

The Present Moment Café

by Susan Lerner

Already an inveterate raw-fooder from New York City, and "spoiled" by the fabulous food served in its plentiful raw restaurants, I visited this St. Augustine, Florida restaurant with my girlfriend, Hippocrates LifeChange Program graduate Caroline Sederbaum. Caroline lived in Neptune Beach, just a half-hour north, and had been to the restaurant with the Jacksonville raw food meet-up group a few weeks before. She was excited to share the good-food experience with me. Even so, I arrived with my skepticism intact, fully expecting a heavy, disappointing meal. Was I in for a delightful surprise!

Owner and executive chef, Yvette Schindler, was turned on to raw foods by her 20-year-old son Nathan. After several months of eating 95 percent raw and living foods, the arthritis pain in her knee pretty much disappeared. She was convinced of the benefits of the new diet. No stranger to the restaurant business, having been the chef at the macrobiotic Natural Café in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the mother and son team opened The Present Moment Cafe in Octo-

ber 2006. They have created a "kitchen with a mission" and a "living-foods temple." They label their food "Kind Cuisine... healthful to your body and the environment."

From the very first look at the Present Moment Café, it is easy to recognize quality in its relaxed, earthy elegance. Whether you enter from the parking area in the rear of the building, or the inviting King Street entrance, the first impression is the same - clean, cared-for, and fresh. It is charming without being cute. Hand-some wood furniture and bar, tablecloths and fresh flowers on each table, and a comfortable lounge area create an appealing environment to spend your mealtime.

Yvette consulted with raw food chef extraordinaire Chad Sarno to create the first menu and train herself and her three chefs - Andrew Hartigan, Sandra Killion, and Natalie Yonan. They use only organic ingredients to create new recipes with delicately layered flavors and joyful eye-appeal. Their love and gratitude is present in every dish that emerges from the kitchen!

And now for the FOOD!

Although I could have had a freshly made green juice appropriately named "End of Paralysis" (celery, cucumber, and kale), or a "Universe Drink - created to help you breach duality and merge back to the ONE" (cacao, Goji berry, and maca in a banana smoothie), I began my first visit with my favored aperitif: simple coconut water. The elixir always grounds me after a long

journey searching hungrily for my next meal. Its potent magic accomplished, I was calm and ready to consider the multitude of choices on the menu.

My starter, "Vegetable Sushi Maki Roll" (\$7.00) arrived after a reasonable wait. Parsnip "white rice", bell pepper, carrots, herbs, and avocado

VEGETABLE SUSHI MAIKI ROLL

PARSNIP WHITE RICE

MAKES 2 CUPS

1 C PARSNIP CHOPPED

1/3 C CAULIFLOWER FLORETS

1/3 C PINE NUTS

1 Teas. OLIVE OR FLAX OIL

1/2 TSP RICE VINEGAR (optional)

CELTIC SALT

BLACK PEPPER

2 Teas. GREEN ONION

IN FOOD PROCESSOR, PULSE ALL

INGREDIENTS UNTIL FINELY MINCED
(white rice consistency)

TO MAKE THE ROLL

1 NORI SHEET

2 OUNCES PARSNIP RICE

CARROT, JULIENNE

CUCUMBER, JULIENNE

AVOCADO SLICED

SPROUTS

2 OUNCE CUP SHOYU

PINCH OF WASABI P.

ON NORI SHEET S

PARSNIP RICE EVEN

1" SPACE - ON TOP A

FOR ROLLING. C

SEMBLE WITH ASSC

VEGETABLES STAC

TUCK AND ROLL.

SLICE INTO 7 PIE

WITH WASABI A

SAUCE.

tightly rolled in nori skin. Wasabi aioli zigzagged across the black plate, and scallion confetti completed the festive presentation.

My immediate first-bite response was a flow of savoring, closed-eyed headshakes... that roll is GOOD! It was a perfectly balanced, delicate dance of flavors - slightly sweet, with an edge of tartness, tempered by the creaminess of avocado plus the added zing of wasabi... I was in food heaven!!! If I hadn't been looking forward to the "Crown of Caesar" salad and my "Portobello Croquettes", I would have eaten another (and another!)



All Present Moment Cafe photos © Susan Lerner 2007



"A Middle East Peace Hummus" (\$7.00) was Caroline's choice for starters—I wondered what could be better than Chef Ken Blue's (Hippocrate's executive chef) hummus but this one is really good... It is made without any beans, just blended cashews topped with mint oil and tahini sauces. Yvette was born in Baghdad to Assyrian parents, and although she has lived in the States since age two, her roots are evident in the authentic flavor of this dish...Caroline says it's the best hummus she's ever had!

