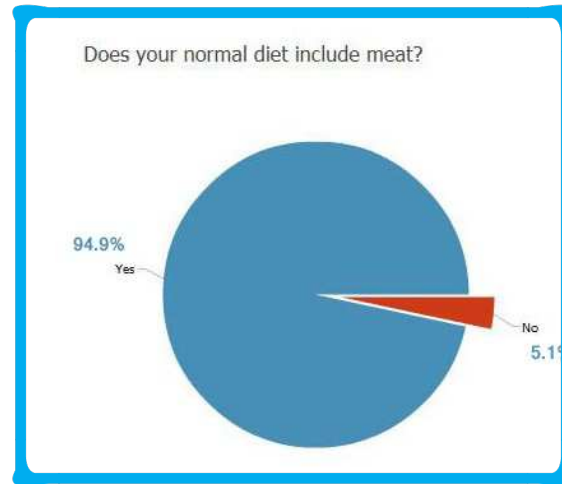
The color on your plate shouldn't solely come from the artwork and designs on the plate. You should focus on including at least three to four rich colors on your plate at each meal. This does not mean drown your meal in ketchup or hot sauce. The richer the color the more nutritious the meal will be and beneficial for your body to use for energy and protection. I like to call these colorful treats Soldiers of Fortune. When you consume nutritious whole foods in the closest state possible to their natural origin (that means don't boil them until they are limp and colorless); the foods will break down in your body more easily and create a chemical reaction that forms a little army that seeks to protect you from and/or destroy the bad things that are not supposed to be there. Think of the soldiers as Dwayne "**The Rock**" Johnson personally protecting your heart, colon and liver. Who wouldn't want **The Rock** protecting them on a daily basis or at least in your kitchen every night – wink wink?

Here is the problem we have when progressing to a new lifestyle, we see the nutritious whole foods in the grocery store, we stand in the produce aisle and stare at them while digging through the cob webs in our left brain trying to remember or figure out, “How the hell do I cook this with a flavor I’ve had before or that I would like?” We are searching for satisfaction, something we can recall or call upon that tells us we will like this and we will be satisfied after we consume it.

The same is true when I walked into the church’s dining hall following my grandmother’s funeral where I smelled the southern fried chicken. I instantly remembered when I was 12-years old walking into my grandmother’s house after church and smelling the fried chicken my granddaddy prepared for us all. We want something familiar or something that conjures a happy memory that tells us, “Oh, yes, I do like this and I want more.”

But, when you are new to the vegetarian lifestyle and colorful whole foods have not been an integral part of your life or eating habits, you don’t have a memory to call on and that presents a challenge for us when it is time to prepare our meals. So, what do we do? We stick to what we know and we walk away from the eggplant and we pick up the tomato or the broccoli. No offense to the broccoli, but three weeks into our lifestyle change we are bored out of our minds with the same old broccoli, lettuce and tomatoes. We convince ourselves this lifestyle just isn’t a good fit. We tell ourselves we are not satisfied. You know that feeling you cannot describe where you want to eat but you cannot decipher what you want so you eat some lame dish to satisfy your hunger but you are still disappointed. Before long we have a leg in our mouth – a fried chicken leg, that is. Later in the book, I’ll share six simple recipes to prepare colorful meals and treats for yourself and/or family. These recipes take little time to prepare and incorporate a variety of nutrients for your body to use to protect and serve.





*In a recent Facebook poll we conducted, 94.9% of respondents stated their normal diet, more than two meals a day, includes animal products or meat.*



Let's get down to the nitty gritty bone size grizzle dizzle concerning the truth about a vegetarian lifestyle. The absence of meat does not make the heart grow fonder. In actuality studies show, the absence of meat makes our heart jump for joy and pump a little more efficiently when we reduce our intake of meat of any color or kind. As I mentioned before, during the transition our mind begins to play tricks on us. We tell ourselves we can't go without that juicy steak on Friday evening during that special dinner with our special someone. We tell ourselves a little Angus burger won't kill us today. How about when we are racing from one afterschool extra-curricular activity or an evening dance recital we tell ourselves the

fried chicken nuggets are healthier than the cheeseburger so we pick it up, go on our way and the hunger crisis has been diverted.

