

Vegans and BC: A Budding Relationship

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Poking fun at the dietary habits of my older sister Rachel, my father once said, “Show me a live Tofurkey running around on a farm and *then* I will eat it.” Rachel laughed out loud with the rest of us, but I could tell she was not amused. As my father was walking away, I saw Rachel pick up a clementine from the table and size up the back of his head (in addition to being a vegan, Rachel is also a softball pitcher). Had my father stayed in the room but a moment longer, I am sure we all would have seen a rather symbolic message concerning veganism in the form of a fastball.

My father’s manifest personal rejection of the vegan lifestyle reminds me of the day-to-day hurdles faced by vegan sprinters in the race of life. The majority of the omnivorous community, like my father, questions the validity of using substitutes for animal food products, which often leaves vegans, like motherless bluebirds, to fend for themselves when it comes to nutrition. For them, going out to eat with non-vegan friends is officially labeled a “hassle.” Quite simply, most restaurants do not have enough vegan entrees on their menus.

This unintentional nutrition discrimination is even more prevalent at college, where many students are placed on a meal plan and, for the most part, dine in the campus dining halls. So instead of choosing from a lineup of restaurants in a town or city, the collegiate vegan is stuck with whatever food his/her particular college chooses to provide. A college, fundamentally a business, would not want to overexert its resources to please such a small portion of the population. Yet ARAMARK, a college campus food provider, released nationwide research in 2005 revealing that “out of more than 100,000 college students surveyed, nearly a quarter said

finding vegan meals on campus was important to them” (“Vegan”). Specifically at Boston College, I was able to investigate the extent to which vegans feel included in the realm of nourishment. In my own research, I found that despite the innate troubles that vegans have in any public dining situation, this Boston College/vegan relationship is only growing stronger each season.

One BC Senior, Amir Shirazi is taking no dietary shortcuts: he is a vegan. Amir made this decision in January of 2008 after reading a book recommended by his late father called *The China Study*. The book talks about avoiding, but not eliminating, the input of animal proteins into the human body. So in truth, the book is technically not advocating veganism, but instead a diet very close to it. *The China Study* calls its desired diet the “whole food, plant based diet” (Shirazi). Amir claimed that the book’s message and effect was life changing, which, for him, it literally was. Instead of the gradual process involving the transformation from an omnivore to a vegetarian and then to a vegan, Amir was inspired so much by the book that he made the jump right away, skipping the common transitional vegetarian phase.

When posed with the question “Is there a setting in which it is particularly hard for you to find the food you desire?”

Amir responded with a smile, “BC.” He explained that taking on a vegan diet is synonymous with denying the basic All-American diet (offered not only at BC, but everywhere in America), which is supplemented heavily with poultry products and cow products, such as chicken, eggs, milk, and beef. Amir said that despite the limited options, he has been impressed lately with the increased vegan entrees in the dining halls. Ethnic foods, for instance, are usually good sources of non-meat-based dishes. Asian, Mexican, Indian, and European foods all make more sense to a vegan than America cuisine. BC dining, in fact, tries to replicate this worldly

selection in their Grab‘N’Go vegan section of the fridge, boasting pre-packaged items like noodles or dumplings. Additionally, the World Market section McElroy’s cafeteria serves falafel with tahini on pita, among other dishes. Not confined to this ethnic theme, however, BC Dining offers standard American items like two brands of calcium-fortified soy milk, cubed tofu, a rotation of legumes, veggie burgers – which can be cooked on an induction burner if one is concerned about his or her food being prepared on the same grill as animal proteins – eggplant sub, vegan lentil soup, and whole grain products (Boston College).

Amir is not the only one noticing BC’s improved dining efforts. *BC Heights* staff writer Laurel Manlow remarks that “BC has made gigantic strides this year.” When Laurel returned for the fall semester, she was taken aback by the loud banner advertising the Thursday Farmer’s Market set up by Corcoran Commons. She then noticed the same vegan ethnic dishes in the dining halls that Amir has been eating these past couple of months. As a result, Laurel’s “previous mindset about being a vegan in college is definitely being challenged by the constructive changes BC has recently made.”

Mark Judd, who has been the Assistant Manager of Stuart Dining for eight years, gave a short explanation regarding the dining services’ new direction. When asked about any drastic changes imposed upon BC Dining, Judd recalled the beginning of Helen Wechsler’s term as Director of BC Dining: “Since then we’ve been using quality foods. We’ve been using quality, local foods.” Judd mentioned the addition of Addie’s Loft, a collaborative health food project brought about by Real Food BC and BC Dining. Danielle Cortesa, A&S '09, is a member of Real Food BC, a lead grower for the organic farm on Brighton Campus, and an employee at Addie's. She assures that the food all comes from local farms, so "you know exactly what you're getting," which is often of high priority for vegans and vegetarians (qtd. in Manlow). Laurel explains that

Addie's Loft offers a seasonal menu, so every month or so the vegetables will change, and we

know it will always be fresh. Vegans can build their own pizza without cheese as well as build their own salads; there are so many wonderful ingredients that someone might not even miss the cheese or meat. (Manlow)

In the fall of 2006, the Lyons Basement, The Rat, transformed from primarily a late-night style cafeteria into a dining hall that now emulates the healthy standards of the rest of the on-campus eateries (Czerwienski). Not surprisingly, any talk of the old Rat amongst upperclassmen has taken on a nostalgic tone, as if they were reminiscing about the good ol' days. Senior Chris Poulos said that many of his friends want the old Rat back. In fact, groups on Facebook have been dedicated entirely to that purpose. The group is called, “ ‘BRING BACK THE RAT!’” boasts almost 700 members, and a second group, ‘We Want the Old Rat,’ posts scathing criticism: ‘The Rat has become nothing more than the Healthy Squirrel’” (Czerwienski). Despite this seemingly overwhelming student reaction towards the healthier change, Amir figured that the number of those who prefer this modification matches the number of those who oppose it, which means the vegans of BC are in relatively strong company.

Mark Judd and I agree that Boston College is making strides towards a healthier, vegan-friendly future. He seemed to stress the flexibility presented by the food services here. Over each summer, he and the chefs collaborate on new dishes that will hopefully suit the needs of all students. Judd even revealed that a student who is unable to find what he is looking for need only ask, and he shall receive. What's more, Judd agreed to lobby for more choices if asked for by the students. As seen through Judd's tireless efforts, Boston College's continues to strive for healthier dining and please every kind of special dieter. In a way, Judd reminds me of that famous Jesuit slogan: men and women for others. And by others, I mean vegans.

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