

# Mexican Quinoa Salad: A Recipe for Love from a Non-Cook

Hello Dear Readers,

Shanah Tovah, happy new year and happy Monday. I hope everyone is feeling well. Today's guest post in the Love Series comes from a tiny bundle of energy and talent all rolled up into a Sarah Jessica Parker look-alike package known to me as my cousin, Ayelet. I have two cousins, many distant cousins, but two first cousins--Ayelet and her brother, Michael. Ayelet and Michael (known to the family as Micki) grew up in Israel and emigrated to the US in 1989 to live their American dreams, which at the time, consisted of listening to Billy Joel and Vanilla Ice on rotation while wearing an obscene amount of neon. Ayelet is one of the most passionate people I know, who about 3 years ago, left everything she knew to fulfill her dreams of becoming a certified dog trainer. Below is the story of how she met her partner, Alex, and how, thank Gd, they finally wised up to decide to share their lives together, which works out really nicely for me because now we have another incredibly talented musician in the family. Enjoy. Love, Whit xoxo

P.S. For a sample of Alex's music and for purchasing information after you fall in love with his music, go [here](#).

My husband and I met in 2006, but the stars took a few years to finally align for us.



On Our Wedding Day

In 2006, Alex and I were cast opposite each other in a 10-minute, 2-person play as a couple who lived together. At the time I was in a serious relationship so I just thought of him as a sweet guy from London. Once the play ended we loosely kept in touch for a few months and because he only had a Visa to stay in New York for a year he eventually moved back home.

However, while he lived in London, he was always coming back to New York for visits, and about every 6 months I would run into him on the street in random places. It was as if [insert your preferred Higher Power here] kept putting him in my path saying "What about this guy?," "Hey, remember this guy?," "HELLO! THIS is the guy." But I was still in that relationship and so would say a quick hello and keep walking, never giving it a second thought. The last time we happened to run into each other was in the fall of 2009 when I was with said boyfriend and he was with his producer. After introductions

the conversation went a little bit like this:

Me: What are you up to these days?

Alex: I'm recording an album and playing a lot of shows in this neighborhood. You should come some time.

Me: Sure! We'd love to!

When we parted ways I said to my boyfriend "We're not going to see his shows. Everyone's a musician or an actor here. Between all of the friends I go to support and my own stuff I don't have time to start supporting someone else." It was callous, and I'm embarrassed to admit that I said that, but there it is. We did, however, become Facebook friends.



Loving Life

A few months after that I broke up with the boyfriend, moved out and starting living the proper single New York City life.

A few weeks into my Singledom I got a Facebook invite from Alex to a benefit concert for Haiti Relief. Since it was a fundraiser I knew I should go and support the cause, but before confirming that I would come I decided to check out his music to make sure I wasn't committing to a night of terrible music. I found his MySpace page (remember those days?) and was blown away. I felt like such an ass for not supporting his music before. His music was brilliant. I was transfixed. A few weeks later I showed up to the show and it was sold out! I was so disappointed. But there was a light at the end of the tunnel. He had also invited me to his first record release show, which was a couple of weeks later, on Valentine's Day. I got my dear friend Hannah to go with me and that's when everything changed.

That night, as I was listening to him sing, I was blown away. Not just by his talent (of which there is an endless supply), but by his honesty. Besides my brother and father I had never met a man who was emotionally expressive. And here was Alex, pouring his heart out in the most beautiful way. It was like finding the holy grail y'all. Hannah looked at me, watching him perform, and she said "You like him!" to which I promptly and maturely answered "Shut up, no I don't." But she knew better and so did I.





That's my awesome cousin, smack in the middle, leading a flash mob at my wedding.

After the show we went to his after-party and briefly caught up. He asked me if I was married yet to which I said, "no, quite the opposite. I'm single."

"In that case," he said "I'll be back in New York in October. We should go on a date then." "Sounds good" I answered, totally blown away by the lack of games; and then late into the night, as I was leaving, he kissed me.

