

# A Little Heavy and A Lot of Fake Cheese



“Cheese”

It's no surprise that as a new mom, or really, a mom, I don't really get a lot of free time. Between work and spending time with Siona there's not a lot of 'me' time. This thought kept running over and over in my head the first couple months of my daughter's life. I know it's not really talked about but the first three months as a mother were some of the most difficult months of my life. Yes, I felt excited but mostly I felt terrified. I was terrified of all the change. I was terrified of not being able to cut it in my new role as a mom/wife/friend/sister/employee. How would I balance it all? Would I ever watch a movie again? Cook? Read a book? It was so overwhelming at times I felt like I was drowning in a sea of anxiety until one day I had a realization that all that fear and anxiety was getting in the way of actually connecting with my child. My husband, who just happens to be an incredibly fun and light-hearted individual, had this amazing relationship with her but I wasn't getting smiles or giggles. I was the

overly concerned, constantly worried mom in the corner just trying to catch my breath and catch up with my life. So of course, one shabbat evening, as my husband and I sat across from each other over dinner, I had my little meltdown. We talked, I cried a little and then the next morning we woke up and I felt lifted. Since then, about 3 months ago, things have gotten a lot better. I still battle with the occasional bout of anxiety (hey, I'm a Jewish mother. I mean, I can't shake that) but it's nothing compared to all those months ago and the result of this self-realization is a happier, more connected relationship with not only my daughter but with myself as well.





It's easy to connect when you force your child to hang out on you. P.S. Awesome drool shot, no?

Since then, not only have I seen more movies than I can keep track of, I've even found a little 'me' time (this blog can attest to that). Before I became a mommy, I would spend my shabbat mornings on our balcony, sipping iced coffee and reading for hours. I was never one for schul after leaving Jerusalem and not connecting with a schul since living in Ann

Arbor. Instead, I would find my solace on the balcony; coffee in hand and book in lap. Nowadays, I feel blessed to get 45 minutes to an hour on a shabbat to read and drink coffee and dang it if that's not all I need. I don't even need a marathon nap, though, I do miss those. Just a little quiet time to escape in a book, a cup of coffee and maybe, if I felt ambitious that week, a sweet little chocolate treat.



New book, new love



Now that there has been a little balance restored to my life, and clearly cooking is back, I decided to take on the task of cooking for a colleague (as mentioned in the previous post). I'm doing a 'trial' run with another potential client for this week who was intrigued with the idea of someone else cooking for them, especially more healthy, clean food. I've been asked to prepare as much Paleo or vegan-friendly meals as possible. My kitchen being a kosher kitchen, they're also getting kosher food but of course, kosher being flexible (it's true! I promise!), all that Paleo/vegan cooking isn't as scary as I thought.



Veggies—so perrrdy



They actually put 'cheese' on the label

I decided to try out a recipe I found on Oh She Glows. It was easy and pretty delicious. I don't usually cook with fake cheese but luckily, my 'client' (and dear friend) puts a lot of trust in me and let's me be adventurous and I'm SO grateful for that. I followed the recipe pretty word for word so have to admit, I wasn't super adventurous this time around and didn't make up my own recipe but hey, it was a busy weekend. Can't a girl catch a break ☐

## Oh She Glows' "Naughty & Nice Vegan Enchilada"

### What?

- 8-ounces dry fusilli pasta (3.5 cups dry noodles or half a 16-oz package)\*  
(I used brown rice noodles to keep it closer to Paleo-friendly. Make sure to cook for no more than 10 minutes if going brown rice noodle or else they will get mushy).
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 red onion, chopped

- 1 medium jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped\*
- 3 bell peppers (I used 1 red, 1 orange, and 1 yellow), chopped
- 1-3 tbsp taco seasoning mix (I made my own with a dash or two of cinnamon, cumin, ground coriander and sea salt)
- 1 can black beans (or 2 cups cooked), drained and rinsed
- 1.5-2 cups homemade enchilada sauce (see above, or use store-bought)
- 1/3-1/2 cup Daiya cheese (or other non-dairy cheese)
- 1 cup chopped green onions
- salt & pepper, to taste
- 20 tortilla chips (about 2 handfuls), crushed
- Avocado, salsa, sour cream, etc, to garnish

## How's That Now?

1. Preheat oven to 350F and grab a 2-quart casserole dish. Add dry pasta to a pot of boiling water and cook for 7-8 minutes. Be careful not to overcook the pasta or it will get mushy in the casserole. Drain and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking process.

