

## It's Never Too Late

*How I turned around my long list of health issues starting at age 67.*

*by Jim Lanning Smith*

**F**rom Thanksgiving 2012 to my birthday in February 2013 I gained 10 pounds, going from a weight of 310 to 320 pounds. That wasn't unusual. Year after year I did that same thing during that extended holiday period. Year after year I allowed myself to eat anything and everything that I wanted, arguing that it was the holidays and I wanted to enjoy them. Within three decades, from my thirties to my sixties, my weight went



from 160 pounds to 320 pounds.

When we got married in 1972, my wife joked to her friends

that I was so skinny she could wrap her arms around me twice. Forty years later that skinniness was nothing but a distant memory. I became fat, very fat. In other

words, I became morbidly obese. I also developed high blood pressure, high cholesterol, an enlarged prostate, acid reflux disease, leg cramps, neuropathy, toenail fungus, kidney pain, and more. But I never associated those things with getting fat or with not eating right. Instead, I considered them a normal part of aging. And why shouldn't I

*"The toenail fungus, the enlarged prostate, the acid reflux disease, the leg cramps, the neuropathy, and the kidney pains are now all gone."*

have thought that? When I got together with my friends, they all complained about similar pains and ailments. And my own wife had medical issues larger than mine.

Because of that, I never considered my health to be bad. I knew I was overweight, a term that I preferred to that of being obese

or fat. But the rest of my problems were just things to put up with. Prescription drugs helped in that regard. One prescription in particular, Flomax, had me so scared of running out or forgetting to take it with me on out-of-town trips because without it I couldn't pee. And yet today, I pee fine and haven't taken a Flomax pill in over three years. Since I've never had prostate surgery, I have to credit the power of food with giving me that gift.

After changing my way of eating to a whole-food, plant-based diet over the last four years, I've lost 150 pounds. My total cholesterol has come down from over 200 to 101, and my LDL is now 57. I am no longer taking any prescription medications at all. And yet my blood pressure now averages 110/70, my triglycerides are also 57, and my blood sugar level is below 90 (in the upper 80s). The toenail fungus, the enlarged prostate, the acid reflux disease, the leg cramps, the neuropathy, and the kidney pains are now all gone. I feel great.

Where once it was a struggle for me to walk for 20 minutes, I now find that I easily bicycle over two miles to the nature trail in our neighborhood, walk for two to four miles on the trail, bike back home, and then do yoga exercises for another hour. The change in my physical stamina has been nothing short of amazing.

My story of change began in the Spring of 2013 shortly after tipping the scale at 320. That April, my wife was diagnosed with Stage IV glioblastoma, or to put it in layman's terms, brain cancer. At the time, we were probably both a little naïve about medicine hospitals and the curing of diseases. We believed she would go into the hospital, they would cut the tumor out, she would go through a recovery period, and then she would be out in time for us to take an out-of-town trip that we had planned for our anniversary.

That was not to be. Instead, it seemed that every medical procedure done on her created more problems and contributed to making her situation worse. They did the surgery, but then a week later she was back in the operating room for a second surgery because fluid was building up in the space where the tumor had been. Then in recovery, she developed a pulmonary embolism due to having



*Jim Smith with his granddaughter.*

been in bed in the hospital for so long. And on and on it went for over three months before she ended up succumbing to sepsis (aka a hospital infection). She died on July 12, 2013.

I came away from that experience realizing for the first time that medicine doesn't necessarily cure what ails us. In fact, one of the doctors in the hospital told me that they don't talk in terms of "curing" disease; they talk in terms of "managing" disease. I realize now that all the doctors in the hospital did not believe, right from the beginning, that she was going to make it. My daughter and I seemed to be the only ones holding on to some kind of false hope that medicine was going to come through and save the day.

I knew that I never wanted to go through what my wife went through. In fact, my initial thought after she died was to purchase a gun and put it away for the day I received a diagnosis like she received. I thought about how easy suicide would be. Pulling the trigger would be like clicking the mouse on my computer. And then it would be over.

But I never did that. I found it repulsive just looking at guns in the store. Fortunately, at that time, though, there was a confluence of events that ended in my deciding to




*Jim Smith enjoys harvesting his own vegetables.*

try whole-food, plant-based eating. First, there was a new doctor who I went to in order to get a refill on my prescriptions. He took one look at me and said I needed to see a dietitian. He wrote me a prescription to do so. At the same time, a friend of mine told me about the Eat Smart Live Longer Club in Sun City, where I lived. Knowing I needed to do something, I decided to give it a try. But then I heard it was vegan. I thought that I could never do that. Then I found a book called *VB6: Eat Vegan Before Six* by Mark Bittman, food writer for the *New York Times*. Bittman said to go vegan all day except for one meal. I thought that sounded more realistic, so I decided to

join the club in Sun City and follow Mark Bittman's advice.

All three things worked together to get me started. Even though the dietitian was prescribing a calorie-restricted standard American diet, I chose to follow VB6 and what I was learning in the club instead. But I kept going to the dietitian because she did weekly weigh-ins and she would get excited about how much weight I was losing. Every week she would tell me that I did better than all her other patients. I kept going because I enjoyed hearing her praise, not because I was following her advice (which I wasn't).

I now tell people it's never too late in life to start. I was 67 when I started. Today, I'm 70 years old. My health is nothing like I thought it would be at the age of 70. I don't feel old at all. In fact, I recently had my telomeres measured, and they came in at the length of an average 43 year old man. That's just one of the remarkable benefits I've seen from going whole food, plant-based.

I'm enjoying life today like I never have before. And for the first time in my life, I believe it's possible that I might actually be around long enough to see my grandchildren grow up and form families of their own. I've become so enthused about this way of eating, I've started a blog, which can be read at [www.finallyyourtime.com](http://www.finallyyourtime.com) and I also publish recipes at [www.theartofplantbasedmealcreation.com](http://www.theartofplantbasedmealcreation.com). I am totally convinced that this is the right way to be eating. 



*Jim Smith (at right) with Dr. Michael Gregor, a physician, author and internationally recognized speaker on nutrition, food safety, and public health issues. He runs the popular website [NutritionFacts.org](http://NutritionFacts.org), and is the author of *How Not to Die*.*