

## Can I Honor My Past and Still be a Vegan?

by Delisa Renideo

Everyone I know, including myself, grew up eating meat. Some of us lived on farms, some of us grew up eating moose or other wild game, and some of us still live in families involved with animal agriculture, hunting or fishing. Most of us probably have fond memories of family traditions centered around food, such as turkey for Thanksgiving, ham for Easter, chicken for Sunday dinners and steak on the barbecue grill.

Whether we make a shift toward a plant-based diet based upon health, the environment, or compassion for animals (or all three), we may be torn by feelings of disloyalty to our past, our parents, and our culture. How can we honor our past, whether personal or cultural, and still be a vegan?

One of the most helpful one-liners I've heard is, "I reserve the right to grow." My friend, Sherri Crouse, used to say this at the beginning of each workshop she taught. Her point was that she might

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present some new information that would contradict something she had taught in a previous workshop. I, also, reserve the right to grow. This may mean changing my opinions, my habits, or my diet. However, making any of these changes needn't cast aspersions upon my past.

When I was a child, cars didn't have seat belts. Kids were often seen with their arms or legs dangling out of car windows and playing freely in the back seat. By today's standards, that would be considered unsafe and a sign of bad parenting. But the parents in the front seats were good, caring, responsible parents. Good parents now make different choices. Now that we understand the risks, we are careful to have our kids (and ourselves!) securely

buckled in. Our new perspective doesn't need to discredit the choices we made in the past, even though we now make different decisions.



Our American heritage is based upon change. Adventurous souls have settled in the United States from many other countries. Alaska has also attracted those who were seeking something different and willing to make changes. We may carry some of our old traditions with us into our new life, but we also create new traditions that may incorporate some aspects of the old traditions. Maybe we can do the same thing when we adopt a plant-based diet. While learning to make completely new and

different meals, we can also modify old favorites, leaving out the animal products and substituting plant-based alternatives.

So change is part of our heritage and is an essential part of growing. We can't grow and stay the same at the same time. We can remember old traditions fondly while making different choices now. Even when we look back with regret at some of our past choices, they are part of us and have contributed to who we now are, so it's important to accept them as such.


There may be people whom we dearly love who don't understand the choices we are making. They may feel hurt or angry when we make changes. We can continue to show love to them while staying true to ourselves. Regardless of how well we express ourselves, they may never understand our point of view so we shouldn't judge ourselves based upon

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their happiness with our choices. It takes real courage

to make our own decisions in the face of opposition, and doing this in love is even more challenging.

Difficult as it may be, it is helpful to separate the food from the meaning of the occasion. Getting together with family and friends, playing games, having fun, making music, visiting, laughing and reminiscing are all important aspects of getting together. Even though food is inevitably present, it isn't truly the reason for the occasion. Let's continue to enjoy each other and celebrate our reason for getting together.

Recognizing that almost everyone who chooses a plant-based diet has had similar challenges might be helpful. Feeling like we are the only ones facing these issues makes them harder to deal with. And remember, each of us who makes this change makes it easier for those coming along behind us. So let's honor our past while celebrating the opportunity we have in each moment to make the most loving, compassionate, healthy, and sustainable choice we are capable of in that moment. 

## 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 MacDonald'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.

As a teacher, education is 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.

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

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and my body is functioning normally.

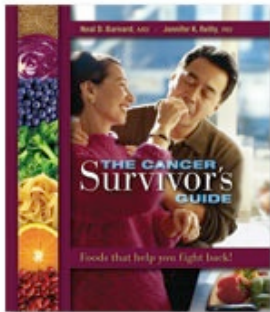
Before making this dietary change, I gained more every year. I'd tried all sorts of diets and every time I started one, I'd get sick. My doctor had been recommending a gastric bypass for years, but I just didn't feel good about doing that. Since I couldn't seem to lose weight and didn't want to have 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.

## Nutrition Nuggets: Favoring Fiber

Excerpts from *The Cancer Survivor's Guide*, Chapter 2

"Fiber" is another word for plant roughage--the part of beans, grains, vegetables and fruits that resists digestion. Fiber helps to keep us regular by moving the intestinal contents along. It also helps us rid ourselves of all manner of chemicals--including hormones--that our bodies are anxious to eliminate.

This "waste disposal" system starts in your liver, which continuously filters your blood. As blood passes through the liver's network of capillaries, liver cells remove toxins, cholesterol, medications, waste hormones, and whatever else your body figures it is better off without. These undesirables are then sent from the liver through the bile duct, which leads to your intestinal tract. There, fiber soaks up these chemicals and carries them out with the wastes.



There is plenty of fiber in vegetables, fruits, beans and whole grains. So if these foods are a big part of your diet, your "waste disposal" system works pretty well. But animal products, such as meat and dairy, contain not a speck of fiber. So if your lunch consisted of chicken and yogurt, there is nothing for the hormones or other chemicals to attach to in your intestinal tract. They end up being reabsorbed back into your bloodstream. This endless cycle keeps hormones circulating for longer than they should. Fiber stops this cycle.