2. In a large skillet, sauté the chopped onion, jalapeno, and peppers in the olive oil over medium heat for about 7-8 mins.

3. Add the taco seasoning, drained and rinsed black beans, and 1 cup of the enchilada sauce. Stir well and cook for another 5 mins.

4. Stir in the cheese, pasta, and chopped green onion. Season with salt and pepper to taste and adjust seasonings if necessary.

5. Spread 1/2 cup of enchilada sauce over the bottom of the casserole dish. Scoop on the skillet mixture and spread out evenly. Spoon on the rest of the sauce on top and sprinkle with cheese.

6. Bake for 15-20 mins at 350F until heated through. Sprinkle with crushed nacho chips, chopped avocado, salsa, and sour cream if desired just before serving. Serve with a big green salad and nacho chips.

Note 1: Be sure not to handle the jalapeno seeds as they can make your fingers (and anything you touch) sting badly. You can also wear plastic gloves too.

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## Confessions of a Kosher School Cafeteria Chef

It was 10 o'clock in the morning when I interviewed Chef Tony. As usual, you could already smell the roasting potatoes complete with garlic and paprika and though it was only 10AM, I wanted those roasted potatoes with garlic and paprika. But sadly, those were being roasted for the first lunch run that starts at 10:30AM, five days a week, and doesn't stop until the kitchen closes at about 1:30PM. In most every public school in America, lunch has finished cooking by 8AM, which means that it's been sitting for hours by the time the average student (that would have been me) actually ate it. But that's not how Chef Tony does it. Nope, Chef Tony and the Chefs at about a handful of other SAGE kitchens practice what's called "batch cooking". Batch cooking is a method of cooking that comes as close to cooking-to-order as possible, even if that's cooking for 1500 people, which is how many mouths Chef Tony and his kitchen staff serves on a daily basis. Plus, he does it with the help of only 6 other employees and no stove. "The kitchen is about 40 years-old. We're the 'red-headed stepchild' of budgeting. No one's budgeting for the kitchen but if you look at the research, we all know that good eating



goes hand-in-hand with good academics". And it's true. If you Google, "good eating and great grades" a host of resources come up on your screen. But between the iPads and the SMART boards and the salaries of some of my colleagues (cough, cough), the kitchen isn't seeing any cash-love. But that's not a problem for Chef Tony, a man whose been in the food business since he was 12 years-old when he began washing dishes at a Greek diner in Long Island and a year later was promoted to line cook. Though his mother was a "good Catholic girl", his father was Jewish and passed down a respect of Jewish culture. Chef's personal kitchen is kosher 'style'—he doesn't mix meat and milk and doesn't mix meat and milk equipment but also doesn't require his personal food to be hechshered.

