

Eat, Drink, Man, Woman (and Child)

How does marriage work for a tofu-loving vegan and a fish-eye-eating omnivore? Deliciously.

BY JENNY ANDREWS

WHEN MY HUSBAND, Ken, and I were planning our wedding two years ago, we toiled over the menu even more than most anxious couples. As a Jewish vegan who doesn't eat meat, poultry, fish or dairy products, I wanted to share vegan delicacies without feeling I was pushing an agenda. My Chinese-Japanese-Hawaiian husband wanted to be sure his relatives would have enough to eat, and to incorporate Chinese banquet foods.

In the end, our caterer served a gorgeous organic vegan meal, complete with Chinese long noodles (representing long life). We added line-caught wild fish, served whole to symbolize abundance and good fortune (in Chinese and Hawaiian tradition). After a Jewish blessing over wine and challah, Ken worked the room, teaching people to extract and eat the fish delicacies: the eyes and cheeks.

I became a vegetarian as a teenager, with the mixed motivation of loving animals and wishing to confound (and inconvenience) my meat-eating parents. Then, five years ago, I became a vegan. Today chili, stews and endless variations of salads are my staples. While Ken's diet is more varied, his philosophy is simpler: without claiming any trendy labels, my husband is passionate about fresh, flavorful food. From fish cheeks to tripe and oxtail, he consumes everything, but he does so with appreciation and attention.

Our contrasting eating habits weren't

an issue when Ken and I started dating. Though I've always been interested in food politics, I've never been a proselytizing sort of vegan. And I've been known to put a little cow milk in my coffee if there's no soy milk, and I'll eat feta in Mom's salad rather than hurt her feelings by picking it out when she forgets "the vegan rules."

When Ken introduced me to his family at my first Chinese banquet, I tried to po-



TOFURKEY, ANYONE? Despite occasional challenges, food is a source of pleasure for my husband and me, not conflict. We learn from our differences.

lately subsist on the garnishes of cabbage and toasted nuts that accompanied plate after plate of whole chickens, ducks and fish. "Nonsense," said the family of notoriously big eaters, and simply ordered me my own plate of vegetables. The platters of whole poultry, which our friends feared would repulse me, instead inspired my respect.

Similarly, watching my husband eat has taught me to be conscientious about what's on my plate. Ken sees a chicken as a bird, not a disembodied nugget. He gives thanks for each animal he eats, and savors every last part of it, sometimes stopping midmeal to reseason a dish. And while he has no plans to give up meat, Ken is open-

minded about my diet, and enjoys my favorite vegan recipes and restaurants as much as I do. One day he looked up as we were cooking, grinning and slightly stunned, and blurted out, "I don't think I like chili any better with meat than without!" There is only one food about which Ken clings to tradition. "It has to be white rice," he pleads. "I just can't handle that brown rice."

In the day-to-day of our marriage, we often sit down together to eat different meals. We eat a lot of stir-fried vegetables and piles of beans—in soup, chili, burritos, enchiladas. I add fruits and nuts. Ken adds (white) rice and sometimes meat. We eagerly await the delivery of our weekly produce box. Our favorite Sunday outing is to purchase beautiful tomatoes, broccoli and peaches as we stroll through the booths of our neighborhood farmers market with our baby daughter, Kiela.

Though our shared meals satisfy us

both, the situation confounds our friends—they drop off gifts of ribs or chicken skewers with the apparent belief that my husband is wasting away in vegan servitude. And there is still the matter of the Hawaiian luau for Kiela. It is tradition to celebrate a child's first birthday with a luau—including a whole roasted pig. A friend of the couple dutifully raises the pig from the time of the child's birth and slaughters it for the party. After being initially appalled, I came to appreciate the care taken in this tradition. The symbolic little piglet is better off than a factory-farmed animal. Still, I had to put out the word

that any Babe-butcher in our honor would offend my vegan sensibilities. We have five more months to figure out what to serve instead. Soy in a pit? Tofurkey?

Despite these occasional challenges, food is a source of pleasure for us, not conflict. I wouldn't ask Ken to change his eating habits any more than he would seek to alter mine, and we plan to let Kiela sample my vegan fare and Ken's meat-inclusive menus so she can decide what to eat for herself. With the shared goal of nourishing ourselves while respecting our food sources, we learn constantly from our differences.

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