But, let's be honest, reports show you are stopping to buy nuggets at least three times a week not once. What about the meat lovers' pizza? Well, you're purchasing that pizza almost two to three times a month. Our intent to separate ourselves from meat is well intended, we know the doctor told us to eat meat in moderation, lower our cholesterol and reduce the amount of red meat we consume; but when you take a look at the four main corners where you enter the highway to get to your next



You do not have to be a prisoner to PB&J and french fries during your transition.

stop the odds of passing a meat retailer AKA fast food restaurant are stacked against your will. Hey, happiness is right there between the golden arches, right?

Living in a fast-paced meatless society in America requires creativity,

preparation and planning.

If you want to have a successful transition whether you are interested in a full-time vegetarian lifestyle or part-time; you simply have to put your thinking cap on and utilize the precious time given when you can find it. The fundamental difference when cooking with animal-

based products or meat products is you can take a package of meat, wash and go. Go to the grill, oven or deep fryer, add salt, pepper and voila the staple of a meal is practically complete. Finding a meat replacement is becoming easier because more and more grocers are finding shelf space for alternative meat sources for those of us demanding healthier and meatless options.

That is a positive revelation for those of us looking for familiar textures to fill the sensations of eating something tender and satisfying. The problem is the taste of the products on the shelf does not come close to meeting our memory's expectations. We remember

what pork bacon tastes like and the salty goodness that reminds of us Saturday morning breakfast with pancakes and eggs. We remember the texture and flavor of a tender grilled steak basted in garlic butter.

When meat is a fundamental part of your life and you search for meat alternatives to fill the gap the current products on the market fall short when it comes to taste and texture. However, you will find there are natural seasonings, vegetables and preparation methods that can help to satisfy your appetite for flavorful meatless dishes. As an alternative to animal products, there are mycoprotein products, wheat protein or gluten-based



Soulgood's Spice Girlz cookie with vegan cheesecake topping.

products, vegetable-based products, and soy products available on the market.

There are different methods and techniques for preparing the products and producing flavors that are appealing to your palette. The good news is as technology improves the

options for sautéing, grilling to frying improves, too. I have found if you prepare foods with organic and natural seasonings using methods that are familiar to your cultural traditions the transition becomes more feasible and tolerable for new vegetarians.

It takes practice and creativity in the kitchen to get it just right for you and your taste buds. You can creatively infuse a little bit of your culture into your whole foods, plant-based meals. This helps the mind accept the new flavors and helps to relieve the mental stress of thinking of what to eat.



Soulgood offers a variety of tasty and soulful vegetarian burgers.

However, dining out as a vegetarian or vegan will not be as easy. You will have to find restaurants and diners that have conscious chefs and meals that will meet your desire for fun flavors and textures that are satisfying to you. This is truly a personal and intimate experience for food lovers. Experts encourage us to call the

restaurant before arrival to find out what is on the menu and what vegetarian options are available. You can also use a mobile app to find restaurants and diners that cater to your lifestyle, such as Yelp.

If all else fails and you simply cannot afford to

purchase meals that compromise your effort to transition, pack your own meal using one of my recipes in this book and enjoy the freedom and satisfaction of having tasty meals on the go. It helps to decrease your chances of quitting, it is better for your health, and saves you money long-term.



*A direct-to-consumer local food eco-system can increase variety into your diet and promote local economic development.*

Fellow Americans, our luck is changing. As the demand for non-GMO foods, organic foods produced on local and sustainable farms, healthier variety and diversity in the retail stores increases, we are finding more local farmers popping up to meet the growing demand. Many of the farmers have been tilling the local land for generations but a paradigm shift is occurring.

The direct-to-consumer eco-system is taking shape in key markets across the United States. People want fair prices for healthier foods. They want to know where the foods came from and how long it took to get from soil to table. The Internet has helped fuel this economic shift in who

controls the food source.