I was almost relieved he was leaving New York the next day because I was in no place to get into a relationship so soon after a serious one ended. The problem was, I couldn't stop thinking about him. Constantly. Being with him felt like I was home. I was so thrown by this that I actually started practicing yoga to find my center. (For those of you who don't know me, I really don't like yoga, but I was desperate).

About a month after his departure I got a call from an international number. My family is all over the map so I thought it could be one of them. But the second I heard his voice say "hi" I knew it was him and my heart soared. He said he had been thinking about me. That was the first of many long

conversations we'd have over the next year and a half.

He would come back to visit every now and then, but we both knew he didn't have his Visa to stay, and we didn't know when that would happen. Though we spoke a lot and we'd see each other when he was in New York, we both wanted totally different things. I was coming to the point where I was ready to date, settle down, and as I put it "find my person and make little people together."

Alex was not there at all. On New Years Eve of 2010/2011 we had a frank conversation in which I told him it was clear we wanted different things, and that I would never ask him nor expect him to change, so we should call a spade and spade and stop pretending that this was going to be a relationship. I had joined J-Date to find the person I was going to marry and he was seeing someone casually back home because his plans were so up in the air, so why draw this out? I had no idea that being so bold, honest and willing to walk away would result in us actually becoming closer.

You know the whole "if you love someone let them go..." saying. Well I'm here to tell you it's true. The phone calls started coming more frequently and the conversations became longer. I remained guarded and continued to date, but there was this inexplicable thing that was happening. It took a hold of me. Getting to know him was magical. He would listen and care about everything that was going on in my world. He would text me "Shabbat Shalom" on Fridays (something I discovered his mother does too, which I love so much). He loved his family and friends unabashedly. He was hilarious. He was honest.

It was a difficult balancing act: I couldn't stop getting to know him, but I couldn't allow myself to be drawn in if he didn't want what I wanted. On his end, without my knowledge, he had been doing some serious soul-searching. He later told me that he wasn't prepared to lose me and started talking to his friends in successful relationships to get advice. Then

one late night he told me he loved me. I told him I loved him too.

A few months after that he came back to New York and we went on our first official date. That was October of 2011. In February of 2012 I went to London to meet his family. A few months later, in April, I went back again for another visit, during which time he got down on one knee and asked me to be his wife. Seven months after that we were married.



Celebrating Alex's Album Release

I wake up every day thanking G-d for bringing me the most caring, loving, kind, generous, understanding, supportive man I have ever met. I have no idea what I ever did to deserve such love but I am thankful for it with every breath I take. I had no idea that love could be this good and that true partnership was a real thing.

The recipe I'm sharing with you is the first dish I ever made for Alex. In February of 2012, I turned 30. Alex knows I like a good party and he went all out. The entire weekend was full of celebrations and surprises. I had never felt more loved. As a "thank you", I wanted to give him something extra special. I decided the most special things are the ones that take time,

effort and thought. For me, that was cooking. From the beginning of our relationship I told him I don't cook and never will. I am terrible at cooking and I don't enjoy it. He said that was fine because he would cook but I could see a tiny light go out in his eyes. So as a special thank you, what better way to show my appreciation than going out on a limb and cooking?!

This recipe is SUPER easy and so delicious. I hope you enjoy!



Quinoa from the "non-cook". Looks good to me!

# Mexican Quinoa Salad (Vegan/Parve)

## What:

1 cup quinoa (I use multi color or red or a combination of whatever is around)

2 cups water

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

juice of 2 fresh limes (3 if they are small)

3/4 tsp cumin

pinch of red pepper flakes (optional – I don't use them but it's great for a kick)

1 can black beans, rinsed and drained

1 1/2 cup cherry tomatoes, cut in quarters

5 green onions, finely chopped

1/4 cup chopped cilantro

1 avocado, chopped

salt and pepper to taste





The 'Players'

## How:

Add quinoa to a saucepan with the water, cover, bring to boil and reduce to simmer – cook until all water is absorbed. 10-15 min.

