

A VOICE for VEGANS

By Sherry Lucas
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Susan Voisin's Jackson dining room may now be her office, photography studio and in-house props storage facility, but the focus remains on food.

Not all food. Just what fits in the scope of her vegan diet — a personal and increasingly professional pursuit.

What started as a hobby and a service has grown into a bread-and-nut-butter (in limited quantities) blogging business, sharing her kitchen creations with fellow readers who eschew meat and animal products, and even some who don't.

Voisin began her Web site, www.fatfreevegan.com, in 2003 and her blog, www.blog.fatfreevegan.com followed three years later. Mentions in magazines *Vegetarian Times* and *VegNews* helped swell her readership and in 2007, hers was voted the most popular blog by *VegNews* readers. Last summer, she was a guest chef at the

QUINOA WITH ASPARAGUS, MUSHROOMS AND CHICKPEAS

1 cup quinoa, rinsed well*
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups vegetable broth
4 sun-dried tomatoes, sliced 1/4 inch thick
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1 1/2 teaspoons basil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon smoked paprika
2 cups sliced small portabella mushrooms
1 bunch asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 15-ounce can chickpeas, drained
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon red bell pepper, chopped

Toast the quinoa in a large nonstick saucepan over medium heat for 3

minutes, stirring constantly. Add garlic and cook for another minute. Add all remaining ingredients except asparagus and chickpeas, bring to a boil, cover and turn heat to low. Cook for 10 minutes. Add chickpeas and asparagus to pan, cover and cook for 5-10 minutes, until asparagus and quinoa are tender. Stir in lemon juice and sprinkle with diced red pepper.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 205 Calories (kcal); 3g Total Fat (11 percent calories from fat); 8g Protein; 39g Carbohydrate; 0mg Cholesterol; 425mg Sodium.

*Quinoa has a natural coating that can affect flavor; it should be washed off before cooking. Rinse well under running water.

McDougall Health and Medical Center in Santa Rosa, Calif.

For the past year and a half, SusanV, as she's known on her blog, has made a living at it. She has about 125,000 visitors a month, who check in for her latest low-fat vegan recipes and commentary.

"The cutoff is no added oils or margarine or anything like that, and low on other fats, such as nuts and seeds," Voisin says of her recipes. "I do use a little bit of peanut butter and other nut butters and nuts themselves, but no oils at all."

Voisin went the vegetarian route more than two decades ago, while living in Columbia, S.C. "I just always had an empathy for animals, and so that's just sort of the next step, to become a vegetarian," she says.

Six years later, she was trying to clean up her diet from a health standpoint. Reading about treatment of dairy animals and chickens

See VOISIN, 2D

From 1D

prompted her to try to be a vegan, eating only plant products.

Voisin tried a low-fat vegan diet for a month and at month's end, treated herself to a cheese pizza. She was sick for three days, "just all the digestive problems that you can think of," she says.

Lactose intolerance? Allergy? Dietary curve ball? She doesn't know. But it was a turning point.

"I decided that anything that could make me feel that bad, I wasn't going to continue to eat. So I went vegan and never turned back. That was in 1994."

Her Web site was her spot for collecting recipes for a vegan diet. "I felt that it was something that I wanted to have all in one place, that there was a need for it, and I started it just for fun."

She began her blog at a friend's suggestion, using the freedom to dish about how her recipes came to be.

"I gave it a try and it was just so much more successful than the Web site itself."

Good timing helped, as did consistency and word of mouth. Hers came along at a time when there were just a handful of vegan blogs. "Almost all of them were saying, 'This is what I ate today' sort of thing. They weren't putting a whole recipe with photos of it so people could try it at home." But she was.

In Voisin's kitchen, the test kitchen, a strawberry snack cake shines in homage to her hometown (strawberry capitol Hammond, La.) and a hearty dish with quinoa (KEEN-wah, a South American grain/seed) and asparagus cooks on the



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stove.

On a day like that one, cold and rainy, hearty foods come to mind, such as soups, stews, chili. "I've got several good recipes for different types of chili, with pinto beans or black beans," she says, as well one with three beans plus corn.

Family members — husband David, an attorney, and daughter Elena, almost 12 — double as food critics in her recipe development. In Elena-speak,

four out of five crumbs is a keeper (with five crumbs reserved for faves such as lasagna). All stick close to a vegan diet. For vitamin B-12, they drink fortified soy milk and take a supplement a couple times a week.

"It's really a lot easier than you would think," she says of maintaining a vegan diet here. "I don't find it hard. Between Rainbow Whole Foods, and Kroger stocking so many organic and vegetarian items, it's really

Susan Voisin serves a piece of strawberry snack-cake. She works as a full-time vegan food blogger, photographer, and cook at her home in north-east Jackson.

become a lot easier. Even eating out, usually most restaurants will have something on the menu that will work, or they'll work with you."

The metro area's Asian, Mediterranean and Indian markets also are good sources. "Vegans tend to eat from all over the world," she says. "We like to take the vegetarian dishes of other countries and make it part of our everyday traditions."

Amy Griggs of Brandon took a church cooking class taught by Voisin and committed to eating vegetarian for a week. "She made it seem doable," Griggs says. And the blogger's site "is really invaluable. Her recipes are really pretty simple and I've been happy with everything I've tried."

Michele Sabatier, who lived in Alexandria, Va., before moving to Leland in 2007, came upon Voisin's site through a link. "I thought it was worth following and put her on my RSS feed."

She's not a vegetarian, but leans that way when cooking. "I'm sort of an improvisational cook," Sabatier says. "Her things are very adaptable to that style — a little bit of this, a little bit of that."

"And I like some of the commentary she has. ... She's very imaginative. And her photographs are beautiful. It's very appealing."

For Voisin, timely blog updates continue but a book's also on the horizon. Look for it in 2010.

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Lucas: Little helping hands add to the fun

From 1D

ing to swell the head count to double digits and I could use the help.

I tied aprons on 3-year-old "Little" Randall and his 8-year-old cousin, Alfred, and we got to work. Alfred folded a sheet of paper and took orders, putting a pizza parlor spin on

things.

Four little fists punched down dough. They fed the mozzarella through the food processor shredder like pros. They placed the pepperoni with infinite patience.

At first I thought Alfred might've had a heavy hand with the oregano in the tomato sauce, but the aroma and taste proved his instincts right on.

I often find enormous satisfaction puttering around the kitchen by myself.

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