There is a shift to remove the oversized middle man. As more people like Robyn O'Brien, Michael Pollan and farmer Joel Salatin take center stage to tell the story of the farmer's plight, the dangers of unchecked food processing and the truth about organic farming we start to see more enlightened consumers. Yesterday, an enlightened consumer was Big Ag's worst nightmare.

Enlightened consumers ask too many questions and want to know the details about the process which increases the price tag for food processors, suppliers and retailers and eventually the consumer.





I am grateful for the Internet, social media and for movies that have shed light on such an important topic. The more we know about our food sources, the more control we have over what we eat. Shopping local helps us to get to know the farmer, their practices, their policies and products used to protect the foods we purchase and consume. In some areas, local family-owned farms provide an opportunity for consumers to visit the farm and tour the land to see the process firsthand.

You may not be able to buy while you tour but it is a step closer to the natural

source. Nevertheless, the vast majority of enlightened consumers will simply visit the local farmers market on Saturday morning to find a diverse variety of produce, meat and dairy products that have come 10, 25, to 50 miles away to meet us. That short distance makes a huge difference in many ways from shortening the carbon footprint and helping the environment, to saving money on the transport from farm to consumer which in turns saves us money and helps the local economy through the production of new jobs and taxes paid locally.





As a natural food enthusiast, I have great fun creating nutritious vegetarian meals for my three children using locally grown produce and organic seasonings. I am amazed at how my two sons, who were committed carnivores who vowed never to surrender the smoked turkey leg to a carrot stick, have transitioned to a vegetarian lifestyle without regret.

I bask in the glow of their smiles when they try a new dish I have created, when I introduce magnificent colors to place onto their plates, or add a new vegetable for which they have never seen before and they gobble it up with fervor.

My 19 year old son, who was born with Cystic Fibrosis and is a double-organ transplant survivor, recently told me after dinner, "Mom, I hate to say this, but I hate when you are right." I hesitantly ask, "Why?" He replies, "Because, when you ask me to try one of your new recipes or some new healthy beverage - I like it."

As many of you mothers know, that testament from a young adult can make you feel like a trusted source of something good in your child's life.

It is and has always been my hope that I raise healthy children who respect the land, environment, and their bodies. Americans who adore the beautiful gifts the land produces and provides to us – naturally.

*Cook from your soul, have fun and eat well!*



"I **COOK** because I like to see people **HAPPY**. I am most happy when **PEOPLE** are enjoying my natural creations and their fear of vegetarian cuisine is replaced with wide eyes and big **SMILES**."  
- Chef Cynthia



### 3-Steps to Help You Successfully Transition to Natural Foods

#### Step 1. Go 7 Whole Days

Once you have made the decision to change, it helps to dip your toe into the water before diving into the pool head first. Gradually work your way towards a whole foods, plant-based lifestyle. Commit to eating 1-2 meals and one snack a day which are meatless. Include 2-3 rich colorful fruits, vegetables and nuts. Select which meals or colors you may want to try at the beginning of the week. Remember, a successful transition is about planning not starving. Explore different flavors to see which varieties you and your family may like to try and keep. Make it an adventure.

#### Step 2. Clean and Replenish

Take inventory of the canned, boxed, wrapped and frozen food items you have bought over the last year or so. For some, you may find there are foods that have expired or have never been opened. Clean and remove highly processed foods and meats that contain little color or natural elements. Replenish with natural whole foods. Start with a recipe in mind and create a shopping list from the recipe. Increase the amount of natural foods you buy and decrease the amount of meat, processed and packaged foods. Having natural foods on the top shelf of your fridge forces you to 'prepare' it before it spoils.

#### 3. Plan, Prep and Cook

If you are a busy mom, college student, or professional on the go, thinking about what's for lunch on Sunday is probably the last thing on your mind. We all have busy schedules and we all have to eat (at least a little something.) If you try to transition without planning and prepping you will fail. To be successful during your transition to a healthier lifestyle you must plan, prep and cook your meals early, store to keep fresh and pack to take with you. Creating tasty meals and snacks that remind you of what you love, your culture or down home flavors will help to keep you satisfied.