Turn off the heat and leave it alone for 10-15 minutes. Remove lid, fluff with a fork and pour into a large bowl. Add black beans, tomatoes, onion, cilantro, and avocado. Separately, whisk together extra virgin olive oil, lime juice, cumin and red pepper flakes. Add salt and pepper. Toss dressing with quinoa mixture. Season with salt and pepper.



This salad can be stored in the refrigerator for a day or two because the lime juice will preserve the avocado.

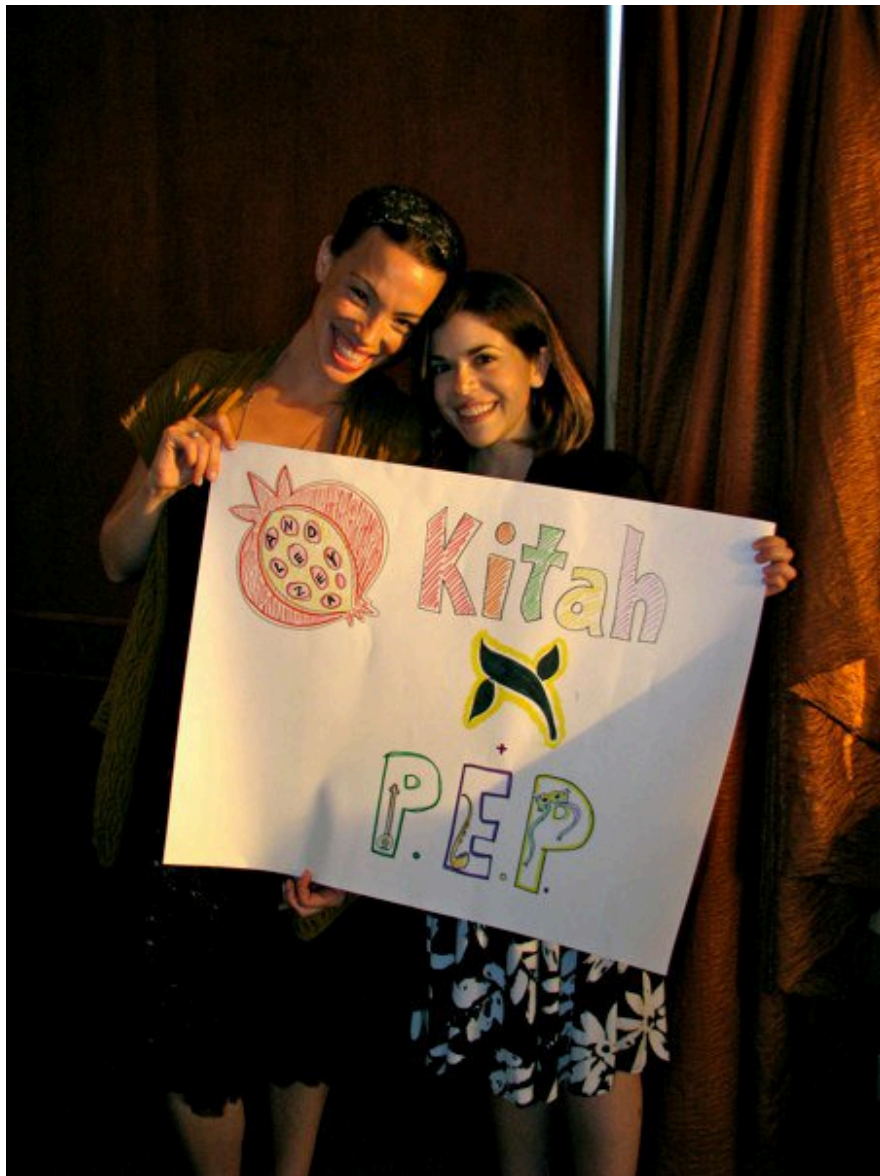
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## Orange Peel + Poppy Seed Cookies: The Love Continues

I invite you to know Ali Brand Stern, today's guest blogger for our Love Stories series, which, if you've been following the series, you are realizing has moved into September. Yep, forgot to account for the obligatory Rosh Hashanah posts so our Love Stories were interrupted. However, we are back and still in love.