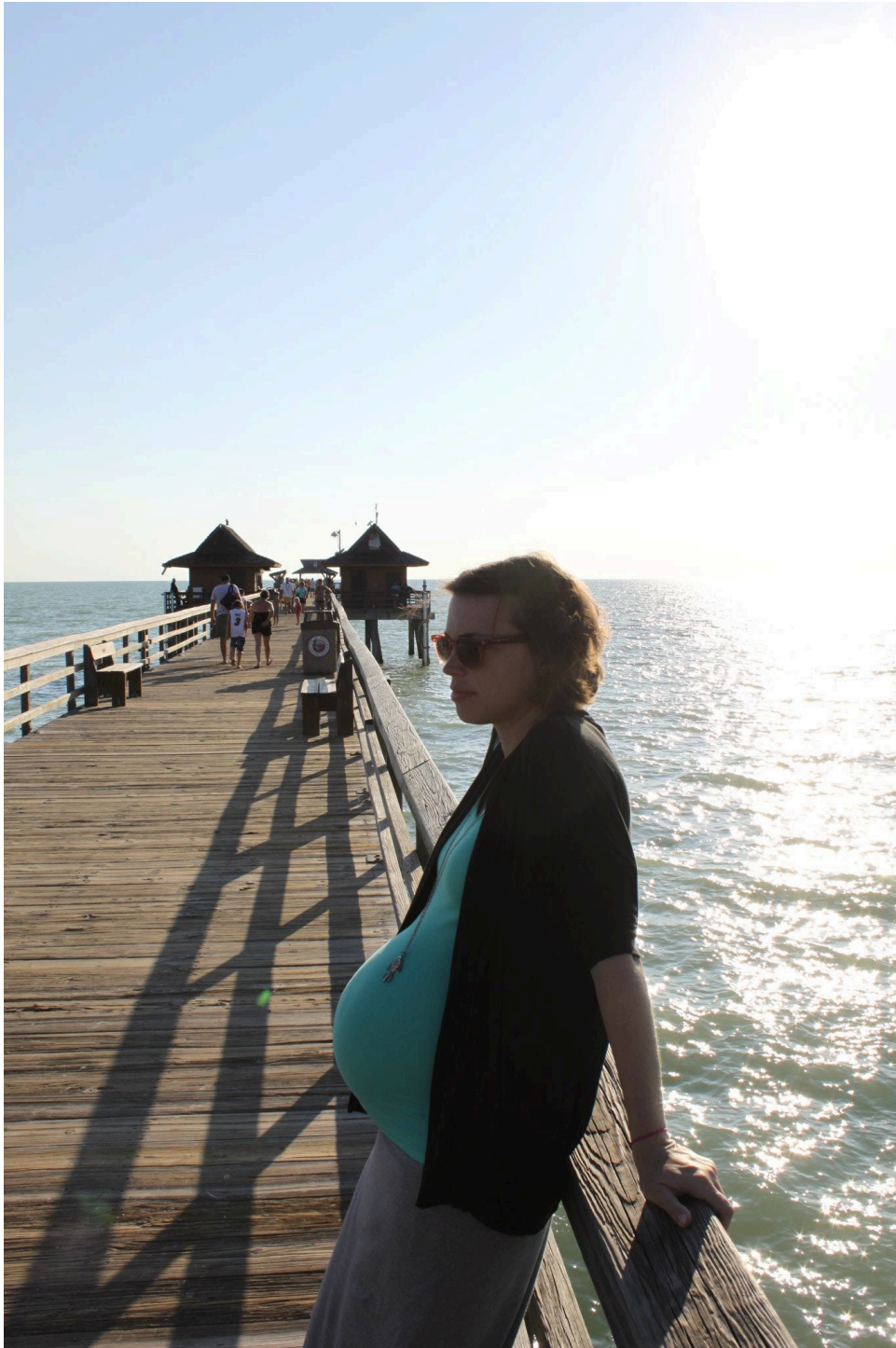


Chef Tony



The Only Grill We Got—He can only fit about 30 chicken breasts at a time so be gentle the next time you complain there's no chicken breast. Remember: 1500 mouths to 30 chicken breasts

I want to be clear about something. I really like Chef Tony. He can be gruff and considers himself the 'least politically-correct person you've ever met', but Chef Tony can't fool me. He is always talking about his children and grandchildren. When I was pregnant, he always checked up on me and asked me how I was doing. Even my husband is a huge fan of Chef Tony. One day, in my first trimester, I was having an insanely strong craving for Thanksgiving dinner. I was desperate for turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, the whole nine yards. I even cried. I'm not proud. But Boston Market not being kosher and my husband not up for cooking Thanksgiving dinner at 7PM on a Tuesday night, I went without (yes, I know, there are people starving all over the world but I was hormonal people, OK?). But wouldn't you know, the next day at school, we had turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy. I'm not kidding when I tell you I hugged Chef when I saw him that day after lunch . . . and after about four pounds of turkey.



There's a lot of turkey and gravy in there.  
Oh, and baby.

