

The Boston Globe

Food & dining

COVER STORY

Converted from vegetarianism by jerk chicken

By Anna Marden | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 18, 2012

I was born and raised a vegetarian by vegetarian parents. Well, to be honest, I ate fish on rare occasions, but only because my parents made me. When I was really young, someone told me fish were swimming vegetables.

I ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every day of elementary school. For dinner, I ate lots of bean and rice burritos, tofu products, pasta, and veggies. My parents were good about making sure I got a decent amount of protein and making me take my vitamins.

When I was about 6, my dad started eating meat again. I had no desire to, even though he tried to persuade me to eat chicken or turkey.

Sometimes I took a tiny sliver of meat (literally, the size of my pinky fingernail), tasted it and declared it tasted like fish, which I didn't really like.

As a teen, I became a little more of an educated ethical vegetarian. I had vegetarian friends and I tried to protest eating fish. With more control over my own diet, it became more heavily based on pizza. I am naturally lean, and was never very athletic or had much energy to be active. And I was sick a lot.



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When I was 15, my mom brought home a steak one day - this after 20 years of being a

vegetarian. I was shocked. After that, she started nagging me about eating meat. She cooked fish more often and tried to get me to eat chicken. But the more she bugged me, the harder I protested.

Both my mother and father broke from vegetarianism because they felt they were missing something essential in their diets and they craved meat.

Two years later, something strange happened. I was at a friend's house and whatever the mom was cooking smelled so delicious wafting up from the kitchen. It was Jamaican jerk chicken. Suddenly, I was craving it. I didn't hesitate. I dived in and, surprisingly, really liked it.

From that point on, I ate chicken with my friends all the time, but I never told my mom. After all my protesting, it didn't seem right to let her in on my newfound love of poultry.

One day, maybe a year later, friends and I were ordering pizza at my house. My mother said, "We have to get something vegetarian for Anna." My girlfriends cracked up.

"Anna's not a vegetarian anymore," someone announced. She made the confession for me, and I couldn't deny it.

This was about five years ago. From there, I slowly started working my way up to a full omnivorous diet. I feel healthier and stronger now. I ate my first hamburger six months ago, but I have to say I didn't like it. Next time I order at a burger joint, I think I'll ask for a veggie burger - with bacon.

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