

VEGETARIAN for HEALTH & CONSCIENCE



Krystal Coxon
Shows Us the Variety of
Healthy & Humane Choices

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

Vegetarian diets aren't limiting according to Krystal Coxon. "It's the opposite," she explains. "It opens up so many options." She says focusing on a vegetable-based diet leads to some experimenting in the kitchen. "I'm always trying new foods. It takes what you used to eat and adds a tremendous amount of variety."

Krystal grew up in Dallas, TX – not exactly a place that produces many vegetarians. "I had meat in every meal while growing up," she says. "A lot of Tex Mex. Now I eat Thai, Ethiopian, Indian, the list keeps going on and on. I still eat a lot of Tex Mex; it's definitely my first love. If I feel like it, I can always eat a version of the traditional American diet with mock-meat substitutes. There are so many options available."

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Degrees of vegetarianism exist: some people will eat dairy products and eggs and vegetables, others may prefer some combination of the three. A person who concentrates on consuming only plant-based products is a vegan (pronounced *vee-gan*). Vegans, like Krystal, make a conscience choice not to cause any animal to die or be farmed for their existence.

Krystal graduated from the University of Texas at Austin then wanted to see what was out there, beyond Texas. "I joined the Peace Corps," she explains. "I moved to Honduras in Central America." She lived in a rural town that didn't have electricity; there were no grocery stores in the town, so people grew their own food. "That was the first time I really made a connection with food," she adds. "Certainly growing the vegetables that I was eating was new to me. The main diet was black beans and homemade tortillas. Every day, for] lunch and dinner, we ate black beans and tortillas."

Meat, cheese, and dairy weren't eaten very often because they just weren't readily available. Also when they were, it was too expen-

sive. In the new environment, Krystal adapted, but didn't think of it as a lifestyle or health choice.

"I loved the diet. I loved having that much protein and so much less fat. I still ate meat when it was available," she says. A celebration occurred in the town that changed her view.

"One of my Honduras friends was getting married," Krystal describes. "Her fiancé, who lived two hours away, rode into town on horseback pulling a pig for the wedding feast." The pig wasn't cute or pink or curly-tailed like what she had seen on television. It was a living thing. "When I saw the pig, I didn't associate it with bacon or ribs or anything, I just thought of it as an animal. When they killed him, I thought: that was a living creature, killed to provide food for me. That's when I became vegetarian. No animals should die for me."

At the time, there was a cow producing milk, so she had homemade cheese and an occasional egg from the chickens that roamed the streets. "But," she says, "I had noticed that when I quit eating meat, my energy increased."

Back in the States, Krystal continued her plant-based diet, enjoying the benefits of more energy, less fat and cholesterol. She learned more about factory farming and the processes used to raise animals for food. "I decided," she adds, "to become vegan to live a happier, more compassionate life, a healthier life all around. That's really where my journey began. At the grocery, I never thought about where the bacon came from, the cheese, the milk, or the eggs."

She celebrates the choices she now has, the opportunities to discover new foods and recipes. "Coconut milk yogurt, which I love," she lists, "and there are soy versions of yogurt and ice cream. Then there's tofu cream cheese. My husband Steve loves the Tofurkey sandwich slices."

Making substitutions for meat and dairy aren't that difficult she says. "My mom became vegetarian. My in-laws eat vegan when they come to visit." To replace meat, she recommends beans and nuts for protein. "Black bean enchiladas," she adds with a smile.

At restaurants, she says to ask what the

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vegetables are cooked in. Vegetable oil? “For beans,” she explains, “I ask if they were cooked with lard. At most restaurants, the beans are cooked without any animal products.” She and her husband frequent local restaurants that have a good variety of choices. “Indian food is amazing if you’re vegan or vegetarian,” she says. “Thai food is really good. You should ask if they have used fish sauce, or order it without fish sauce.” Chinese food also provides vegetarian variety. “Even Wendy’s fries are vegan; they’re never cooked in lard,” she adds. Vegetarian choices help eliminate some dietary factors for heart disease Krystal explains. “Heart disease takes away parents and grandparents and siblings too soon,” she says, “and you can prevent it. My grandmother died of a heart attack and she could have helped prevent it with diet. I didn’t know what veganism was back then otherwise I would have talked to her about it.”

She offers some simple first steps for anyone interested in vegetarian and vegan options:

First, become more connected with what you’re putting in your body. “Start cooking at home so you become more aware of what’s in your food,” she says. “When you go grocery shopping for your ingredients, start reading the labels. Become label aware.”

Second, try to increase the amount of vegetables in your meals. “Focus on kale and chards that are calcium rich,” she adds, “and spinach. Start snacking on nuts for protein.”

Third, look for meat and dairy substitutes at the store. “Try sandwiches with Veganaise and Tofurkey slices,” she advises.

Lastly, try new recipes. “There are many resources on the Internet and in bookstores,” she says. “Also, come to our potluck to meet other people so you can ask questions and try some dishes.” Krystal and her friends have a monthly potluck that she lists on the Facebook group “Vegans in Williamsburg” where interested people can exchange ideas and recipes.

