ALEXIS KING
I have my associate's degree in paralegal studies and love to read, write and imagine in my free time.

Okra

Alexis King

Okra found me, I didn't find okra. I don't remember where I was when I was introduced to my first okra dish (with the slime, of course), but I remember the core taste that filled my head, and that was happiness. I remember saying to myself, *this is just right*.

Okra fills memories in my head that have never formed, taking me to places that I've never been and encouraging me to continue to think outside the box. Food has become so important to me nowadays, when I was younger I never thought about food the way I think about it now. I believe that if you let it, food can change the way you think and the way you move, and teach you things about yourself and others that you may have misunderstood. That's what okra has done for me.

Okra has many benefits. It is rich in vitamins A and C, as well as antioxidants that help reduce the spread of very serious health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Okra is also a good source of magnesium. If you have stomach issues like me, it can also do wonders for your digestive system. Okra has to be one of my top favorite foods that I have ever eaten. Some people don't like the slime, but I do because it makes it different from anything else and it also just makes it fun to eat and fun to prepare.

Before trying okra I had never seen anything like it. I want to go back to the core memories that okra has given me, even though I didn't grow up eating it, and moreover I didn't even know that something like it even existed. It has given me the core memory of family, how cooking brings family together and how stories come out when people share their favorite foods. While tasting okra for the first time I felt like I knew the person that introduced me to it more, like I knew all his hardships and joyful moments just from him sharing his okra recipe with me. I was shocked and stunned. I kept saying, "But food can't make me think like this."

Turns out it did and it always does.

Did I mention that it makes me happy? Yes, okra makes me happy. I'll eat it whenever I'm having a bad day, a good day, an okay day or just about any day. I know you think I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. Have you tried it? If not, you should, you won't forget it. Oh, let me just mention that I'm talking about cooked okra. There's all kinds of ways you can eat it, you can eat okra fried, it can be eaten raw, pickled, in a succotash, roasted and grilled.

By now I know you have heard about okra water. It has been all over TikTok lately, and that in itself has multiple benefits. It has the same benefits as above, but also has some added ones, such as weight management, skin health and blood sugar regulation. I might have to try drinking okra water, since I've been reading that it helps with skin and I can use the help in that area.

It has opened up my taste buds to a whole different world.

This world is always positive, a place where I'm always ready to get going in the morning. Okra makes me more energized no matter what time of day I eat it.

Some unique facts about okra:

1. Okra is also known as lady fingers.
2. It is part of the hibiscus family and is native to Africa, but okra is grown all over the world.
3. Technically, it's a fruit.
4. Okra isn't just green: it can be a variety of colours, including purple, burgundy, orange, red and white.
5. The gel in the okra is called mucilage.
6. It is considered a superfood.

I like the common color of okra, which is green. It reminds me of green grass, money and health. Anything that's green screams good to me, which also screams healthy for you. I try to always make sure I add green to my plate, along with other colors like yellow, orange, purple and white. To be fair, I have only eaten the green okra, but I am willing to see what kind of effects the other colors of okra have on my mind and how they can make me feel.

Okra is not the only food that has done this for me, plenty of food has, and I'll just name a few: fufu soup, acuma and bomba leaves. West African food has basically changed my life in all beautiful ways. One thing that bothers me is that where I currently live there is only one place that serves it, which is okay, but I wish that they had more options and there more places to go.

A goal of mine is to be able to 100% prepare okra it on my own in all ways. I love boiling water and adding meats or just veggies. Okra pairs well with meats like chicken, shrimp, fish and, my favorite, turkey tails. Turkey tails are the perfect combination for it because it gives okra that rich taste, especially with a lot of other flavours and spices. Can't forget the spice. The spice is like the nightlife and the okra is like the day party. Either way, you get the best of both worlds by adding what you like to an okra dish. It brings out more flavor and more authenticity to the meal.

My life without okra would be down and gray. It has easily become one of my favorite foods to eat. I would be sad if I had to travel to another state just to get some. I can't help but to wonder how rich it would be to eat it where it is organically grown. During some research this is what I found on the okra grown in Africa:

It likely originated in West Africa over 1,000 years ago.
It's related to cotton, hollyhock and the rose of Sharon.
It is still found growing wild in some parts of Africa.
The word okra comes from the corruption of the West African name for the plant, nkruma.

There's a debate over the term okra or gumbo and I'll always choose okra, but recently I have learned that in southern states they debate over which one is better. I'm always interested in learning why people choose one food over the other, but that ties in to different cultures and background experiences. When I talked about how food helps you get to know people, that's exactly what I meant, asking the right questions and figuring out why people like one food over another can tell you everything you need to know about a person without getting too deep or keeping it just on the surface level. I think food is a beautiful way to open up people's minds to different conversations and topics to get to know them better. After I taste something that I have never eaten before, it always sparks a conversation between me and the other people around me, and the stories are

always great to listen to.

I think food is love, and once you dive deep into it, you find yourself in love with many different kinds of foods, and maybe even choosing a soulmate. Okra has brought great gratitude to my life and I am very appreciative of it. The positive effects it has stamped on my brain and on my heart are things that I will cherish forever, in addition to how delicious it is. My only hope in the future is that people take the time out to try different foods and expand their minds to something different, letting it take you on a journey that you've never before embarked on. Opening up your life to these opportunities can lead you on a beautiful path.