## Resources

[Farmersmarket.com](http://Farmersmarket.com)

[Eatgreendfw.com](http://Eatgreendfw.com)

[Naturalfoodenthusiast.com](http://Naturalfoodenthusiast.com)

[Natural-and-organic-choices.com](http://Natural-and-organic-choices.com)

[Greenling.com](http://Greenling.com)

[Wholefoods.com](http://Wholefoods.com)

[Sprouts.com](http://Sprouts.com)

[Apps.ams.usda.gov](http://Apps.ams.usda.gov)

[Localharvest.org](http://Localharvest.org)

[Nfmd.org](http://Nfmd.org)

[Allergykids.com](http://Allergykids.com)

[Forksoverknives.com](http://Forksoverknives.com)

[TColinCampbell.org](http://TColinCampbell.org)

[EatSoulgood.com](http://EatSoulgood.com)

[Takepart.com](http://Takepart.com)

[Cdc.gov](http://Cdc.gov)

[Usda.gov](http://Usda.gov)

## Helpful Tips

The term "vegetarian" generally defines anyone who excludes some meat and animal products from her diet, according to Eastern Illinois University.

**Lacto-vegetarians** consume milk, cheese and other dairy products that contain protein, but they avoid meat, seafood and eggs.

**Ovo-vegetarians** eat protein-rich eggs but no other animal products. Semi-vegetarians may eat poultry, seafood, eggs or dairy, but they refrain from eating red meat. Unless you are vegan, your most complete source of protein will be an animal product of some sort.

### Soy Products

Many vegans rely on soy products to get the bulk of their protein. Tempeh, or fermented soybeans formed into cake-like bricks, has a high protein content of 41 grams per cup. Other soy products, like tofu and soymilk, are also good sources of protein. Tofu contains 18 grams of protein per cup while soymilk contains 7 grams per cup. While soybeans offer a lot of protein, the plant estrogens and enzymes can make it difficult to digest.

### Beans

Lentils, chickpeas and other beans are also popular food choices among vegetarians watching their protein intake. A single cup of lentils contain 18 grams of protein and a cup of chickpeas has 12 grams.

### Nuts, Grains and Vegetables

Whole grains and oats, nut products like peanut butter and vegetables such as broccoli can also help you get the variety of proteins your body needs.

Source: Livestrong.com *The Best Protein for Vegetarians*







**Enjoy** some of my family's favorite organic and vegetarian recipes. The flavors are amazing and shopping for the items locally is a memorable adventure for my five-year old daughter.



## Fluffy Coconut Almond Pancakes

Serves: 2

Yield: 6 - 8 pancakes

- 1 cup flour (I prefer organic unbleached all-purpose flour)
- 1 tablespoon sugar (I prefer organic pure fair trade cane sugar or Truvia)
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon raw wheat germ
- 1 cup Organic almond coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons coconut or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon Earth's Balance organic natural buttery spread

\*For a fluffier pancake, sift the flour before mixing.

Directions:

Prep Time: 5 mins

Total Time: 15 mins

- 1 Set out all your ingredients.
- 2 Set griddle to medium-high heat.
- 3 Combine the dry ingredients (flour, sugar, baking powder -- two tablespoons (not two teaspoons as some have suggested), wheat germ, and salt in a bowl and mix well.
- 4 Add the almond coconut milk and oil together in a cup then add to your mixture.
- 5 Mix well, but leave a few lumps in batter.
- 6 Now the pan should be ready for your batter, so melt a spoonful of buttery spread in pan and pour the mixture onto your griddle. These pancakes will require you to shape them into a circle. Luckily, they will not burn quickly.
- 7 Flip [carefully] when you see bubbles in the middle of the pancake and the edges are brown.
- 8 Repeat until the batter is gone, enjoy with warm Grade A maple syrup.



