



The Day I Met with the Whole Food, **REDHEAD GODDESS**

By Jami Tryer

Yes she has her own Emmy Award-winning cooking show on CN8, The Comcast Network. Yes, she is also one of America's prominent authorities on whole foods and nutrition. Yes, she's got her Master's in Food Nutrition from Drexel and travels the world with her inspiring message of the relationship between diet and health. She teaches hands-on cooking classes and has written numerous best selling books (5) on topics close to her heart. Oh yes, she also puts out a custom published magazine called Christina Cooks. The magazine begs readers to, "Wake up from the hypnotic trance of food marketing." And, oh yes, she and husband Robert sponsor trips throughout the year to destinations such as Belize, Tuscany and Sicily that feature "life changing European feasts." There's no disputing that Christina's Curriculum Vitae packs a punch. What you may not know is that she is one really nice, genuine person. And I'm not the only one who thinks so as she's got quite a fan base. She was absolutely delightful and husband, Robert, had nothing but love and adoration in his eyes. They are certainly a match made in Whole Foods heaven.

I was elated that Christina brought Robert (whose anecdotes kept me in stitches for nearly two hours) and her personal trainer, 43-year old, bounceaquateroffhisabs - Anthony Molino, a Culinary Arts graduate of the Restaurant School. I'm here to tell you that healthy food talk goes quite well with delicious eye candy. Did I mention he was an Ironman? You can catch him at Fitness Works (7th & Reed Streets) where he is a boot camp instructor (sign me up!)

The leaves outside were falling and the sunshine crisped up the room where the four of us got to know each other better with some lively Q and A, and I don't mean Quinoa and Arugala.

PF: What would you say to those who feel that they can eat whatever they want because they workout regularly?

CP: Well, both are important to maintain good health. You exercise better when you eat better (added my Iron Man). Marketing tells us that we should be eating foods that our processed. My feeling is that you should eat foods that have been in the sun. When you work out, you move the food through your body better. You need both.

PF: If you were only allowed to pack three food items before being dropped on a deserted island, what would they be?

CP: Olive oil, garlic and salt.

PF: How can Americans deal with portion control issues when dining out?

CP: Americans eat forty percent of their meals each week out of the home. The problem with that is that you really don't know what ingredients are going into the foods that you eat. On top of that, serving sizes have never been larger! Here's a strategy. Don't be afraid to ask for half portions. Sometimes a restaurant will create an appetizer size for you. Also, if the price is still the same, so be it. At least you won't be tempted by a mound of food on your plate. Tapas are a good solution because they are small plates to begin with and great for sharing and trying new foods. Also, watch those entrée size salads. They are loaded with cheese, olives and very fattening dressings in most instances. Ask your waiter for the dressing on the side.

PF: What would you say to those of us who generally shun fruits and veggies due to digestive issues like gas?

CP: Well first, the key is chewing. You should chew each mouthful twenty-five times. Most people who have issues run into problems because generally, it's hard to digest the cellulose (skin) found on many veggies so the key is to cook them down. Stay away from raw broccoli and raw cauliflower. Try using them in soups or stews. Some fruits like papaya and pineapple have a natural enzymes (Bromalyn) that actually aid in digestion. Veggies are an important part of the human diet. When you think you've had enough greens, eat twenty percent more.

PF: Fill in the blank. You put _____ on anything and it tastes good.

CP: Chocolate. Close seconds are butter and olive oil.

PF: In general, what is your philosophy about cooking?

CP: I grew up in a home where nearly everything was made from scratch. I left home when I was eighteen vowing that I was not going to continue this Donna Reed thing. I ate processed foods and then at twenty-six I got cancer. I met Robert in a health food store and he taught me how to eat, what to eat. It was a bit extreme but I told him I'd commit to his diet of broccoli and oatmeal and that I'd embrace seaweed delicacies. I went from 204 lbs to 99 lbs in three months. People shouldn't wait until they're sick to eat healthfully. A healthy diet rich in whole foods is the best preventative medicine. If you don't know how to cook Kale or Okra, find someone who does. Take some classes. Find a muse.