Vegetarian diets aren’t about limitations, as Krystal says, but more about exploring and trying new options for a low fat, low cholesterol, and high energy lifestyle. NDN

For more information on Vegetarianism go online to:

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine has a vegetarian starter kit and more info about the health benefits of a plant-based diet:

<http://www.pcrm.org>

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) also has a vegetarian starter kit (PDF):

<http://www.petaliterature.com/VEG297.pdf>



Blooms that Brighten

Patti DeBlass
Presents a Bouquet of Happiness

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

Flowers make people happy, explains Patti DeBlass of *Blooms that Brighten*. The non-profit organization grew from an idea Patti and her husband, Dave, had one year after the Valentine's Day rush at their floral shop. Today, *Blooms That Brighten* delivers free flower arrangements to the rooms and homes of hospice patients and residents of assisted living communities in the area.

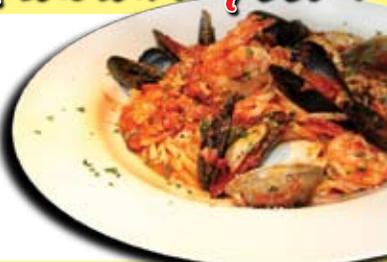
"Having the shop (Schmidt's Flowers & Accessories), Dave and I go in and out of a lot of places here in town," Patti describes the seed of the idea. "We're very hands-on so during really busy times, we do deliveries.

While going in and out of assisted living and nursing homes, we could see a need. There's an interesting dynamic when you deliver flowers. When someone opens their door and sees the delivery, they immediately smile and say 'thank you.' When you walk into a nursing or assisted living

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facility, there are a lot of doors down the hallway. One time I made the mistake of knocking on the wrong door and I saw the reaction of the lady when she realized the flowers were not for her.”

That woman’s deflated expression stayed with Patti throughout her busy schedule of creating and delivering flower arrangements. “After Valentine’s Day that year, we had some extra flowers,” she says, “so we made up a few arrangements. I called one of the facilities to see if they would let us bring the flowers to help brighten some of their residents’ day.”

The reaction Patti received amazed her: “The administrator called and said ‘You have no idea how great it felt to deliver those flowers.’ And I said, ‘Yes, I do.’ The administrator couldn’t believe how happy it made the recipients.” The facility welcomed any flowers that might be available. For Patti, the response made her feel so good that a couple of weeks later, she did it again with a different community.

“I would do a few extra arrangements,” Patti says, “five or six one week for a place,

then five or six another week for another place. Dave and I realized that we enjoyed it, the facility’s staff who delivered the flowers enjoyed it, and the residents receiving the arrangements loved it.”

She says cut flowers are like an antidepressant in a vase. Patti references studies at Rutgers University and Harvard Medical School on the natural mood enhancements of having flowers in the home. “Flowers take the edge off things. Have you ever seen a room without flowers? How severe it looks?” Patti asks. “The color, the greenery helps soften the lines and surfaces in a home.”

Also, for people with limited mobility or limited space, flowers are living things to care for. “Like gardening,” Patti adds, “caring for a flower arrangement is relaxing for some people who can’t get outside as much as they’d like.”

Before following her passion for flowers, Patti worked in the banking industry in New York City. Dave was part of Wall Street. They commuted into the city daily, but when their girls were born, Patti decided to stay home. Eventually as the girls got older, Patti took a

part-time position as a floral designer.

“After 9/11,” Patti explains, “we consciously lived our lives differently. One of the things that became really important to us was being with our family. Commuting into New York didn’t allow us to spend time with our two daughters. Dave’s mom and dad had retired here in Williamsburg. After a visit in 2005, we threw the idea out to our two teenagers and they took the hook. We ‘retired’ to Williamsburg.”

Once settled, Patti and Dave decided they needed new careers. Schmidt’s Flowers & Accessories came up for sale. “We jumped at the opportunity to purchase it,” Patti says. “This is the oldest flower shop in Williamsburg. It has a long-standing history and tradition.”

With left-over flowers, Patti’s designs, and a surprise delivery to hospice and continuing care facilities, *Blooms that Brighten* took root. After several months of these deliveries, a few volunteers approached Patti and offered their time.

“I realized it was going to grow,” Patti says. “We set up *Blooms that Brighten* as a non-profit

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organization. Today, we have approximately thirty volunteers plus groups from the schools that come in and help from time to time.”

Not only does Schmidt’s donate flowers, but other businesses contribute too. “We’re able to corral flowers from Farm Fresh, Andy Bradshaw, Trader Joe’s, [and] Fresh Market,” Patti says, “and Printwell prints the cards that go with each arrangement.” The idea matured into a community effort.

The route some of the flowers take also strengthens the bonds of the community. “We had a family recently whose dad had passed away,” Patti says. “They called me to pick up the flowers from his memorial service. We broke those flowers down and created arrangements to take to the father’s former continuing care facility. People there said the flowers meant a lot to them because they knew the man and his family. The flowers came back to his friends at the facility as a memorial to his presence in their lives.”

Other times, the flowers provide an opportunity for residents to get acquainted. “Some facilities ask residents in independent

living units to deliver the arrangements to less mobile residents, maybe ones in the nursing home area,” Patti explains. “This allows people to visit with each other and form friendships.” So in this case, the flowers also bring companionship in the delivery. “The flowers give them the opportunity to interact with each other,” she adds.

For such far-reaching benefits, cut flowers take very little care. Patti says keep the water clean, changing it at least every other day to keep it from turning murky. Re-trim the stem when you change the water to make sure the flower can draw what it needs to maintain its bloom. Flower arrangements do better in a cool area, so try not to set them in direct sunlight.

Hospice and continuing care residents have a little brighter day because of Patti’s initiative to bring flowers into their home. NDN

To find out more about BloomsThat Brighten and how you can help, call (757) 229-1665 or e-mail: info@BloomsThatBrighten.com

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