

## **BACON, BACON ... WHO'S GOT THE BACON?**

By: Betsy Bearden

*Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the restaurant...*

Imagine this, if you will...you're at work, in the middle of a heated budget meeting, and someone notices its lunch time. Ahhhh, lunch time...music to a growling stomach! Visions of bean burritos and cheese enchiladas covered in cheese, and topped with grilled veggies, smothered with more cheese immediately popped into my head. Sweet! But my co-worker, Sandra, suggested we all take a vote, (you know the type). "It's already noon, much more to streamline on the ol' budget yet- so, let's all go somewhere close." A vote was taken, and the majority ruled. The closest restaurant was the STEAK HOUSE! Ugh! Steak house+vegetarian= disaster!

"Table for 16?" asked the server. We were all seated, and I was contemplating another house salad with a baked potato on the side. The majority of the office will be having a nice juicy steak cooked to their specifications, ordered anywhere from rare, medium or medium-rare. I could just imagine the server asking me, "...and how would you be having the salad and baked potato prepared today, Ma'am?"

"Oh, I'm thinking salad...fresh, and with a mix of young tender baby greens, and a baked potato-baked with the skin on which has been lightly hand-rubbed in extra virgin olive oil and rolled in Kosher salt; no foil." But then, upon taking a look at the menu, hope sprung eternal! There were two things which I might be able to order- it would be tricky, they'd have to be altered, but it could be done.

No stranger to this scenario, I could order the chunky potato soup, which came with crispy bacon bits, and the house salad which the menu stated was, "loaded with fresh tomatoes, mushrooms, sweet Vidalia onions, red peppers, tender baby greens, and drizzled with a warm, spicy honey- mustard dressing, all topped with grilled chicken strips, parmesan garlic croutons, and... 'you guessed it', crispy bacon bits." Our server approached; she started with me, naturally. Well, no pressure here. The entire table was all of a sudden completely silent. You could have heard a micro-chip drop. Gulp! I squeaked out my order, and she repeated it back in a booming voice, "Potato soup, no bacon, and house salad, no chicken strips and no bacon." Perfect. She proceeded to take everyone else's order.

Appetizers were promptly brought out and placed around the table. There was calamari wrapped in bacon, bruschetta topped with sun dried tomatoes and bacon, deep fried mushrooms-fried in bacon fat no less, and a creamed spinach dip with fresh slivers of Parmesan cheese which had probably been aged in a bacon factory somewhere. Sandra leaned over to me and said, "Oh, why don't you just *try* some of the Calamari? No one will ever have to know." Oh, I get it. It's kind of like, what happens at lunch stays at lunch?

Our server brings the order, and I am starving! “House salad without bacon,” as she looks at me with a raised eyebrow, “and our specialty of the house— chunky potato soup with EXTRA bacon.” Yes indeed, just when you thought it was safe. ...

You may remember the article I wrote for the March/April issue of the *Life-Line*, entitled: *Tofu-Thirty Years Ago*. In that article, I wrote about the challenges of being vegetarian and how far we-meaning restaurants and main stream grocery stores, and society in general, have come over the past thirty-years. But after episode, upon episode of, “hold the bacon,” I have to ask, have we really come that far?

For my money, no-not really. That’s why my husband, Steven and I, are so supportive of Life Grocery, and Café Life. Do you know how lucky we are to have Café Life? What a spread of veggie delights! Everything is always delicious and fresh, and if you haven’t tried it, I highly recommend you do! I have to admit that more and more mainstream restaurants are really starting to get on the bandwagon, but honestly, what does a steak-monger know about veggie lasagna any more than I would know about how to prepare a standing rib roast? There is yet a lot of ground to cover, here. I appreciate the veggie pattie in place of the burger in some restaurants, but could someone please come up with something more inventive? That’s all I’m asking; that’s all I’ve ever asked. But the good news is that they *are* trying.

OK, enough of that! Summer is almost here, and I’m ready for some fun, how about you? I would like to share one of my favorite picnic foods with you. With the upcoming Fourth of July celebration, and all the summer picnics we are looking forward to over the next few months, I hope you will try this recipe. Even if you aren’t vegetarian, I guarantee you will like it!

### **Vegetarian Baked Beans**

3 cups cooked navy beans  
1/2-cup light brown sugar  
2- Tbs. mild mustard  
1/2-cup molasses  
1/2-cup any barbecue sauce  
1- large sweet onion-diced  
1/2-container firm tofu-diced (tofu optional)  
3 cloves garlic-minced  
1 large (28 oz.) can diced tomatoes-do not drain  
1/4 cup olive oil

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Place olive oil in skillet and sauté onion until tender, about 4-5 minutes
- Add garlic and sauté for two minutes and remove from stove
- Place beans into a 2-quart rectangular casserole dish
- Add cooked onions, garlic and remaining ingredients into casserole dish and mix well
- If you are adding tofu, make sure to drain the tofu well, dice it, and gently stir it into the ingredients

- Bake at 350 for 40-45 minutes

Now, if anyone at the picnic steps up and tells you this is good and all, but... “Where’s the bacon?” You totally have my permission to bean them. I know-I had to add that. Sorry! Have a happy summer!

Betsy Bearden is a certified and published writer, and the author of a self-published cookbook, *Normal People Eat Tofu, Too*. She has worked as a volunteer chef, and cooking class instructor at Kroger’s School of Cooking in Alpharetta, Georgia, and as a reporter for *The Paulding Neighbor Newspaper*. You can reach her at [betsybearden@bellsouth.net](mailto:betsybearden@bellsouth.net) or visit her website at [www.creativewrites.net](http://www.creativewrites.net)