We couldn't resist the "Oceania Sea Vegetables" (\$6.00), a beautifully layered mountain beginning with fresh coconut strips at the base, climbing up to shaved red cabbage, and topped with marinated arame and an edible flower. A sesame garlic sauce pulled all the flavors together in this surprisingly tasty salad.

The "Crown of Caesar" (\$6.00) was, well, a splendid salad, just as tasty as the one my mom used to make in the anchovy days of my life. The abundance of crisp young romaine leaves co-mingled with whole leaf dulse, rosemary croutons and, if you choose, a \$2.00 scoop of sea veggies. Pine nut parmesan and Present Moment's creamy Caesar dressing finished the salad perfectly.

The menu description for the "Portobello Croquettes" (\$12.00) reads: "Portobello mushrooms and walnut, sunflower, and almond paté create a nice alternative to meatballs.

Served over zucchini spaghetti noodles with a red pepper marinara sauce

and topped with pine nut parmesan." Modest language for extraordinary food! The 2" round croquettes were light, seasoned, and dehydrated to perfection, and an exquisite blend with the noodles and marinara sauce. This was another heavenly dish, truly better than any spaghetti and meatballs I ever tasted!

Caroline relished her "Sunlight Burger" (\$12.00), a nut and veggie burger, served open-faced over a slice of tomato, with a covering of pine nut provolone and caramelized onions (marinated in Nama Shoyu). It is a great substitute for the "ham" kind of burger, for anyone transitioning to a raw diet.

When I go to a raw food restaurant for my dinner, I am usually prepared to forgo my normal healthy eating regime of properly combined foods (avoiding sugar after a meal). This day was no exception. The food had been excellent and I could not leave

without trying at least one dessert.

We chose to share the "Warm Live Pecan Apple Cobbler" (\$7.00). The warm sweet/tart apple and fresh pecan mixture was topped with a coconut vanilla crème sauce, and served side by side with a generous scoop of homemade vanilla iced nut cream. Deliciously decadent! I can taste it now!



MARINATED SEA VEGETABLES

- 1 BAG ARAME, ALREADY RE-HYDRATED and drained well
- 1/4 C GREEN ONIONS DICED SMALL
- 1/4 C RED BELL PEPPER DICED SMALL
- 1/4 C YELLOW BELL PEPPER DICED SMALL
- 1/4 CUP SHREDDED CARROTS
- 1 T NAMA SHOYU
- 1 T OLIVE OIL
- 1 T TOASTED SESAME OIL (optional - can use regular sesame oil)
- 1/4 C WHITE SESAME SEEDS

- 1 T APPLE CIDER VINEGAR
- 1 T MINCED GINGER

IN MIXING BOWL TOSS ALL INGREDIENTS WELL, STORE AND KEEP REFRIGERATED.

LAYER WITH FRESH COCONUT STRIPS AND SHAVED RED CABBAGE. DRESS WITH A SESAME GARLIC SAUCE AND EDIBLE FLOWER.



Northern Florida is blessed to have this restaurant. The Present Moment Café is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Saturday. It is occasionally open on Sunday, when the Jacksonville raw food meet-up group has its dinner meeting there. As Yvette says, "we're a full-blown restaurant where you can invite friends, have a birthday party, enjoy a glass of wine and go away feeling better than if you had had a cooked meal."

Like that familiar quote that ends "...and today is a gift - that's why we call it the present", this "Present" is a gift to us all. Go visit this wonderful place - enjoy the food, the atmosphere, and then tell your friends - share the gift and keep it alive!

The Present Moment Café
224 West King Street, St. Augustine,
Florida (904) 827-4499
www.presentmomentcafe.com

To find or start a raw food meet-up group in your area, go to <http://rawfood.meetup.com/>

Susan has been enjoying a 100% raw and living foods lifestyle since 1999. She completed the LifeChange Program in 2004. She became a Hippocrates Program Consultant, on staff at the Institute and is now an independent representative, arranging lecture tours for Brian in the New York, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. areas. Susan coaches & consults with people after their Hippocrates experience, helping them to incorporate the Hippocrates Lifestyle into their lives. She can be reached at vital-longevity@earthlink.net, or at (561) 477-8876, ext 343.



1/3 CUP
NG
OM
TO AS-
CENTER
SERVE
DIPPING