40 grams of fiber are recommended daily for optimum health. Here's a quick way to check that you are consuming enough fiber in your diet:

- **Beans and lentils: 1/2 cup = 7 grams fiber**
- **Vegetables: 1 cup = 4 grams fiber**
- **Fruits: 1 piece, or 1 cup = 3 grams fiber**
- **Grains: 1 slice whole grain bread or 1 cup cooked pasta = 2 grams fiber**  
**1 cup oatmeal = 4 grams fiber**

## Recipe of the Month: Fudgy Bean Balls

*A favorite from the kitchen of Peggy Robinson*

It can be challenging to find healthy, low-fat, vegan alternatives to cookies, candies, and other goodies. This recipe is the perfect solution to that problem! These fudgy balls are a nutritional powerhouse, containing fiber-rich black beans. They are sweetened with date sugar or dates, which are a whole food, and contain no added oil. They're simple to make and you can enjoy them year round, as well as during the holidays.

- 1 can black beans, drained  
OR 1½ cups of cooked black beans
- 1/3 cup date sugar or dates,  
to taste
- 2 Tbsp cocoa powder  
(may use carob powder)
- 2 Tbsp rolled oats
- Chopped walnuts



- Place beans, date sugar or dates, and cocoa powder in a food processor and process until smooth. You may need to drizzle a little water into the processor to keep the mixture processing.
- Add rolled oats and process again, until smooth
- Roll into balls (about 1 TBSP of mixture) then roll in chopped walnuts  
(If you chill the mixture before rolling into balls, they will be less sticky)
- Refrigerate and enjoy!

**Note:** I take a container of these power balls to work and keep them in my work bag. They come in handy when I don't get lunch or need a pick-me-up. To me they taste like fudge!

## Christmas Still Came!

*by June Linnea Cordasci*



It came without turkey,  
it came without ham,  
It came without roast beef,  
it came without spam.  
It came without chicken,  
duckling or goose,  
It came without deer, elk, caribou or moose.

It came without partridge, it came without quail,  
It came without sausages sent through the mail.  
It came without pork, it came without veal,  
It came without salmon, shrimp, crab or eel.

It came without milk, it came without eggs,  
It came without snails or little frogs' legs.  
It came without bacon, it came without steak,  
It came without pate' or meatloaf to bake.

And after we'd all eaten as much as we could,  
We all joined hands as round the table we stood.  
And the feelings we got were so free and so warm  
Christmas still came and not a creature was harmed!

Yes, Christmas still came and it was so great,  
As only plant-based foods had filled up our plates!  
Not an animal was used in preparing our feast,  
Neither a fish, nor a fowl, nor even a beast!

### Who to Call



Elaine Albertson: AVS Newsletter Editor.....746-4668  
Peggy Robinson: Membership and Treasurer....373-1901  
Toni Truesdell: Advertising Coordinator.....745-4404  
Delisa Renideo: AVS President.....373-1526  
Charlie Renideo: Bookstore and Website.....373-1526



## Holiday Potluck and Party!

**December 18, 2010**

**6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

**United Protestant Church Palmer**



This year we will again be combining our end of December potluck with a holiday party. Christmas will fall on the last Saturday of December, so we're having the potluck/party the week before, on December 18th.

Come, bring a dish to share, and enjoy the fun. Instead of our usual program, we'll have a Chinese auction, so bring a fun wrapped gift for the game.

# Upcoming Events



## Saturday, December 18

AVS Holiday Potluck and Party, 6:00 - 8:30p.m. Lots of fun with food, games and Chinese Auction. See page 3 for more info.

## Saturday January 8

Next AVS Film Night, 7:00 - 9:00p.m. Watch the website for information and details.

## Saturday January 29

AVS Potluck Dinner, 6:00 - 8:30p.m. United Protestant Church. Children's program "AVS Sprouts" will resume. See website for details.

### **Film Night Notes**

We won't be showing a film in December because of all the busy holiday activities. We will resume our monthly educational films the second Saturday of January. Stay tuned for an email notice about the topic of that film!

### **Recycling Info**

Our local recycling center, VCRS, will be closed to residential drop-off December 1 through 7 while they move into their newly constructed facility. They will reopen December 8 at the new site next to the borough animal shelter.

## **Last Newsletter for 2010**

This will be our last newsletter for 2010. Our next newsletter will be available at our potluck dinner on January 29, 2011, and online.

## **HOW TO BECOME AN AVS MEMBER**

Online at [www.alaskaveg.org](http://www.alaskaveg.org) (click the "Membership" button) or contact Peggy Robinson at 907-373-1901 or her email [fmyrob@mtaonline.net](mailto:fmyrob@mtaonline.net).

The Alaska Vegetarian Society is under the umbrella of Rays of Hope, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation.

## **Food for Life Nutrition & Cooking Classes**

### **Anchorage**

#### **Cancer Prevention or Survival**

#### **Providence Extended Care**

4900 Eagle Street

January 5 - February 16, 2011

Wednesdays, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

#### **Diabetes Prevention & Reversal**

#### **The Lions Clubhouse**

501 N. Pine Street

January 7 - February 18, 2011

Fridays, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### **Wasilla**

#### **Diabetes Prevention & Reversal**

#### **Dayspring Enrichment Center**

1625 Edlund Road

January 6 - February 17, 2011

Thursdays, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

### **PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED!**

**All classes meet weekly for 7 weeks.**

**Cost: \$90**

To register: Call Delisa or Charlie,

907-373-1526

or online: [www.yestolife.info](http://www.yestolife.info)

For more information:

[delisa@yestolife.info](mailto:delisa@yestolife.info)

## **Alaska Vegetarian Society**

### **Mission Statement:**

To create a compassionate and sustainable world by inspiring and supporting reverence for all life and the adoption of a plant-based diet.

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907-373-1526 [www.AlaskaVeg.org](http://www.AlaskaVeg.org)