

Hats Off



By Anna Von Reitz

There are people who touch our lives in gentle ways. Often, we don't know the impact they've had at the time, so of course, we don't thank them. Then life "happens" and time flows on, your paths don't meet, and then someday you hear their name or something jogs your brain and you think: I never said thank you. Too often, it's too late.

About a dozen years ago, one of those Special People crossed my path here in Alaska. I'd just lost another friend to cancer and saw a poster for a cooking class centered around an anti-cancer diet. It was free. I had time on my hands and a grudge to settle with the disease. So I went to class for six weeks. It was my introduction to Vegan cooking.

That class was taught by Delisa Renideo, otherwise known as The Barefoot Gardener. She recently published some of her best recipes in a new book, *The Barefoot Gardener in the Kitchen Cookbook*.

Vegans, as I was to learn, don't use animal products at all. Their diet is entirely plant-based. No milk, no eggs, no cheese. And of course, no meat. Nonetheless, everyone seemed sane and healthy, and I was intrigued.

Like most of you reading this I briefly entertained the image of my life with food being reduced to gnawing on stalks of celery and maybe a baked potato with salt for Sunday dinner. I also had a twinge of the, "oh, no, not some kind of weird vegetarian cult!" suspicion, but I suppressed those biases and fears: with people dropping like flies from cancer and suffering from awful chronic diseases, it was obviously time to look for answers.

And anyway, a free cooking class where you get to taste the results seemed harmless enough for a respectable Granny to indulge in. Indulge, I did. It was all delicious.

I learned how to "massage" kale -- and otherwise, would probably have never eaten it. I learned lots of other wonderful things--- how to make a delicious cheese sauce without cheese, how to sweeten things without sugar (or nasty unnatural substitutes), and miracle of miracles, a healthy cookie recipe that my son liked better than standard Chocolate Chip Cookies.

If the benefits had stopped there, I would have called it one of the Top Ten Freebie Bargains in my whole life, but it didn't end with that.

As I s-l-o-w-l-y adjusted to my new knowledge base and began to implement what I had been taught, I also began to think more about nutrition and what I was eating and about how food is produced, and why so much of what we eat is nothing but air: empty calories, that is, calories that add to our waistlines, but don't nourish us at all.

It would take a miracle of Biblical proportions to turn my husband into a vegetarian, much less a vegan, but nonetheless the "little seed" Delisa planted in my brain persisted and bore more fruit. I began growing basil for pesto and other kitchen herbs and adding them to salads and soups. I

whittled down the amount of meat the family was eating and soon, I was able to sneak in entire vegetarian meals without anyone noticing.

They all just adjusted and chowed down and didn't seem to notice that...bit by bit, we were converting from a Standard American Diet (SAD in more ways than one) to a better diet, a more nourishing diet, and did I mention-- a cheaper diet?

Oh, yes, even though I took the pledge and converted to 100% organic and non-GMO, our food budget went down by a whopping 25%. I can't even imagine how much money that has saved us over the last twelve years, but it is a lot of money. A lot.

And, the adventure continued. Somehow that little cooking class with Delisa Renideo hit the reset button on my relationship with food. No more limits! I threw Nasturtium blossoms and sweet violets into my salads. I rediscovered mushrooms and olives. I made Artisan Bread. And it was all good. And it was all better.

And it was all because of Delisa and Charlie and a cooking class.

I am still not a 100% vegetarian, much less can I call myself a Vegan, but I am a lot closer to being a vegetarian than I could ever imagine being and my old "whiskey and corn chips for breakfast" diet (somewhat of an exaggeration, but not much!) is a distant memory.

The benefits from that little cooking class just keep ticking along, year after year, paying dividends in new choices, new experiences, better health and better food.

Not everyone will be lucky enough to get a cooking class with Delisa, but everyone can buy her cookbook and use it as a portal to a whole new world of food. It's not a cheap book at \$29.00, but that's nothing compared to the cost of a single doctor visit.

Hats off, to Delisa and Charlie Renideo, for being the difference and making the difference. I want to thank them and pass on the gift they gave me to you.

You can learn more at their website: www.YesToLifeSolution.com.

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