

A Family of Vegetarians Makes a Contribution to Protecting Our Earth

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Ms. Sie Ning-Huei attends the GHG Inventory Workshop at Tzu-Chi Jing Si Hall in Xindian in April 2023.

My journey with vegetarianism began with my employment at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital.

After my graduation from the International Health Division of the Institute of Public Health at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU) in 2009, I

was offered a position at the Department of Community Medicine at Dalin Tzu Chi University. Although the Tzu Chi University Student Cafeteria (Sphere of Lazuli Dining Hall) was my top choice for money- and hassle-saving meals during my academic studies in Hualien, I still

wasn't a full vegetarian back then. On weekends and holidays, I would often dine off-campus with my classmates. Around six months after I started my employment at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital, a major earthquake of 7.0 magnitude struck the far-away island of Haiti at the other end of the Pacific. Milo, an international student from Haiti who I befriended in graduate school, had returned to Haiti to accept a position at the Haiti Centers for Disease Control after his graduation from NYCU. I was really concerned about the safety of this good friend and his family. Since I couldn't reach him by email, the idea to become a vegetarian and thereby gain good karma and add power to my prayers for my friend's safety emerged in my mind. Several weeks later, I finally

received Milo's message that he was safe and well, which took a heavy load off my mind. After my initial relief and excitement, I suddenly realized that I had forgotten to include a time limit in my vow to become a vegetarian for the sake of my friend's safety. Since I had no aversion to vegetarianism, it came naturally to me to continue my vegetarian diet until now.

My husband Chen Po-Chun also wholeheartedly embraced the concept of vegetarianism and became a full vegetarian after joining the Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital staff as Dr. Lin Chin-Lon, the Superintendent of the hospital at that time, launched the Health-Promoting Hospital initiative. In the context of this Health-Promoting Hospital campaign, he got a chance to visit numerous hospitals and personally



Sie Ning-Huei (bottom right) and Vice Superintendent Lin Ming-Nan (top left) attend Southeast Asia Climate and Health Responders Course Video conference

witnessed their active promotion of vegetarian diets and meticulous design of meal choices. For instance, Taiwan Adventist Hospital in Taipei stresses low-sugar and low-oil cooking methods. Many new mothers highly favor the hospital's sophisticated and delicious postpartum vegetarian meals. The vegetarian menu of Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in Singapore incorporates Southeast Asian culinary culture. It features an impressive array of Indian and Malaysian vegetarian dishes.

These visits inspired my husband to share Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital's experiences in the promotion of low-carbon vegetarian diets with a larger audience.

We were extremely grateful that our parents and grandparents agreed to our choice of an eco-friendly, vegetarian menu for our wedding banquet with family and friends. After extensive research, we selected healthy, tasty, and sophisticated dishes that subverted meat-eaters' entrenched stereotypes of vegetarian



Mr. Chen Po-Chun and Ms. Sie Ning-Huei attend the Buddha Day Ceremony in May with their children. The whole family is vegetarian and implements environmental actions in daily life.

meals. After we got married, I gave birth to two sons who were born as vegetarians. I not only breastfed them but also personally prepared their supplementary food.

Healthy Vegetarian Babies

My older son only weighed 2,010 grams when he was born in the 36th week of conception. He had to stay in an incubator for 12 days before his discharge from the hospital. His growth curve always lagged behind that of his peers, but now he is well-built. It is obvious to everyone that both my kids are strong and healthy. Even my meat-eating relatives come to ask me for advice and often wonder how we raised them so well with vegetarian diets.

We recommend a diet that includes every kind of food free of non-vegetarian ingredients and ensures a balanced intake of all nutrients. Strong emphasis should be placed on plant-based protein intake, a good exercise routine, and sufficient sleep to ensure that children are strong and physically fit.

My kids who were born vegetarian have never had meat before. A Taiwanese saying goes: “They had never eaten pork before but had seen pigs walk.” Our children have neither eaten nor seen pork. One day, we dined together with friends. Our cute older son who was only two

back then said he wanted to eat carrots when he saw a plate filled with bright red pork slices next to a hot pot on the neighboring table. Our little son who we nicknamed “Fruit Prince” due to his love of fruit once saw a plate of freshly cut meat on a table. When we noticed that he was about to reach for a piece of “watermelon” on the table, we yelled: “That’s meat!”

They have known since they were little that they are vegetarians, not meat-eaters. When they were a bit older and someone offered them something to eat, the first thing they asked was not “Mom, is it OK?” but “is that vegetarian?”. Now that they’re able to read, we have started teaching them how to interpret nutrition labels and ingredients. They have learned how to identify non-vegetarian ingredients. When they attended Daai Kindergarten, the school educated them on the benefits of vegetarian diets and how to analyze dietary habits from the perspective of animal and environmental protection. They have even started to persuade close relatives to become vegetarians for the sake of their health.

Racking Our Brains to Attract Our Kids with Creative, Nutritious, and Tasty Recipes

We have put a lot of time and effort into studying recipes in purchased cookbooks to gain the ability to cook

tasty and delicious vegetarian dishes for our kids since we have realized that once kids have tasted restaurant food they no longer find bland home-cooked food appetizing. When our kids were still little, we tried different cooking techniques and color combinations to avoid tension and arguments at the dining table and get them to love the food we put on the table.

We would jointly discuss our menus and buy what we needed for our recipes together. We even allowed our kids to choose their favorite ingredients. We reached a bump in the road during a period when they developed a dislike for vegetables. We thought to ourselves: “What is left to eat if we stop eating vegetables? As vegetarians our food choices will be even more limited.”

We therefore had to come up with ingenious ideas to further refine our cooking techniques. During that time, flavors and dishes from different countries that can be found on restaurant menus such as vegetarian fried rice/noodles with various ingredients, vegetarian Okonomiyaki, farmers pizza, risotto gratin with seasonal vegetables, and spaghetti started to appear on our dining table. We added Japanese, Italian, American, and French flavors to our traditional Taiwanese and Chinese cuisine. We relied on our creativity to conjure up even the most challenging



The older brother Chen I-Rui cooks vegetables, while his younger brother Chen I-Che makes Edamame pancakes. The children work as a team to prepare tasty dishes in the home kitchen under close supervision of their parents.



dishes with the goal of arousing the taste buds of our kids and making sure that they ingest all the nutrients they need without even realizing it.

Transformation of Kids into Chefs Adds to the Vegetarian Flavors and Dining Experiences

At home, we allow our kids to use knives, forks, and the gas stove under our close supervision. We try to give them appropriate leeway, offer them a chance to grow, and make them appreciate the hard work we put into the preparation of the dishes.

We also discovered that children seem to find dishes prepared with them

serving as “sous chefs” more appetizing and delicious. When tasting these delicacies grown-ups must remember to dish out positive feedback and praise and thereby fill the little cooks with a sense of achievement. That way, they will be even more eager to roll up their sleeves and cook for the whole family next time. We also shouldn’t forget that dishes personally plated by children coupled with an occasional “sense of ceremony” or fancy dining table decorations add a lot to the dining experience and the flavor of the food!

Let’s have some very different vegetarian food for dinner this evening!