Chef Tony got into the kosher business about 10 years ago after he sold his bowling alley snack business and took what he thought would be a part time job at a new Conservative Jewish Day School in West Palm Beach with SAGE Dining Services. Ten years later he's heading up one of the strictest and better kept kosher kitchens in South Florida. In fact, says Chef Tony, who is also known as the 'Mashgiach-



slayer', his kitchen is so together in terms of kashrut standards that he often hosts mashgiachs-in-training (as long as the mashgiach doesn't come into Chef Tony's kitchen and try to change anything. G-d bless the mashgiach who tries to question Chef Tony's standards). But working with an outdated kitchen, no burners (did you hear that? NO BURNERS), a staff of only six, and a limited budget isn't even Chef's greatest headache. It's not even the parents that like to come in for a 'meeting' to advise him on how to cook (apparently the biggest 'suggestion' is for homemade marinara sauce. Guess how much tomatoes are from Chef's produce guy (or any bulk produce supplier) when they're out of season? \$39. Also, take this into account. Have you ever tried making marinara without a stovetop?). Nope, it's not the parents. It's kashrut. The man's 'bread and butter' is also his greatest enemy. "I wish kosher could just be black and white. But it's like that old saying, 'Put two Jews in a room and you get three opinions.'" Every affiliation has it's standard and when you're a large community day school with a strong observant staff, you're going to get the occassional staff person who questions the standards because it doesn't fit his or hers level of kashrut observance.



## It Was Hot Dog Day Ya'll

How does Chef deal with it? He grins and bears it and though he likes to be a little, um, aggressive with his opinions, his passion for what he does, not to mention his incredibly strong work ethic, doesn't allow him to not consider the opinion, whether he agrees or not. For a man who was raised by a father who spent forty years in the Marine Corps., and who would have been a lifer himself if it wasn't for his wife (he's been married four times. He makes no qualms about his love life. "It takes a special woman to be married to a Marine Corps. officer and a chef."), Chef Tony, The Mashgiach-Slayer, just might be the most important and yet the most under-appreciated staff member on campus.





And You Think You Have Storage Issues?

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**Sex with a Side of Roasted  
Carrot Soup w/Coconut Milk**

# (Kosher Connections Link Up, Jan., 2013)

Sex was brought up a lot at work this week. Let me explain. I am a middle school counselor. That's right. I get paid in ~~nickles and warm fuzzies~~ the big bucks to be emotionally and physically available to middle school-aged children 9 hours a day, 5 days a week (well, I get out early on Friday for Shabbat). It's not a job I EVER, I repeat, EVER thought I would do much less love but I do love it. I was originally hired at the school as a co-director of student life and then 2 weeks after school started I walked into a meeting I thought was about our kosher food bank program and it turned out to be a "how'd you like to be a school counselor" conversation. I am a trained social worker so it's not far off. I also love working with youth, which was my concentration in social work school but my focus was in community organizing, not in individual practice (IP). In fact, I distinctly remember somewhat tuning out in the mandatory IP courses thinking, "There's no way in H\*LL I'm ever going to do this." Ha. Jokes on me. So here I am, a school counselor—for middle school students. I mean, the apex of awkwardness, 'drama', emotions, depression, everything in a child's developmental life. I have learned so much about young people through this job. Heck, I've been asked parenting advice and that was before I had a child. Parents come to me desperate for advice or an explanation as to why their child is behaving the way they are and often I bring up the frontal-lobe/brain development stuff but mostly I tell them that this is normal. Your child is going through a change that is so intense the only ages that match it's intensity of development is 0-2. It's amazing the sigh of relief I see when parents hear, "You're not alone." Of course, the other side of the job is occasionally recommending continual outside therapy and let me tell you, NO ONE likes the person in the room who is recommending therapy.



Mommy, where do babies come from? Ummmm . . .

