

Vegan victories

A former Eugene woman finds success as a chef and cookbook author

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It's difficult to believe, but celebrated vegan chef and cookbook author **Alexandra Jamieson** once existed primarily on fast food, sugary sweets and lots of soda. And in her words, she "got away with eating really bad for a long time" before she sought medical attention and embarked on a vegan lifestyle.

The former Eugene resident and University of Oregon graduate explains that after years of poor eating habits, she began experiencing an array of physical ailments. "I got really sick at the age of 25," Jamieson says. "I was having migraine headaches, I was 20 pounds more than I am now and I was very depressed."

Fed up with feeling awful, Jamieson went to a doctor who recommended Prozac. She dismissed his advice and saw a different doctor — a more holistic one — who conducted a battery of tests and determined her symptoms were directly related to her food choices. "He told me, 'You eat nothing but refined food. You need to change your diet,'" she says.

Which is exactly what Jamieson did. She quickly ditched meat, caffeine and sugar and began a vegan regimen that focused solely on the consumption of whole foods. The results were remarkable.

"In less than two weeks, I started to feel so much better," she declares. "I felt refreshed. My headaches went away and my extra weight dropped off without even thinking about it."

Today, the 35-year-old Jamieson, who is 5-foot-9 and weighs a litesome 128 pounds, is the epitome of good health. She makes her home in New York City where she resides with her husband, acclaimed film director **Morgan Spurlock**, and their young son, Laken. She recently traveled to Eugene and Portland to promote her latest written work, "**Vegan Cooking for Dummies.**" Featuring more than 160 vegan recipes for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the book is a follow-up to "**Living Vegan for Dummies**" (2009).

Jamieson explains that a vegan diet contains everything but animal products. "I like to describe it in a way that makes it seem like there are lots of options because there are," she says. "Basically, the diet includes whole grains, beans, fruits, vegetables, sea vegetables, nuts and seeds.

"There are so many foods that people eat normally that are vegan. Like pita and hummus with falafel. That's vegan. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich. That's vegan. This is some pretty basic stuff. Chips and salsa and guacamole. These are regular snacks in my house and they're all vegan."

Jamieson gained international recognition for appearing in the 2004 Oscar-nominated documentary, "**Super Size Me,**" which was directed by her then-boyfriend Spurlock. The film chronicles the health consequences endured by Spurlock during a 30-day self-imposed diet of nothing but McDonald's fast food.

Spurlock's gastronomical ordeal, which resulted in significant weight gain and numerous physical problems, prompted Jamieson to create a vegan detox diet (and subsequently write her first book, "**The Great American Detox Diet**") to help him recover.

"It took two months for his blood pressure, liver function and cholesterol to return to normal," she says. "It took him a year to keep all the weight off."

A vegan diet is an excellent way to maintain a healthy weight because you never need to think about eating too much, Jamieson says, adding, "It's hard to eat too many vegan calories."

Along with creating plant-based recipes and writing vegan cookbooks, Jamieson is a certified holistic health counselor who offers support to women seeking a healthier, happier way of life.

“As a counselor, I help a lot of women use food, lifestyle and holistic modalities to heal longstanding health issues,” she concludes.

“We can eat ourselves into disease, and we can eat ourselves back to health.”

Jamieson offers the following recipes from “Vegan Cooking for Dummies”: Un-Tuna Sandwich, Vegan Baked Beans and Nutty Choco-Pretzel Sticks.

Un-Tuna Sandwich

2 cups water

2 packages (8 ounces each) tempeh

¼ cup red onion, minced

½ cup celery, minced

¼ teaspoon fresh garlic, minced

¼ cup minced dill pickle

2 tablespoons flaked nori or dulse

1 cup vegan mayonnaise

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

8 slices whole-grain bread, toasted

Bring 2 cups water to a boil in a medium pot with a steamer basket. Dice tempeh into cubes and place in basket. Steam 5 minutes; remove from heat and allow to cool for at least 5 minutes.

Place steamed tempeh, red onion, celery, garlic, pickle, nori, mayonnaise, salt and pepper into a food processor.

Blend for a few minutes, stopping to scrape down the sides once or twice until the mixture forms a smooth paste.

Spread 1/3 cup of the tempeh mixture on a slice of toasted bread and layer with your favorite condiments. Top with other bread slice. Cut sandwiches in half on diagonal and serve. Refrigerate remaining tempeh mixture in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Tip: You can find the nori or dulse in the macrobiotic section of your local health food store. Also, feel free to substitute two 30-ounce cans of drained chickpeas (garbanzo beans) for the tempeh if you wish to go soy-free.

Vegan Baked Beans

4 cans (16 ounces each) navy beans, rinsed and drained

2 tablespoons grape seed, canola or olive oil

2 cups minced yellow onions

1 clove garlic, minced

16 ounces unseasoned tomato sauce

¼ cup pure maple syrup

¼ cup blackstrap molasses

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

2 bay leaves

2 teaspoons dry mustard

3 to 5 cups water

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

½ teaspoon salt

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Place the beans in a large casserole dish and set aside.

Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Saute onions until they turn translucent, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook for another 2 minutes.

Add tomato sauce, maple syrup, molasses, vinegar, bay leaves, mustard, 3 cups water and black pepper. Cook 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Mix tomato mixture into casserole dish with the beans and stir well to combine. Cover with foil and bake 2 hours, adding salt and stirring after 1 hour and adding 1 to 2 cups water to keep mixture moist.

After 2 hours, remove foil and bake an additional 30 minutes.

Makes 8 servings.

Nutty Choco-Pretzel Sticks

1 cup vegan chocolate chips

24 pretzel rods

½ cup finely chopped almonds, pecans or other nuts

Prepare a baking sheet or large plate by lining it with parchment paper. Set aside.

Melt chocolate chips in double boiler over simmering water on medium heat. Dip the bottom half of each pretzel rod in the melted chocolate and lay on baking sheet. When you've coated all the pretzels, sprinkle with nuts.

To set the chocolate, refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Makes 12 2-pretzel servings.