I met Ali, whose love story is written below, and her husband at the same place I met the previous guest blogger, Stef. I met them all at the glory that is The Pardes Institute of Judaic Studies. I knew I wanted to be friends with Ali during the obligatory opening introductory 'get to know you' circle that opens every first year of school at Pardes. There were roughly 60 – 70 people in the room and everyone's not-so-secretly trying to prove just how smart they are when they introduce themselves. And then it's Ali's turn. Ali stands up in the Beit Midrash, introduces herself and proceeds to tell everyone she just got married and, rather than try to prove her brain power, which is pretty powerful, she continues, "So, sorry ladies and gents, but I'm taken", and then proceeded to sit right back down as if she didn't just tell a room full of rabbis, Torah scholars and the like that she's off the market. Yes. Please. Ali is one of the funniest and most genuine people in the world. When I was trying to wrestle with leaving my single life behind and marrying my husband, it was Ali whose wisdom and open-mind I sought out. She is someone whom I

believe truly lives her life to the fullest and I admire her so much. Ladies and gents, here's Ali. xoxo, Whit



Ali and I representing our class at our friends' wedding.

Thirteen years. That's how long my husband and I have been partners. When I tell people our dating history, I follow it up by saying that I met my husband, Noam, when I was a fetus. That's not actually true, but it sometimes feels like it. I don't know many other thirtysomethings who have been with their better half for the better half of their life.

Talking about the beginning of our "love story" is like talking about the day I realized I had a left arm. I can't

recall when, but I'm sure there was a day when I said to myself, "I have another arm? This is awesome! This will help me accomplish so many more things in my life!" That's sort of how I feel about my husband. I can't really remember a time when he wasn't there.

I met Noam three weeks before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday while we were attending a summer program at Brandeis University called Genesis, which was a glorified nerd camp for Jews. Are there summer camps for Jews that aren't also nerd camps? No, probably not.

Noam was the first Orthodox Jew I ever really met. He was sweet (still is), short (still is) and wore an over-sized, severely faded Pearl Jam t-shirt (which I later made him burn for fashion reasons. I have nothing against Pearl or her delicious jams.) Noam sat down across from me during the first Shabbat dinner at Genesis. My actual thought when I saw him was, "That one. I want that one." Although full disclosure, I thought the same thing when they brought out cake for dessert.

Having never attended Jew camp before, I didn't know any of the songs that everyone else started to sing at the end of the Shabbat meal. Actually, I could barely read Hebrew. I felt like an idiot. And there is nothing more painful than being a 16-year-old girl sitting across from a super cute little *yid* and feeling like an idiot. But because Noam is who he is, he quickly caught on that I was just silently mouthing the word "watermelon" over and over again, trying to look like I belonged. Noam got everyone to sing the only song I knew (which could very well have been *Dayenu*, complete with hand gestures. I don't remember.) Noam stuck by me the rest of the night. And that was it. That was the night I met my left arm.



Ali and Noam in Jerusalem, 2013

We fell for each other quickly, in a totally PG-summer camp sort of way. During one of our many night walks through the deserted college campus, Noam asked me if I was a fruit, what kind of fruit I would be. I told him I would probably be an orange because I have a layer that you need to get past in order to really know me (Leave me alone. I just finished reading Ralph Waldo Emerson that summer and had even underlined a few passages in a vintage fountain pen, so clearly, I was really, really deep.)

A few days later, on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, Noam gave me a gift. It was an orange, partially peeled. He told me that he hoped he had gotten past part of my “layer”, and was looking forward to getting to know more about me.

