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I grew up in Bulgaria and can remember as a young child not really wanting to eat meat when my mother would fix it. I'm not sure why -- maybe it was just my intuition about what it involved. I preferred to eat the plants on my plate.

Many years later, after coming to the U.S. in 2005, I read *Fast Food Nation*. Even though I rarely ate fast food before that, learning what was behind this industry made me turn away completely from ever going to a fast food restaurant again.

Then, in January of 2009, I was ready to start the new year with a commitment to being a vegetarian. I had always wanted to be a vegetarian, so this seemed like a good time to take the leap. The next step in my journey to becoming vegan was attending the [Food for Life Nutrition and Cooking Classes](#), where I learned how to cook healthy food that really tasted great, and

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how to make and buy substitutes for dairy products. It was a gradual transition, but by summer I was eating a totally plant-based diet.

When my friends and co-workers ask why I eat this way, I'm always willing



to tell them. I feel better about myself for eating in a way that is better for my health, better for the environment, and definitely better for the animals. When I learned how animal agriculture uses tremendous amounts of water that could be used for other necessities in addition to being wasteful of other resources, I was happy to be able to avoid contributing to this waste with my own personal choices. When I learned how much cruelty is involved in raising

animals for meat, eggs, and dairy products, I didn't want to contribute to this cruelty. And when I discovered that I could be much healthier, have a stronger immune system and avoid many of the diseases that are so common in our culture, I found it to be an easy choice to eat a plant-based diet.

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and my own, small contribution to a better world. I find I have even more energy than I did before, which is really important to me since I love to go backpacking in Alaska. I always share some of my food with my backpacking companions and co-workers, and they are always surprised by

how tasty it is.

For anyone interested in making some changes toward a plant-based diet, I recommend reading books to learn about the effects of our food choices on the environment, about how the animals are treated,

and about how much healthier we can be on a plant-based diet. Also, taking the [Food for Life Cooking Class](#) really helps you learn good ways to cook healthy foods to make it easier to put it into practice.