So why sex? Well, I run a girls group--a small group 'lunch bunch' of 6th grade girls. Working with girls in helping them feel confident, understood, and healthy is a passion of mine, especially in Miami where the exposure to weight-loss ads, Botox, and the expectation of beauty is so overwhelming I have 6th graders telling me they want to be 'skinny' when they grow up. It's heartbreaking. I had the first two sessions of my two 6th grade girls group this past week and during this time I

always ask them what they want to talk/learn about. I get the usual—gossip, cliques, parents, peer pressure, etc. But this time around, someone in both groups said puberty. Last year I ended up teaching ‘unofficial’ sex education when it became very clear that my girls had no idea what their periods are and what happens to their bodies during puberty. I closed the shades, told them that I reserved the right to not answer a question they might ask and then let them ask me any question they ever had about the issue (within reason, of course). It was very “Reading Lolita in Tehran”, except this was “Learning about My Uterus in Jewish Day School” (remember people, its *uterUS* not *uterU*). Could I have gotten fired? I’m not sure. But dang it, it’s too important that our girls are educated about their bodies so that they can make educated decisions about what happens to it as they grow up. So now I’m getting permission to officially talk about it in girls group plus I’ve been asked to teach sex ed. in health class. It’s intense but it’s all in a day’s work.

On top of all that sex talk, I was asked to compile a list of resources for a mom who wants to talk about sex with her eleven year-old son but is terrified to do so. And then it dawned on me, ‘Holy shit, I’m gonna have to do this with Siona one day’. And then another thing dawned on me. As a relatively observant Jewish woman, my husband and I practice *Taharat Hamishpacha*, The Laws of Family Purity, part of which is going to the mikveh every month for a ritual cleansing. One day Siona is going to realize that mom leaves the house once a month all showered, no make up, hair wet, and is gone for about 20 minutes (Gd bless those mikvot that take reservations) and then comes back all hair still wet. She’s going to want to know what’s up with that and eventually I’ll need to be honest about what it is and why mommy does it. It’s kind of a beautiful way to explain the birds and the bees to a child. It certainly beats learning about it from your awkward Math teacher when you’re 10 years-old. I’m still debating whether that was a good thing or a bad thing as in the end, I



was terrified of sex for quite a long time. Thanks Mr. H. Maybe that's why I hate Math so much.



Carrots: Pre-roasting

This week's recipe is soup. I've started cooking 3-4 dinners/week for a dear friend/co-worker who wants to go semi-Paleo and doesn't want to cook for herself. It's such a great opportunity because it challenges me in the kitchen and I get paid. Holler! I was craving roasted carrot soup for myself so went ahead and made it for Dana and then saved some for me. I hope she likes it (and you too)!



Carrots: Post-roast

# Roasted Carrot Soup with Coconut Milk and Cilantro

## What?!

8-10 carrots cut in 1/2 in. rounds  
Olive oil for drizzle  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 tbsp coconut oil  
1/2 can coconut milk  
4 cloves of garlic, minced  
1/2 tbsp ground coriander  
4 cups of water or vegetable broth  
Sea salt  
Pepper  
1 bunch of cilantro

## How?!

Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees F. Place cut-up carrots spread



out on a baking sheet and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with sea salt and pepper and place in oven for about 30 minutes. About 15 minutes into the roasting, coarsely chop onions and mince the garlic. Place a stock pot on the stove with the flame on medium-high heat. Put coconut oil in pot. Let sit for a minute and then add onions. Sauté until clear, about 4-5 minutes. Turn down flame and add minced garlic. Sauté with onions for another minute or so. Add carrots to the mix once they are done (they should be nicely browned and soft). Add the ground coriander. Sauté for another minute. Add the water and bring to a boil. Reduce the water to simmer and let sit, covered, for about 10-15 minutes.



One Big Happy Soup Family

At this point you can either blend in batches in a food processor or, if you're really good, you have a hand blender and just blend the crap outta it. I LOVE the hand blender. It's the easiest way to make any soup. Just roast vegetables, add water or broth and then blend. Once it's smoothly blended, add the coconut milk and stir. This part is up to you. Taste and if you like the consistency, keep it as is. If you want it richer, then add more. Add a bit more sea salt and pepper to

your taste. Top with bunch of fresh cilantro and serve.

This soup is delicious. I'm pretty proud of myself for this recipe. I may or may not have high-fived myself after eating.



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