PF: Speaking of muses, how is Anthony different than any other personal trainer out there?

CP: He's an ISCA Certified Personal Trainer currently maintaining a roster of seventeen private clients, including me. He's the Food and Nutrition Manager at Methodist Hospital and he's a Johnny G Madd Dog Certified Spinning Instructor. He's also a Red Cross Certified Life Guard, and the author and creator of Food Fitness Nutritional Analysis Program, a program custom designed for clients need and goals.



PF: All that's great, but really, what makes him different?

AM: I'll take this one. It's simple. I train people the way I'd want to be trained. I find the true passion of my clients and build a custom program around that passion. I'm personally invested in my clients' goals and successes. I'm taking the journey with them. Say for example I have a client who loves to play golf. I will break down the motion of the swing and focus on strengthening the obliques and the lower back so that his swing can be enhanced, so that the body functions better. For an avid swimmer, I would work on the back, biceps and triceps and create a program that will build and maintain muscles that are essential to speed and agility in the water. I also offer private nutritional consults to complete the program all age appropriate and goal oriented. Think of eating as a vehicle to make your internal health better. Everybody wants to have a smaller waist but it's more important to eat well for your internal health and longevity.

PF: Christina, your story about how you fought off cancer is truly remarkable. If one is diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, what are the top five nutritional changes you would recommend?

CP: Eliminate saturated fats and sugar (sugar suppresses the immune system). Eat whole grains and veggies. Exercise, but not to the point of exhaustion. Drink a lot of water. Eliminate dairy and meat. Unsweetened soymilk is okay.

PF: What advice can you suggest to folks who are simply bored with diets? After all, many of us make New Year's resolutions and break them simply because we fall back into our desire for comfort foods.

CP: First, don't start off on your new quest for healthful eating by emptying all your shelves and filling them with stuff from the natural foods store. Take baby steps. Replace white rice with brown rice. Cook one hearty meal a week from scratch and build from there. Next, park your car one mile from the office and walk or even bike to work when you can. Cheat once a week. Have that meal that you've been dying for and before you know it, you'll feel stronger, have more stamina and you won't even realize the changes that you've incorporated because they'll be the norm in your life. In other words, good habits will eventually just be part of your everyday lifestyle. If you don't take care of your body, it becomes a host for disease. If you take care of yourself, your body will take care of you. For example, people who maintain a healthy lifestyle may nurse a common cold for about three days. Those who did not prime the body by exercising and eating right are more apt to incubate the common cold for 6-8 weeks at a time.

PF: Can you give us two recipes that are easy and may tempt our readers to maintain good health and nutrition? Remember, our readers are very active and don't have a lot of time to prepare healthful meals. After work and the gym, it's nearly 9:00 pm for many.

CP: No problem. These recipes are easy to prepare and will give you that full feeling you're looking for after a workout.

FRIED NOODLES WITH TOFU AND VEGETABLES

An easy to make and easy to present main course lunch or dinner idea. Try this well-balanced meal of complex carbs, protein and vegetables to keep you strong and vital.

Ingredients:

- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 carrot, fine matchstick pieces
- 4 slices of fresh ginger, finely minced
- 1 bunch of bok choy sliced on the diagonal
- 1 red onion, thin half moon slices
- 3 slices of packaged baked tofu, cubed
- Soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons of brown rice syrup or honey
- 7 button mushrooms
- 8 oz whole wheat Udon noodles
- The juice of a ½ lemon
- 3 sprigs of fresh parsley, finely minced

Place a small amount of oil, ginger and onions in a deep skillet and turn heat to medium. When the onions begin to sizzle, add a dash of soy sauce and sauté for about 2 minutes. Stir in mushrooms and continue to sauté until mushrooms release their juices (about another 2 minutes). Stir in carrots, bok choy and a light seasoning of soy sauce. Stir in baked tofu and rice syrup and season with soy sauce to taste. Sauté until bok choy is wilted and crisp-tender. While the vegetables are sautéing, bring a pot of water to a boil and cook the udon al dente, about 12 minutes. Drain and rinse well. Stir cooked noodles into sautéed tofu and vegetables, stir in lemon juice and transfer to a serving platter. Sprinkle with parsley and serve immediately. Makes 3-4 servings. Don't leave out the tofu! You'll lose the protein punch! Tofu is like a sponge and takes on the flavor of what ever you are cooking along with it!