At the end of the summer, I went back to Boulder, CO and Noam went back home to Maryland. We said our goodbyes and left our relationship as “two people who cared a lot about each other, but lived super far away.” We didn’t want to label ourselves and what we had. Dan Savage would have been proud. I never thought I would hear from Noam again. I cried a lot. Had there been Facebook when I was 17, I’d like to believe that I



wouldn't have posted thousands of very meaningful and totally poignant song lyrics from all of the Lilith Fair albums. But I would have. Because I was that awesome.

Fast forward 8 years. Fast forward through hundreds of long distance phone calls and emails. Fast forward through my parents flying Noam out to be my high school prom date. Fast forward through that time when I was a freshman in college in Seattle and Noam was studying in Israel during the height of the Second Intifada, and he called to tell me that the café across the street just blew up, and it was terrible, but he was okay and he loved me. Fast forward through me not being able to tolerate the long distance anymore and finally transferring colleges to be with Noam at Brandeis.

Fast forward 8 years to the afternoon at Walden Pond when Noam got down on one knee and took out an orange, almost entirely peeled. Fast forward to when he told me that he wanted us to spend the rest of our lives getting to know each other better.



Newly engaged; peeled orange and all.

Two weeks after our wedding, we ran away together to Israel, where I met Whitney. Our year-long-honeymoon-adventure in Jerusalem turned into five years living in Israel. Living abroad was the greatest gift to our marriage. We dodged rockets and killed cockroaches. We walked towards each other religiously and spiritually and built ourselves a happy little home somewhere in the middle. We made each other laugh, and we drove each other completely insane in ways that only your partner can. We helped each other up when we fell down. In 2011 when I lost my dad to cancer, Noam stayed at my father's bedside reciting Psalms, serving as my father's spiritual guardian. Noam

is so much more than my left hand; he is my spare soul.

Noam and I celebrated our 5<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this July. On our wedding day, we stood in front of our family and friends and pledged to spend the rest of our lives helping each other peel back our layers. I think we're off to a good start.



Ali's Orange Peel and Poppy Seed Cookies.

**Ali's Orange Peel and Poppy Seed Cookies:**

**Ingredients**

- 1 tbsp orange zest
- 1 egg (room temperature)
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup butter/margarine
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds
- 1 1/4 cup flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda

**Directions**

Blend butter and sugar. Add egg and orange zest. In a separate bowl, combine dry ingredients (except seeds). Slowly add dry ingredients to the butter/sugar/egg/zest mixture. Add poppy seeds. Bake at 360F for 10-12 minutes, or until golden brown.



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# A Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-Fry: A Meat-Eater Meets his Match

You know, I should really make a holiday to celebrate my dear friend, Jessie. Upon reflection, I realized that without Jessie, I may not have met some really important and incredible people in my life. One of these incredible people, besides my husband, is Stef, the guest author of this post.

Stef is one of those people who is the full package – outrageously funny, kind, smart, and beautiful. I remember asking her years ago how she met her husband (at the time, they were just dating) and I remember loving this love story.

I'm sure you will too. Shabbat shalom, Whit xoxox

P.S. Follow Stef and Matt's journey as new Israelis here.

When I asked my husband which food he thought most represented our love, he answered without hesitation: tofu.



On Our Wedding Day in Jerusalem

Like Whitney, I met my husband, Matt, in the holy city of Jerusalem, but it took us a bit longer to realize we were meant to be. On my first day at the Pardes Institute in 2006, where I planned to study for 3 years, my closest friend turned to me and asked me who I thought was cute. I immediately picked out my future husband, despite the fact that he was wearing cut-off hospital pants, a “wife-beater” tank-top, and mismatched red and blue converse high tops. It took us a few weeks to actually have a conversation (although my husband doesn’t remember it) and a couple months until we became friends. Since he was in a relationship with someone else at

