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~ Colleen
Patrick-Goudreau

Although she grew up “pretty much eating everything that swam, walked, or flew” New Jersey-raised Colleen Patrick-Goudreau read a book that changed her eating habits and her life.

By ANGEL JENKINS MORRIS

Prior to “Diet for a New America,” Colleen said she “ate what (her) folks fed her.”

“I never ate processed meats, such as sausage and pepperoni, but I don’t think it was for any conscious reason,” she said. “I owe amends mostly to chickens, I think. I remember eating chickens somewhat frequently – some kind of cream of chicken concoction was something I made frequently. I didn’t know any better.”

“New America,” however, was an education in why the then 19-year-old might change her diet.

“I had never seen the images of the animals in confinement like that. It was very powerful for me. I remember literally staring at the photos for hours, just back and forth, in utter shock,” Colleen said. “I had been so clueless up until then. I was also fascinated by the nutrition info, and it’s when I realized how unnecessary it is to consume animals.”

As a result, Colleen eventually founded Compassionate Cooks – to help people make informed food choices and debunking myths about vegetarianism and animal rights through cooking classes, workshops, articles, a Vegetarian Food for Thought podcast, a vegetarian cooking DVD, and an award-winning cookbook “The Joy of Vegan Baking.”

“Initially I began doing outreach and education, informing others about what I learned, but I was still disconnected. I was eating animals from the sea, and I was consuming chickens’ eggs and cows’ milk,” Colleen said. “My final awakening came once I read ‘Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry’ by investigative journalist Gail Eisnitz. I woke up to the truth about our treatment of animals and realized that no matter how they are raised and what they are raised for (their flesh, eggs, milk), they all wind up in the same horrible place: the slaughterhouse.”

“I had been deceived into believing that somehow the chickens’ eggs and cows’ milk I had been consuming were from animals who were protected from harm and even spared death. I was very wrong. The process of breeding, transporting, and killing young and innocent lives is ugly and violent, and death does not come easy for those who want to live.”

At this point, Colleen said her outreach “increased tenfold,” and the more it did, the more she found that

people had the same reaction.

“Once they heard about what we do to the animals, their first question is always ‘How can this happen?’ and ‘How could I not have known?’ But it was their subsequent questions that led me to begin teaching cooking classes: Where do I shop? What do I eat? How do I cook? Will I get enough protein? What do I feed my family?”

Colleen realized the need for Compassionate Cooks and its resources was great.

“People wanted to know what to eat and how to cook, and I just responded with cooking classes,” Colleen explained.

“I just kept asking ‘What is the need and how can I fill it?’ and the answers continued to come. When people asked when I would be on TV, I responded with a DVD to increase the reach for people who don’t live in the San Francisco area. When a publisher approached me to write a cookbook, I wrote it. When I saw the dearth of veg-related articles and editorials in the media, I wrote. When I realized I had something to offer by way of podcasts, I stepped in.”

Beyond these things, Colleen said the intent behind Compassionate Cooks is simple: “To raise awareness about the suffering of animals, to be their voice, to speak my truth, and to empower people to make informed food choices.”

“I believe we’re all put on this earth to contribute in a way that is a reflection of our passions and our skills. I knew when I left graduate school that I was going to do something related to writing, communication, and animal rights, but I had no idea what it was going to look like,” Colleen said.

Today Colleen said she most enjoys hearing from podcast listeners who share their eating transformation stories. She encourages anyone thinking of changing their diet to do so, even if they start with baby steps.

“My eating has evolved so much from when I first embarked on this journey 20 years ago. I don’t want people to think this process happens overnight,” she said. “Over time my habits and palate have changed so though I ate a lot more processed veg foods when I first became vegetarian and then vegan, my favorite meal today is something like my garlic and greens soup – kale is my favorite food ever – my blueberry smoothie, and a really



good salad. Eating an abundance of whole foods is something that developed over time for me, but it is definitely what I emphasize in my work teaching others to cook and eat healthfully.”

Changing the way one eats is as much about changing how one thinks as it is changing one’s diet.

“The primary thing I try to do is take veganism out of the box. I encourage people to recognize that what we call vegan food is food they are already familiar with: vegetables, fruits, beans, grains, mushrooms, nuts, seeds, herbs, and spices,” Colleen explained.

In the case of baked goods, it’s flour, sugar, cocoa, chocolate, vanilla, baking powder, baking soda, cornstarch, and yeast.

“I focus on the normalcy of what we call vegan food – whether it’s cooking or baking. I think that really helps people relax into these new habit changes and it just makes it a lot less daunting.” A common assertion Colleen hears is that someone could stop eating all animal products except one item, usually cheese.

“And I say, ‘Well, then stop eating all other animal products except cheese for now – at least do what you’re able and willing to do,’” Colleen said. “Each step will bring you closer to the person you really want to be, to the animals you want to help, and the health you want to achieve. But to continue eating animal flesh and animal milk or eggs because you can’t give up cheese – it’s an absurd rationalization. “Don’t do nothing because you can’t do everything. Do something. Anything.”

Aside from her most obvious eco-friendly behavior of not eating animals, Colleen also shops green.

“We buy most of our produce from local farmers, this goes for the food in my cooking classes, too; we hardly drive – my husband takes public transit and I work from home – and when we do, we drive our Prius; we grow our own vegetables (with no animal products) and planted several fruit trees,” Colleen said. “We have rain-catcher tanks so we can use rain water for irrigation; we removed our front lawn and replaced it with a garden (and drought-tolerant plants); we’re composting maniacs; and I use only compostable plates/forks/bowls/spoons in my cooking classes.”

To learn more about these efforts, visit www.compassionatecooks.com/, where you may even communicate with Colleen herself.

“I feel like we’re all on a journey together, and I just love hearing about how people experienced their own awakenings. Those are my absolute favorite encounters,” Colleen said. “I’m thrilled to be able to spend all my time devising ways to educate and empower people. I feel so very grateful to do this work.”