

Sarasota's Raw Reality

*Jenna Norwood Debuts
Her Rawcumentary*



A series of things happened on Jenna Norwood's way to becoming a raw foodist. The catalyst in her path: facing in the mirror an image of herself wearing a Las Vegas showgirl costume. Yup, that was the turning point at which Norwood knew something had to be done for the better.

It was the day after Halloween and inspired by the showing of costumes at party the previous night, Norwood was ready to plan next year's costume. "I went to the Glass Slipper, a costume shop near my home, and a showgirl headdress caught my eye," she said.

In her youth Norwood had trained as a dancer and worked as a model. "I had always worn dance costumes and been confident about my appearance," she said. "And I always wanted to dress as a Las Vegas showgirl. At the time I was 38 and I could see the direction my weight was going, so I thought this might be my last chance. I tried on the costume and I wasn't pleased with how I looked.

"It hit me, because I had a history of being fit," she continued. "It all crystallized in my mind — this was something I had to make a high priority."

A vegetarian since she was 13, Norwood was becoming progressively discouraged with her health. She had issues with low energy, joint pain, back pain and increasing pounds. "I worked a lot. Keeping busy I ate on the run and I had a weakness for sugary things, pasta, refined flour," she admits. "I was a junk food vegetarian."

Yes, you read that right — junk food vegetarians do exist. Norwood explains, "You can keep busy not eating many fruits and vegetables. I was eating cookies, pizza, cheese...I had a weakness for chocolate dipped vanilla ice cream cones, French fries and veggie burgers."

At the time, she says, it didn't seem like food was controlling her, however she admits to craving something and going to get it. "I didn't feel nourished — just busy."

Norwood had heard about eating raw foods a few years ago, but had yet to explore the diet, which is comprised of at least 75 percent raw (uncooked, living, preferably organic) foods.

Raw foodists eat a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as dried fruits and vegetables, leafy greens, sea vegetables, seeds, nuts, sprouted grains, beans and legumes. They drink fruit and nut smoothies, vegetable juices, coconut juice, wheatgrass juice and purified water. Cooked foods are avoided because their inherent digestive enzymes and nutrition begin to be destroyed at temperatures about 105 degrees. Over time, eating cooked foods takes

a heavy toll on the digestive system's ability to produce its own digestive enzymes, explains Norwood, adding that it can cause waste and toxins to build up in the colon and intestines.

Norwood recalls having been invited to a raw food potluck. "It was surprisingly good. I had a ton of energy, that night I stayed up cleaning and organizing — and I'm not domestic. I even slept well," she said. "I thought it was interesting at the time, but it didn't click."

Later she began to encounter others who had gone raw. Noting their amazing transformations the correlation was beginning to sink in and Norwood's curiosity was getting the best of her.

Two people proved inspirational for Norwood. While visiting her boyfriend's family in Atlanta, the couple went to a raw foods workshop with expert David Wolfe. "David was an unbelievable speaker," said Norwood. "My boyfriend had a total junk food diet: fruity pebbles, oodles of noodles, ice cream sandwiches. That weekend transformed him and he has since lost 40 pounds, and he's not even 100 percent raw."

Norwood's other inspiration was her grandmother. "She was a picky eater, and just had a sense about things. Here was my grandmother who lived to be just six weeks shy of turning 100 and who exercised every day while she was able; and here I was feeling almost worn out."

After her grandmother passed in January 2005, Norwood completed a documentary about the woman who was one of the Florida West Coast Symphony's founding members. She showed the film at a celebration she hosted on what would have been her grandmother's 100th birthday.

In April 2005 Norwood began her raw food journey. She booked a three-week stay at the Optimum Health Institute in San Diego, Ca, which is a raw food detox center. Having seen Morgan Spurlock's documentary "Super-size Me," Norwood hired a two person crew to film her journey going "30-days Raw." Norwood completed her full-length documentary "Supercharge Me...30 Days Raw," (www.30daysraw.com) in September and set to make its first public showing at the Tofino Film Festival near Vancouver, Canada, this month.