GRILLED PORTOBELLO SANDWICH WITH CAMELIZED ONIONS, CAPERS & SUN-DRIED TOMATOES

Very yummy and meaty tasting, this sandwich will satisfy the most discriminating palate from vegans to burger biters. It's packed with flavor, seasoned well and ideal for those looking to get that full feeling fast!

Ingredients:

- 6 portobellos w/o stems, gills intact
- 2-3 cloves fresh garlic, thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons of EVOO or avocado oil
- 5-6 red onions, thin half moon slices
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- Mirin or white wine
- Generous pinch of red pepper flakes
- 3 tablespoons capers, rained well, do not rinse
- Sea salt
- 8-10 sun-dried tomatoes (not oil packed), diced
- Caramelized onion topping
- juice of ½ lemon
- 12 slices whole grain sourdough bread
- 6 leaves fresh romaine lettuce
- 6 slices vegan soy "cheese" (optional)
- 1-2 containers of alfalfa sprouts (optional)

Preheat the grill to hot or warm a lightly oiled grill pan over medium heat. Whisk together olive oil, vinegar red pepper flakes and a generous pinch of salt. Rub each mushroom thoroughly with the oil mixture and grill on both sides until tender and lightly browned, 5-6 minutes each side. Set aside. Place a small amount of oil, garlic and onions in a deep skillet and turn heat to medium. When the onions begin to sizzle, add a pinch of salt, a generous dash of mirin and red pepper flakes and sauté for 3-4 minutes. Add capers and sun-dried tomatoes, season lightly with salt and continue to cook, stirring frequently until the onions begin to caramelize, as long as 25 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in lemon juice and set aside to cool slightly before making the sandwiches.

To assemble the sandwiches, brush one side of each slice of bread lightly with oil and grill, oil-side down, until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Lay the bread slices, grilled side up, on a dry work surface. Lay a lettuce leaf and cheese on six slices of the bread. Lay a whole portobello mushroom on top of the lettuce. Mound caramelized onion topping on each mushroom and top with sprouts, if desired. Lay the balance of slices of grilled bread on top and serve. Makes 6 sandwiches. Note: you can melt the cheese on the portobellos for added creaminess, if you like.

If you are interested in learning more about Christina Pirello, the redhead Whole Food goddess, log onto www.christinacooks.com or pick up any one of her books chock full of delicious and good for you fare. Books include: *Cooking the Whole Foods Way*, *Cook Your Way to the Life You Want*, *Glow, A Prescription for Radiant Health and Beauty* and *Christina Cooks: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Whole Foods, But Were Afraid to Ask*. Christina is currently working on her fifth book, which will feature tips on how to age gracefully and achieve health and longevity by eating whole, natural foods.

Two hours went by in what felt like just a few minutes. At the beginning I had interviewee subjects, at the end I had friends. It was more than refreshing to meet three incredible people with such passion and positive attitudes. I went home and tossed my processes foods in the garbage. I plan on attending a Boot Camp Workout with the hunky Anthony soon. I just have to make sure that there are enough hospital beds that week at Jefferson! If there's one lasting impression that I got from our discussions, it's that having good eating habits and eating doesn't always have to do with the waistline. I learned that embracing Kale and shunning meals in a box has everything to do with longevity and the body's ability to just feel good. I'm not on a diet; I'm on a mission.



Jami Tryer is a freelance writer, who grew up in Margate, NJ., 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.