## Bellistic Summer Salad

Serves: 4-6

Yield: 4-6 8 oz cups

- 2 diced green organic bell pepper
- 2 diced red organic bell pepper
- 2 diced orange organic bell pepper
- 2 cups sliced organic cherry tomatoes
- 2 cups chopped organic strawberries
- 1/2 cup chopped banana peppers
- 1 1/2 cups chopped glazed walnuts and cranberries
- 3/4 cup Feta cheese
- 1/2 - 1 cup balsamic vinaigrette

### Directions:

Prep Time: 10 mins

Total Time: 15 mins

- 1 Set out all your ingredients.
- 2 Set out large salad bowl
- 3 Combine the natural ingredients in bowl
- 4 Add balsamic vinaigrette
- 5 Toss together and serve chilled



## Chik'n with Wild Rice and Kale

Serves: 4 - 6

Yield: 6 - 8 cups

- 1 1/2 cups chopped organic fresh kale
- 1 1/2 cups long grain and wild rice blend
- 1/2 cup diced organic red bell pepper
- 1/2 cup diced organic orange bell pepper
- 1/3 cup diced organic white onion
- 3 chopped organic garlic cloves
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds (unsalted)
- 12 oz Quorn meatless Chik'n Tenders
- 1/4 cup Canola oil or Grapeseed Oil
- 2 cups water or organic vegetable stock
- 1 teaspoon Sea Salt (fine)
- 2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce or liquid amino

Directions:

Prep Time: 20 mins

Total Time: 30 mins

- 1 Set out all your ingredients.
- 2 Set a stove element with a wok or large skillet
- 3 Add 2 tablespoons of canola oil to wok on medium heat (don't let oil burn)
- 4 Saute chik'n tenders, onions and bell peppers for 4-5 minutes
- 5 Add chopped garlic cloves and kale and saute
- 6 Add salt, garlic powder and pepper and stir until Chik'n is browned
- 7 Add rice blend and a cup of water/stock let simmer for 20 minutes on medium heat
- 8 Add soy sauce or liquid amino and let simmer for 10 minutes
- 9 Sprinkle with sliced almonds and serve warm



## SASS Salad

Serves: 4-6

Yield: 4-6 8 oz cups

- 12 oz sliced fresh organic strawberries
- 1 cup of sliced organic tomatoes
- 1 package of fresh organic spinach
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinaigrette

Prep Time: 10 mins

Total Time: 15 mins

- 1 Set out all your ingredients.
- 2 Set out large salad bowl
- 3 Combine the natural ingredients in bowl
- 4 Add balsamic vinaigrette (optional)
- 5 Toss together and serve chilled

\* Can add feta or bleu cheese if desired



## Tyler's Special

Serves: 4 - 6

Yield: 6 - 8 cups

- 1 package angel hair pasta
- 3/4 cup frozen organic edamame
- 1 cup sliced organic carrots
- 1/2 cup chopped organic orange bell pepper
- 1/2 cup chopped organic red bell pepper
- 12 oz diced firm organic tofu
- 3 chopped organic garlic cloves
- 1/2 chopped organic yellow onion
- 1 teaspoon fresh chopped parsely
- 1/4 cup Angola oil or Grapeseed Oil
- 1 cup water or organic vegetable stock
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1/2 cup Louisiana original hot sauce

Directions:

Prep Time: 45 mins

Total Time: 60 mins

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

- 1 Set out all your ingredients.
- 2 Set a stove element with a wok or large skillet
- 3 Drain and cut tofu into even 1" squares, toss in bowl with Louisiana hot sauce, garlic powder and salt and lightly spray cookie sheet with cooking spray and place tofu on cookie sheet to bake for 30 minutes
- 4 Prepare angel hair pasta according to instructions on container in a separate pot
- 5 Add 2 tablespoons of oil to wok on medium heat (don't let oil burn)
- 6 Saute onions, bell peppers, and carrots until slightly tender
- 7 Add chopped garlic cloves and edamame and saute for 10 minutes
- 8 Add tofu with dash of salt, garlic powder and pepper and stir (season to taste)
- 9 Add angel hair to plate and pour mixture on top and serve warm



## Vanilla Almond Cupcakes with Strawberry Frosting

Serves: 1 - 12

Yield: 12 cupcakes

- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups sweet almond milk or almond coconut milk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup organic pure cane fair trade sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup coconut oil, warmed until liquid
- 1 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract

\*Can substitute coconut oil with canola oil

Prep Time: 10 mins

Total Time: 15 mins

1 Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease two 12 cup muffin pans or line with paper baking cups.