Entering the detox program, Norwood anticipated losing weight and was afraid of the potential detox symptoms, which may include headaches, nausea, vomiting, aches and pains. Fortunately her symptoms were mild. "Initially I didn't know what to expect and I was surprised by a few things, like enemas and colonics were

part of the program. They're recommended for optimal health. I never had those before so that was scary."

The detox center provides a safe environment to transition into a raw food lifestyle and the program includes lots of classes on how to prepare foods.

You need to overhaul your kitchen with new equipment. Norwood replaced pots and pans with a good blender, juicer, food processor and dehydrator. The dehydrator is used to change the textures of foods, making them crunchy or chewy. It intensifies flavors and can preserve foods.

"I'm a Foodie," admits Norwood, "I love flavors. With cooking you lose flavor and I find that raw foods have more intense flavors. I'm very happy about that."

Surprisingly raw food recipes are much more diverse than one might expect. Recipes can be gourmet or simple and there are several books available for any skill level. Norwood even offers a food preparation workshop at Whole Foods market each month to teach others how to get raw. She says not only is it limitless in what can be made, but Whole Foods offers prepared raw food items from Glaser Farms, such as Mushroom Walnut Veggie Pie, Coconut Chocolate Almond Drops, Ginger Maple Pumpkin Seeds, Golden Flax Seed Crackers with Tomato and Bell Pepper to name a few.

"I've found my tastes have changed. I don't crave the same foods I used to, I'm not controlled by my food addictions and I'm not hungry as much because the foods I'm eating are nourishing."

"Is it extreme? People thought so," she admits. "I started slipping in cooked items but found my aches and pains, the weight gain, started to return. I had to buy back bigger clothes."

Norwood confides that she did go back to her old eating habits before the film was finished, even sneaking chocolate cake out of Metro Café. But as word got around about her film project (a trailer for it had been featured at last year's Sarasota Film Festival) she noticed, "I had so many witnesses around town. People were always looking at my plate, and that kept me honest."

She resumed her 100 percent raw diet (her boyfriend has maintained his mostly raw diet) and regained her pain-free, slight frame within 12-weeks.

"I feel good again. I have more energy, and reverting to my old diet showed me that I am someone who can't have just one bite of refined sugar or flour. There is no question. If I crave

something sweet, I use guava nectar or honey. If I want something salty I add Celtic sea salt," she said.

If others want to start their own path to becoming a raw foodist, Norwood advises that going to a detox facility is an incredible orientation. It helps with discipline. But, if that is not an option, add more raw food to your diet with green juices or fruit smoothies. A smoothie she recommends from Victoria Boutenko's book "Green for Life" is simple: combine 1 cup of strawberries, 2 bananas, 1/2 bunch of Romaine or spinach and 2 cups of water. Blend well. Use frozen fruit if you want it cold. The "Strawberry Field" yields one quart of smoothies.

Another easy entree is Norwood's recipe for Pesto Stuffed Portabella:

(All ingredients should be raw and organic, if possible.) Ingredients:

- 4 portabella mushrooms, cleaned & stemmed
- 1-cup walnuts
- 1/2-cup pine nuts
- 2 cups fresh basil
- 1/2 cup first cold pressed olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1/2 tsp. Celtic sea salt

Place mushroom caps top side down on a plate. Blend all stuffing ingredients in a food processor until smooth. Scoop equal portions of stuffing into each mushroom cap. Serves four.

And for dessert try her Easiest Banana Ice Cream:

Freeze four organic ripe bananas. Allow bananas to thaw for 10-15 minutes. Blend in food processor until creamy. Top with nuts of choice. Norwood likes pecan pieces. Serves four.

To learn more, and find information about Sarasota's local raw food group (the sixth largest in the world with 140 members) visit www.rawsarasota.com.

Norwood and Beth Day will be presenting food preparation classes at 6 p.m. the second Thursday of the month from Oct. —Dec. at Whole Foods market. Call 955-8500 to register. It's one hour, it's free and you might just find it free-ing.

Diana Bogan

