

Vegans, vegetarians, near-vegetarians and inquisitive eaters all find a warm welcome at Lovin' Spoonfuls. Owner Peggy Raisglid reaches out with her "Route 66 bacon cheeseburger" and "banana cream pie." The quotation marks signal that these are Lovin' Spoonfuls' vegan variations on the traditional theme. (Vegans do not eat animal products, including eggs or dairy products.) Raisglid turns out traditional food made with nontraditional ingredients.

Raisglid, who has a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Arizona, previously worked as an engineer with Mobil and later as an instructional designer and creator of technical training tools. But she always loved to cook and entertain.

"When I was a child, as soon as my mother went out of the house my brother and I would run into the kitchen to cook," she recalls. Raisglid grew up eating the standard American diet. "I was a hard-core carnivore. I loved T-bone steak, and after I'd eaten the steak I would take a piece of bread and mop up the juice."

Raisglid became a vegan on Aug. 14, 1989, a date she remembers precisely. "I went to a Unitarian church service, and the speaker talked about vivisection. Whatever she said went straight to my heart, and I walked out of the church having made the decision to become a vegan."

Dietary necessity became the mother of culinary invention. "My biggest challenge was trying to create the dishes I was used to eating without using animal products," Raisglid says. She experimented in the kitchen, substituting vegetable-based ingredients for meat, eggs and dairy products until she achieved the flavors and textures that fit her criteria. Over the course of 16 years she created a lot of recipes.

"Whenever I went to parties or entertained, people would rave about my food and tell me I ought to open a restaurant," she says. Years went by, and the restaurant idea sat on the back burner. Finally, in 2005, various factors came together to make the idea seem workable. "The company I had been working for here in Tucson was bought out. I didn't want to move to another location to work for the new company. Also, I was turning 50, and I told myself that if I wanted to try opening a restaurant, it better be now. I was at a point financially

Lovin' Spoonfuls:

by Linda Brewer

Not Just for Vegans



where I could almost do it, so I went ahead with it.”

Lovin’ Spoonfuls opened in September 2005. Raisglid describes the time since then as “nontrivial. The most fun of my life. I live here. I’m here from the time the restaurant opens until after we close. The restaurant combines everything I love. I love to cook. I love promoting a vegan diet. I love entertaining people. Before, I used to love entertaining in my home. Now I entertain people here every night.”

The hard work and devotion have already paid off. In its year and a half of operation, Lovin’ Spoonfuls has received several awards in the category of vegetarian restaurants.

In choosing the décor for her new home-away-from-home, Raisglid visited restaurants all over Tucson until she found one whose design appealed to her. She contacted the designer and described her wish list: wood, bricks and an overall warm and welcoming atmosphere. The resulting plank-and-brick walls and wooden counters give the small restaurant a bigger feel. There’s a banquette along one wall, booths on the opposite wall, and tables in between. Classical music plays over the sound system. A well-lighted pastry case draws customers to the counter—vegans do eat chocolate. Customers order at the counter and take a numbered wooden spoon back to their table.

Raisglid welcomes both vegetarians and nonvegetarians. She provides a variety of informational materials for people interested in trying a vegetarian diet. She says, “I get such an interesting cross-section of customers. There’s a whole spectrum of ages and backgrounds and motivations. About half of my customers are not vegetarians, but they want to eat

more healthfully. Some older people come here because they used to come to the restaurant that was here before and they just kept coming when we opened. Some of my customers practice yoga and follow a vegan diet. Some customers like to eat here for religious reasons. I already have so many regulars who feel like part of the family. When they come in they’re so friendly and nice. I feel that I have the nicest customers in Tucson.”

Lovin’ Spoonful is located at 2990 N. Campbell Ave. Telephone: 325-7766.

Peggy Raisglid developed this recipe to get new vegetarians off to a sweet start.

Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

Makes 12 big cookies

3/4 cup Earth Balance margarine
1/2 cup Florida Crystals unrefined sugar
1 cup brown sugar
1 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup plain soy milk
1 cup unbleached flour
3 cups rolled oats
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. ground cloves
1 cup chopped walnuts or pecans
1 cup raisins

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Combine margarine, sugars and vanilla. Blend in soy milk. Mix in flour, oats, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and cloves. Stir in nuts and raisins. Scoop cookie dough with ice-cream scoop onto greased cookie sheet and flatten slightly. Bake 15 minutes. Remove from cookie sheet with spatula. Cool on rack.

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