

"I Wish My Mama was Mama Palma!"

Dealing with cravings by giving in...sensibly.

By Jami Tryer

Here's the thing. I love pizza. I could eat it every night. No other food is so diverse, so satisfying and so ooey gooey good. Even a bad pizza (cold and greasy with spots of beer from the night before) can satisfy. That's why I was nearly in tears when I realized that Pizza was not exactly a go-to food for those in diet mode. Ugh. Honestly, it was like taking a binky from a baby. So, I resorted to dining in places where salad was an option and I watched my husband go at his pie as if he just got off "Survivor" Island. I had animosity and contempt all over my face and a deep, deep longing within for three things: dough, cheese and tomato sauce. I felt ashamed. I had been reduced to a pathetic dieter wearing a puss face that nearly gave way to rage. As hubby twirled the strands of hot Mozzarella around his extended tongue, I had my fork in position behind my back ready to stab it.



Renalto is a fixture at 23rd and Spruce.



I had reached an all time low. I was staring at Stauffer's French Bread Pizza through the glass in the supermarket's frozen section. I'd wipe condensation off of the glass just to get a better visual of the packaging. Wearing the face a dog makes when you take away his bone, I walked away with my tail between my legs.

I would call Dominos, listen to the greeting and then hang up. I would surf the websites of Papa Johns and Pizza Hut just to see what the promos were that week. I was sinking fast into a chronic state of (S.O.W) - Severe Oregano Withdraw. I had to do something. I had tried recipes at home with stuff like pitas, alpine cheese, Ms. Dash, but nothing I concocted could make me happy. I tried to tell myself that it the greatest home pizza I could make without the fat and calories. But that only made me want to make a comparison with the real deal.

So one night, hubby took me to Mama Palma's (**23rd & Spruce Streets, Phila 215-735-7357**) for what I thought was going to be just another night of relentless torture. Low and behold, that night, this comfortable, neighborhood spot was serving up something called Salerno Pizza - 100% Whole Wheat Pizza with a Fresh Tomato Base, Spinach, Chicken, Roasted Garlic and Roasted Peppers. Suddenly, my idontfeellikeasalad brain lit up like a Christmas tree. Great tasting low fat pizza, served up hot? I was stoked. Then, the owner Renalto Russo told me that all of the menu items marked with a heart symbol indicated their low-fat pizzas. He also mentioned that soy cheese was also available. Also, low-fat or no-fat, no-cholesterol Mozzarella were available. Um...hello! He was the angel on top of the tree.

I smelled the wood-fired brick oven working over time. I closed my eyes and was transported to Napoli in an instant and I was slowly getting my mo-jo back. Their brick oven is imported from Europe. Unlike conventional ovens, theirs can achieve a combination of roasting, baking and smoking. The intense heat from the hardwood seals in the flavor that creates the many awesome tastes of Mama Palma's one-of-a-kind pies.

Don't get me wrong; the salads are really impressive as well. They are huge and also inventive. I really like the Insalata Di Palma: Crisp Arugula, Vine-Ripened tomato, Red Onion, shaved Imported Parmesan tossed in their own Balsamic Vinaigrette. (They have a nice selection of fat-free dressings, just ask). Also very good is the Greek Salad: A festive mix of Vine-Ripened Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Red Onions, Green Peppers, Calamata Olives and Feta Cheese tossed with their own tangy dressing of Fresh Herbs of Mint, Oregano and Parsley.

I suggest moving on to the Chicken Dijon with Spinach Pizza. It features Chicken Breast sautéed in Tamari and Garlic, Fresh Spinach, Caramelized Red

Onions and Dijon Mustard topped with Low-fat Mozz Cheese. Also fabulous is the Hawaiian Pizza, which comes with Roast Pork Tenderloin marinated in Teriyaki sauce, zesty Hawaiian BBQ Sauce and Pineapple Chunks, topped with Low-Fat Mozz Cheese. Yeah, not your traditional pie toppings, but so, so good.

You can dine in or take a gourmet pie home. If you dine in bring your wine or try their house beer - Peroni (very light and tasty). If you're watching your waistline, pass on the Panninis and Calzones. This is a somewhat of a kid-friendly spot so if you are looking for a bit more quiet, go later in the evening.

Since my first MP experience, Renalto has been so kind to hubby and me. He treats us like he's known us a hundred years. He takes pride in every pie. They've been cranking out amazing concoctions for ten years at this location, and it's no wonder why they've lasted so long in a mostly residential community of Center City. Their pizza is so incredibly delicious it will keep



you coming back. They're more than willing to accommodate the changing diets of waist-watchers, and have a proactive eye on health-conscious cooking trends.

"This pizza shop has been around for awhile because I demand only the freshest ingredients. The toppings are inventive & the food is consistently good," explains Renalto.

Pizzas come in three sizes: Individual, Small and Large and they're more than accommodating when it comes to special requests. A small is great for two to share, while a large will fill four.

No slices are served in this much loved corner cozy spot where customers are treated like family. They're open Tuesday to Thursday - 4 pm to 10 pm, Friday and Saturday - 11 am to 11 pm and Sunday 2 pm to 10 pm. Don't go on Monday as they are closed. No delivery is available at this time.

It's great to see pizza joints finally getting with the program... the health program. You won't be disappointed. Tell Renalto Jami from *PhillyFIT* sent you!



Jami Tryer is a freelance writer, who grew up in Margate, N.J., but has been a Center City Philly resident since 1991. She is a partner with Munroe Creative Partners, a well-known graphic design firm, where she is a Senior Project Manager and helps to develop new business. She has been freelancing in her spare time for five years for magazines such as Philadelphia Style where she has reported on trends in beauty, fashion, food and culture. For PhillyFIT, Jami has countered the myth that dining out can be frighteningly fattening in her column. Contact JamiTryer@phillyfitmagazine.com.

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