

Compassion, Confidence, and Hope

Diane Rodriguez's Vegan Story

I've totally turned my health around in just a few months on a vegan diet, but that's not why I decided to stop eating animals --- it was just a wonderful side-effect. I'll tell you more about that later, but let's start at the beginning.

I've always loved animals and refused to touch raw meat. I didn't see much raw meat growing up because we ate mostly processed food and lots of MacDonal'd's meals. It didn't bother me to look at a piece of cooked meat because I didn't think about it being an animal. In fact, I'd try just about anything (even lizard, when visiting Costa Rica!)

Then, at age 21, I saw a whale being dismantled. That really, really bothered me. I decided to stop eating animals. It wasn't hard for me to give up meat, but I had no idea what else to eat. I got a couple of vegan cookbooks and tried some recipes, but I had never learned to cook, had no idea what those ingredients were, felt lost at Natural Pantry, and the foods seemed kind of strange to me. So I gradually went back to my old eating habits, again eating processed meats that I could pretend weren't from animals.

Fast forward 8 years. . . After teaching in the Bush for 5 years I finally reached the point where I had seen too many animals killed. I didn't want any part of that, so by the end of the school year (2010) I had again decided to become vegan. I spent the summer with my parents in Wasilla and heard about the Food for Life classes from a

friend. I wasn't particularly interested in the health aspects but I wanted to learn how to prepare vegan meals so I signed up for the class. I became vegan the day after the first class, on June 18, 2010.



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This time it was easy! Finally, I actually learned to cook. I liked the food I tried in class and then I made all the recipes at home, plus many more. I spent every afternoon cooking and discovered it was fun. My mother took the class with me and enjoyed my cooking, too. I'm not great at following recipes so I had a few disasters, but I had enough successes to replace my old meals with new, healthy, plant-based meals. Now I'm right at home in the kitchen, cooking beans from scratch, and I've discovered I really LIKE my own cooking.

very important to me. In addition to attending the class, I've educated myself about nutrition and the broader effects of our dietary choices by reading *The China Study*, by T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D. and *The Food Revolution*, by John Robbins, both fabulous books. Now when someone asks me a question, I have the answer! My knowledge gives me confidence and courage, grounding me in my decision to eat a vegan diet and preventing me from harboring doubts caused by other people's misunderstandings and fears.

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Now about the wonderful "side-effects." I've lost 70 pounds so far, and still losing. I still have a lot to lose, but now I actually have hope that I can achieve a healthy, normal weight. I used to be on several diabetes



medications. Now I'm off those medications and my blood sugar is NORMAL! I'm also off my cholesterol medication, and my cholesterol is lower than when I was on the medication! I used to have severe psoriasis on my arms, and now it's almost gone. I can get down on the floor with my students and get back up again. I have more energy. My hormones have become balanced and my body is functioning normally.

Before making this dietary change, I gained more every year. I'd tried all sorts of diets and every time I started one, I'd get sick. My

doctor had been recommending a gastric bypass for years, but I just didn't feel good about doing that. Since I couldn't seem to lose weight and didn't want to have the surgery, I had given up. I had lost all hope of ever losing weight. Now, miraculously, that's all changed. By deciding to eat in accord with my values, I've also discovered the *healthiest* way for me to eat. I've gained confidence, seeing that I can take charge of my health, and hope, that I will achieve my normal weight.