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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 18<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – “New Year’s Eating Resolution – Discovering the power of the plant”**

Well, I hope you are having a Happy New Year, dear readers. As I write this, I’m still acclimatising to harsh reality of being back at work after 3 weeks of R & R. Once again it is time for New Year’s resolutions. Our good friend Helen came to stay for a few days to help welcome in 2025. She has been on a healthy eating kick and inspired us to listen to a podcast called ZOE, which comprises highly enthusiastic, scientifically driven likeable nerds explaining the latest research on nutrition. In my younger years, healthy living was a very low priority for me. A healthy diet was even lower. But now, as I approach the age of 60, quicker than a runaway bobsled to hell, one’s ability to bounce back from injury or illness a very elongated process, thus health is becoming a major priority. When you throw disability into the mix, good health is an even more desirable pursuit

Leading up to New Year’s Eve, we had a very nonchalant approach to our diet. Ham was a reoccurring theme, as we purchased a customary yuletide sized ham. We had ham quesadillas, whores’ pasta with ham, ham fried rice and Ernest Hemmingway inspired fried ham and eggs, not to mention the occasional frittata with, yes, ham.

After listening to the ZOE podcast, I was particularly inspired by an episode on the 30- plant challenge. It focused on the importance of eating a variety of plant foods that are important for the community of bacteria that lives in one’s gut. It also went on to talk about the importance of polyphenols, which are responsible for the colours of many plants, and have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

Initially I thought the idea of eating 30 different plants in one week would be arduous, to put it mildly. I love to cook, but I’ve always been preoccupied with various meat dishes, whether it be Fijian curry, souvlaki, pulled pork, braised beef cheeks and a recent obsession with beef chow main. However, after listening to the podcast which went to great lengths to explain the complex combinations and interactions of plant, fibres, phytochemicals and proteins, and the way they interface with our digestive system, I became more open minded to the concept of 30 plants a week.

I then went a step further and downloaded an eBook, entitled “How to eat 30 plants a week”, written by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall of River Cottage fame. His book enthusiastically outlined the excitement of using different nuts, grains, spices and herbs in cooking. Before I read his book, I found him vaguely annoying in his TV series where he strives to be self-

sufficient in a culinary sense, foraging and single handily farming in that nerdy English plummy way. Now I'm sold, using his recipes to embrace the diversity plant life offers.

So instead of being so focused on meat, I'm taking a literal leaf out of Hugh's book when he says "the difference between pork and beef is notable of course, and the difference between lamb and mullet more so, but it's nothing compared to the difference between a leek and a walnut, a parsnip and chilli or an apple and a coriander seed".

We have been lavishly mixing an array of unlikely plant bedfellows together for breakfast, lunch and dinner since then. Radishes sit rustically alongside delicate raspberries, who share the plate with earthy macadamias. And that's just to start the day! As we virtuously nibble away and diligently record our 30 (+!), we are aware that we are in a kind of false vacation reality. Will we sustain our noble nibbling once we are both racing out the door and wearily arriving home? Will I resist the lure of the fried lasagne topper for a lunchtime fill up? Time will tell, as with all resolutions, but until then I will ward off what I can with the Power of the Plant.

*Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.*