

The mission wasn't over. Olivia glanced over her shoulder, making sure no one was watching. Drained the pot of boiling pasta, and pulled the glass pan from the microwave. Dropped the contents in a blender, and added the ingredients from a saucepan on the stove. The blender whirled to life when she flipped the switch. Noise reverberated around the kitchen. Feet clambered upstairs, and Olivia hurried to empty the mixture from the blender into the pan of macaroni before the kids arrived.

"Yummy, mac and cheese!" Mollie said, grabbing her bowl.

Olivia didn't need to confess about the hidden veggies.



Do you remember the hidden veggie craze with the competing cookbooks that came out back in 2008? There was a lot of controversy over who wrote which book first, not that many parents cared. Most were excited about a way to sneak veggies into their kids' diets. I was amongst them, as I had an incredibly picky eater in those days. We started adding pureed veggies to most meals, from tacos to ice cream. Yep, I added raw spinach to our homemade mint chocolate chip ice cream. The kid was unaware, and the leafy greens gave it a nice pale minty color. Then there was the day I attempted the brownie recipe.

I still shudder to think about it. Don't get me wrong, I've had brownies made with applesauce and sweet potato before. They were all delicious, but this recipe called for pureed spinach. I don't do cooked spinach. I've tried many times in my life, but it literally makes me gag. The texture, the slime, the stem. Please, spare me from describing it any further.

Chocolate, as the saying goes, can hide a multitude of sins. So, why not give it a chance? I did, but was too chicken to try a bite. My husband, unaware of the spinach, was not. Until he took the first bite. The look on his face forced me to take a bite, because surely, no matter

how bad the brownies were, they could not be *that* bad. Oh, dear reader, they were indeed *that* bad. They were the second worst thing I've ever eaten. The first being ground goat meat, which is a story unto itself.

The kids came charging into the kitchen then, spotted the chocolate delicacies on the counter and asked if they could have some. We nodded mutely and waited to see what would happen. Nothing happened. Even my picky eater scarfed them down. Despite this delighted outcome, I never made those brownies again.

I assure you, the brownies I make these days are completely vegetable free, although thanks to our food allergies, they contain flaxseed instead of eggs. I'm told I should warn people before serving them, because flax can have a powerful effect on one's digestive system.

I still make a macaroni and cheese sauce from vegetables, but that's because we learned my crew is allergic to dairy. So we make our "cheese" sauce from potatoes, carrots, and cashews. My picky eater is no longer picky, and I often have to ask him to *stop* eating the vegetables while I'm chopping them for dinner.

The Reluctant Author 