

A Family Affair

by Donna Pearson

My vegan journey began with a scare. As my husband and I were returning from our winter home in Arizona last spring, our adult daughter was being taken in the ambulance to the hospital. She spent 11 days there with some time in critical care. We learned she has severe diabetes. Bless her heart; she took this in such a positive way. She decided this was the motivation to give herself a new lease on life by adopting a healthier lifestyle. Our family decided we would learn what we could about diabetes and also support her with healthful foods at family gatherings, etc.

A neighbor of mine had taken Delisa's cooking class a few years ago and from time to time had brought over dishes and information to encourage me to sign up, but I just kept brushing it off until it became personal when my daughter became ill. Then my neighbor told me about the upcoming [Food for Life Class](#) in June, so my daughter and I signed up. I went with the attitude

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that I was there just to support my daughter. Yes, I would start eating more vegetables and fruits but had no intention of giving up steaks or salmon. I seriously doubted I would become a vegetarian, let alone a vegan. However, I did love the bean salad Delisa made in the first class and went home and made it myself. I ate that salad by myself all week long because my husband was out of town fishing. But I also ate other, "not good," foods too.

It was a tough decision to make the recommended three-week commitment to a plant-based diet, but my daughter and I finally decided we would do it for the last three weeks of the class. After class we were "on vacation" in Kenai and

Homer and we each went off the wagon, but both of us were eager to get back to eating vegan. I was actually craving the vegetables, and we both noted feeling sluggish from eating the wrong foods (pizza and fish and chips).



In spite of initially thinking I was doing this only to support my daughter, I actually found myself excited about my new plant-based diet and started recommending the classes to others. My daughter and I both took the next class that was offered and each brought our husbands. I guess I'm pretty persuasive because I got my son and a few of my friends to take the classes too. One of my friends signed up for the class at the last minute and persuaded her husband to come with her to the first one, just to give it a try. He didn't pay for the whole series because he wasn't too sure he would be back. But part way through the class, he jumped up and went over to pay for the rest of the series! Once they came to the class, they saw the benefits for themselves.

The most exciting benefit of eating vegan for me is the huge increase in energy. I've felt tired most of my adult life, and as I've gotten into my 60s have been prone to afternoon naps. I am no longer needing those naps and feel like a young chick again!

At the first class I asked Delisa for advice about chopping cilantro because it hurt to hold a knife to chop due to arthritis in my hand. She suggested

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scissors, but she also commented that the arthritis might improve with the diet, which I could hardly believe at the time. Behold—today I am nearly pain free. I used to wake up every morning and pop an Excedrin for the pain. I no longer take Excedrin and

only very rarely notice a slight pain.

As I've learned about the other health benefits of vegan eating, I am looking forward to my next

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annual exam and lab tests in April of next year. The last exam showed my blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar all rising past the borderlines, but my doctor and I decided to hold off on any medications just yet. I am looking forward to wowing him with low numbers next year—achieved without any medications.

Finally, it wasn't my primary goal, but it surely makes me happy to see the belly fat melting

away. Since the end of June I am down 20 pounds. Yes, I've had plateaus and times I've "cheated" and have had to retake pounds off, but what a reward to be shopping for smaller sizes. I'm excited about going back to Arizona in January where my husband and I do round-dancing every day, knowing I will not only look better but also hope to be a more graceful dancer. (Okay, maybe the diet can't guarantee that I'll be more graceful!)

I've been on diets before and always looked forward to being able to go back to "normal" eating after the weight loss; and, of course, in short order, the weight came back on and then some. This is the first time I can say that I want to eat this way for the rest of my life—it's my new "normal."

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