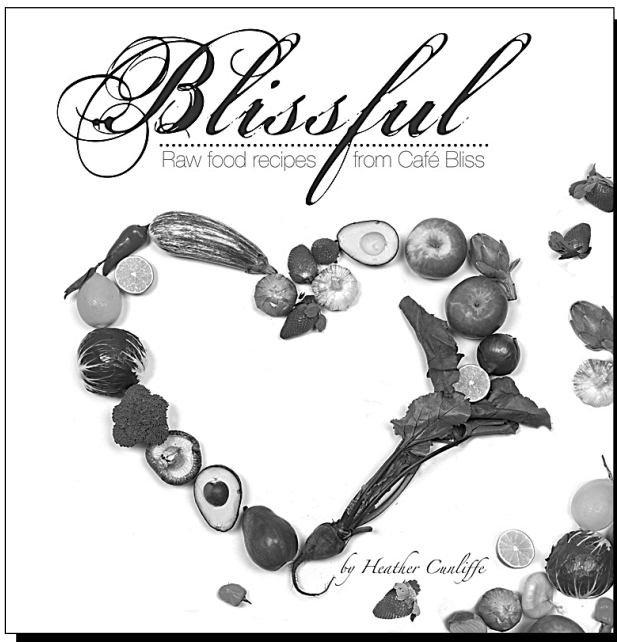


# Pure raw bliss

Salt Spring-raised chef enlightens urban palates



BY SEAN MCINTYRE

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***In the introduction to her newly released book, *Blissful: Raw Food Recipes from Café Bliss*, chef and entrepreneur Heather Cunliffe recalls how she spent much of her youth on Salt Spring Island foraging for wild berries, fishing for salmon and harvesting vegetables.***

She recalls her adventurous young parents' constant encouragement to have fun in the kitchen while the family created nearly everything they needed from scratch.

Years later, Cunliffe is still having a hoot in the kitchen as the owner of a sophisticated and successful raw food café on a resurgent stretch of Pandora Avenue in downtown Victoria.

Cunliffe's revelatory moment came about five years ago during a retreat at the Tree of Life Rejuvenation Centre amidst southern Arizona's arid hill country.

While she always imagined herself as a fit,

healthy and active young woman, Cunliffe was astonished by the sudden effects a raw food diet had on her energy levels, mental clarity and mood. She recalls feeling awake, alive and like a child again.

Cunliffe said she soon realized she'd reached the natural human state of bliss.

"This discovery was so inspiring to me I wanted to tell the whole world and, more than anything, I wanted to empower others with the same understanding," she writes.

Despite her limited business background and a lack of managerial experience, Cunliffe pursued her passion to launch Victoria's first exclusively raw food café and juice bar.

Four years after she and her brother Joe opened the doors, Café Bliss has evolved into a thriving eatery that employs 12 staff and is open seven days a week.

"I just had a passion," she said. "Being inspired to share that with other people has

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# Raw food lover inspires others to try 'bliss'

## BLISS

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always been at the back of my mind.”

Cunliffe's latest book celebrates the restaurant's fourth anniversary and continues her quest to inspire healthier eating habits. The generously illustrated self-published effort contains inspirational words of health and wisdom along with 64 recipes for juices, smoothies, breakfast, soups, salads, crackers, spreads, pizzas, pies and treats. Each of the café-tested recipes is made with raw and, whenever possible, locally sourced organic vegetarian ingredients.

**“There's so much potential.**

**Raw food is a growing movement that's on the rise.”**

HEATHER CUNLIFFE  
*Cafe Bliss*

Recipes like earth blood tonic, cacao jedi, raspberry chia pudding, Sombrio salad, pizza rica, goji lemon brownies, bliss kisses and banana coconut cream pie offer experienced raw chefs and curious first-timers a chance to put a spin on old favourites while they try something new.

Cunliffe's recipes chart a progression through



PHOTO COURTESY HEATHER CUNLIFFE

Cafe Bliss co-owner Heather Cunliffe with customers at her Victoria cafe. The Salt-Spring raised woman has just released a cookbook of raw food recipes.

her discovery of new raw food tastes and textures as she continues to create innovative dishes for a clientele with a growing appetite for all things raw.

“There's so much potential. Raw food is a growing movement that's on the rise,” she said.

“My personal hope is that people don't want to eat the food just because it's healthy but also because it tastes good, because everything is really vibrant, alive, nourishing and comforting. There doesn't have to be a sacrifice.”

The key, she advises raw food newbies, is to focus on all the creative flavours and ingredients that are available instead of lamenting the loss of familiar standbys. A gradual approach into the

realm of raw, she said, can take off much of the unneeded pressure associated with adhering to a new and not-so-familiar diet.

At the end of the day, the goal is to educate the palate and demonstrate the benefits of a raw food diet, not burden people with a sense of guilt over what people should serve themselves, their friends and their families.

“There isn't much choice and people don't get a chance to see the alternatives,” Cunliffe said. “Café Bliss is one of those alternatives.”

Blissful: Raw Food Recipes from Café Bliss is available at Salt Spring Books, Natureworks and online at [www.cafebliss.ca](http://www.cafebliss.ca).

Cafe Bliss is open seven days a week at 556 Pandora Ave. in Victoria.