the time and I had just gotten out of a long-term relationship myself, we continued to be just friends for the remainder of the year. In the first days of our friendship, Matt came over to my apartment for dinner. That year also happened to be the year I reintroduced meat into my diet after many year of vegetarianism. While I had begun eating some meat, I still preferred to (and generally still do) cook vegetarian. When Matt came over for dinner that night early on in our friendship, I told him I was making tofu. A look of uncertainty and fear washed over his face. He admitted to not having a lot of “experience” eating tofu and to not liking it so much, but agreed to try it nonetheless. I don’t think I could truthfully say that fell in love with tofu that night, but he did eat it and that’s a good first step.



At our LA Wedding Reception

Fast-forward to today: we have been married for four years and tofu is still a staple part of our diet. How did that happen? The simple answer (to both the questions of marriage and tofu) is love.

After our year of friendship, Matt moved back to the US and I began my second year of school in Jerusalem. Now, with both of us available and thousands of miles between us, we decided it was the right time to start dating. This was confirmed the week I came back to the States for a friend’s wedding. We knew

we wanted to see each other before committing to a long-distance relationship, so I planned a detour on my trip to meet him for a weekend. Unfortunately, the only time such a visit could be arranged was over the holiday of Yom Kippur, a 25-hour fast day where we are meant to focus on repentance and atonement. It would have to do. Even though we spent much of the visit davening (praying) in shul (synagogue) on separate sides of the mehitzah, it was enough for us to know that we were ready to do this. We survived the distance and the following year Matt got a job in Israel so we could spend my 3rd year of school together.

Finally in the same place, we began to share many more meals together and I began to learn about all the foods Matt did or did not like. On the list of “not-likes” was, you guessed it, tofu. To add insult to injury, he also claimed to not like spicy food, something that characterized almost everything I ate. Here’s where love comes into play. Despite his specific dislikes (those previously mentioned, among others), Matt always tried every single dish I cooked. And to both our surprise, he liked more things than he thought he did. If you ask him, Matt will still claim that anything I make with tofu would taste better with chicken, but he eats it and, dare I say, he enjoys it. At the end of my final year of school, we got married in Jerusalem (at a vegetarian restaurant) on Tu B’Av, the Jewish day of love, and the rest is history.



## Falling in Love in Jerusalem

Over the course of our marriage, my husband has grown to like other previously disliked foods as well, including spicy food. I still prefer to cook vegetarian during the week (we save the meat for Shabbat) and this Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-fry is one of our go-to meals. If you don't like spicy food, heads up, this is a real mouth burner.

# Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-fry (adapted from a "learn to cook vegetarian" book I had in college)

## What

2 Tbsp Cooking Oil (you can choose: canola, olive, coconut, etc.)

2-3 cloves Garlic, minced

1 Tbsp (or more) Fresh Ginger, minced

1-2 Tbsp Chinese Chili Garlic Sauce (the hero of this dish)

1 block of Tofu, cut into 1 inch cubes, drained

1 small or 1/2 large Eggplant, cut into 1 inch cubes, pre-steamed if you like softer eggplant

Any other vegetable of your choice: red pepper cut into strips, mushrooms, zucchini, spinach, water chestnuts, etc.

2 Tbsp Soy Sauce

1 Tbsp Sesame Oil

1 Tbsp Brown Sugar

2 Tsp Corn Starch

1/2 cup water

2-3 Green Onions, diced

## How

Heat the oil in a large frying pan or wok, add garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add Chinese chili sauce (adjust for taste) and simmer for another minute. Add the drained tofu



cubes and cook for a few minutes until the tofu absorbs the garlic mixture. Add the eggplant and stir-fry until cooked through.



### Working with Tofu

Mix together soy sauce, sesame oil, brown sugar, corn starch and water in a separate bowl. At this point add any additional vegetables and then the sauce mixture to the pan. Cook until vegetables reach desired tenderness. In the last minute, add green onion.





Serve over brown rice and enjoy!



Spicy Love