2 Measure and pour the apple cider vinegar into a 2 cup measuring cup. Fill with almond milk to make 1 1/2 cups. Let stand until curdled, about 5-10 minutes. In a large bowl, Whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the almond milk mixture, coconut oil, and extracts. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir just until blended. Spoon the batter into the prepared cups, dividing evenly.

3 Bake in the preheated oven until the tops spring back when lightly pressed, 15 to 20 minutes (no longer than 20 min). Cool in the pan set over a wire rack. When cool, arrange the cupcakes on a serving platter.

## Vegetarian Strawberry Frosting

### Frosting

1 8 oz Earth's Best organic natural buttery spread  
1/2 cup finely chopped organic strawberries  
1 - 2 cups organic confectioners sugar  
1/4 teaspoon lime juice

### Directions

Blend all ingredients with hand mixer until smooth  
(add additional sugar as needed to thicken frosting,  
place into fridge to cool and stiffen; and remove to top  
cooled cupcakes and serve

\*This frosting melts easily. Place into fridge after  
preparation to stay cool.





Learn more about Soulgood's Community Giving and sign up to become a volunteer.

**Soulgood's** mission is to put healthy, meatless and tasty foods into the hands of adults and children across America. We care about the environment, the planet, animals and sustainable food sources for all Americans.

Giving back is a part of who we are and we have created a new outreach campaign called, Aplatefor. me. The concept is simple. For every Soulgood Healthy Meal you buy at our local pop-up store,

restaurant or lunchbox online we will donate organic fruits and vegetables to children in local communities across America.

We will volunteer to host and teach healthy eating classes, sustainable gardening or cooking classes to underserved children in local urban and rural communities.

Every year we will donate 5% of our net income to the Kids Environmental Education Network, Inc. A Texas-based

501(c)3 organization. You can learn more about KEEN at [www.keengroup.org](http://www.keengroup.org).

With your help and Aplatefor. Me, we hope to encourage more children in urban and rural communities to plant their own foods and eat healthier meals one plate at a time.

Visit [www.eatsoulgood.com](http://www.eatsoulgood.com) to learn more.





I believe it is important to maximize the lives of children by promoting a healthier lifestyle. This is possible through health education, nutrition education, art and environmental education. I have lived in a neighborhood that is a food and park desert for over forty years.

Today, our young children do not have a nearby grocery store, community garden or playground for outdoor activity. Instead, we are surrounded by fast food restaurants, convenience stores and dilapidated homes left by families that have moved away to relocate to the suburbs for better opportunities. The families who remain in our neighborhood are left to feed their children what is nearby – unhealthy options that lead to extraordinary rates of obesity, diabetes and cancer in children under the age of twelve.

We believe our nonprofit can change that and offer solutions to help families make better

choices. We believe through health education, nutrition education, sustainable urban gardens, outdoor activities, and integrating photography to allow children to express themselves we can help families live healthier and more active lives long-term. Partners like Soulgood are invaluable to our mission.

APlatefor.Me offers community volunteers an opportunity to help teach local children, who live in these conditions in America, how to make healthier food choices and to grow their own foods using sustainable practices.

As a breast cancer survivor, I know personally, how important organic and whole foods are to living a more spirited life. Join us in the fight to maximize the lives of children in partnership with Soulgood.

Learn more about Kids Environmental Education Network at [www.keengroup.org](http://www.keengroup.org).

**Shirley Lewis**  
Executive Director  
Kids Environmental Education  
Network, Inc.  
[www.keengroup.org](http://www.keengroup.org)  
Fort Worth, Texas



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