

From Uninsurable to Passionate about Health

After a life-changing realization, I transformed my life with a whole-food, plant-based diet and lifestyle.

by Anthony Masiello



Anthony & Cathy Masiello

In October of 2005, I felt the pain that started me on this journey. I came home from work and found a letter from an insurance company about a life insurance policy I had applied for. I was anxious, because I'd had issues getting insurance in the past, which meant I'd had to pay more for coverage. It hadn't been encouraging, but I'd paid it and was covered.

I opened the letter, and there it was: "Denied." Nothing mentioned about going into another risk category or for a follow-up medical assessment, just "Denied." I couldn't believe it; this insurance company would not sell me a 20-year term life policy! I was only 33 years old, and they didn't expect me to live for another 20 years. That hurt, bad.

As I stood there, on medication for high blood pressure, morbidly obese with a 54-inch waist, having high cholesterol, and recently having been diagnosed with sleep apnea, I felt depressed and hopeless. I kept thinking to myself, how did this happen? Why did this happen? I'm not a bad person. My life isn't so bad. I'm not so unhealthy—or am I?

Looking back, there were lots of good things happening in my life. My wife and I were married, in love, and starting a family. We already had an 18-month-old son, and our second was on the way. I had a good job that I enjoyed, and we did lots of fun things like snowboarding, biking, skateboarding, and spending lots of time with friends. At the same time, there were things that were difficult. At 6 feet, 4 inches tall, and weighing 360 pounds, it was painful for me to sit in armchairs. I overflowed my seat on airplanes, and I had to ask the flight attendant for the seat belt extension so I could buckle up during flights. I had to buy heavy-duty everything, from ladders to oversized kitchen and dining room chairs. I couldn't even weigh myself on a normal bathroom scale.

Worst of all were the things I couldn't do. I remember late in the summer of 2005, I was walking around the local church fair with my wife, Cathy, and 18-month-old son, Evan. I was carrying Evan against my chest, and he was seeing all of the rides, flashing lights, and ringing bells for the first time. Then we walked around the corner and his eyes lit up! Evan spotted Thomas the train! I don't even remember if it was really Thomas or not, but to Evan it was. His face immediately lit up, and he started squirming in my arms and pointing anxiously. He was really excited, and that got me excited for him. We walked toward the train, and as we got close, I started to pull Evan from my chest to hand him to Cathy so she could take him on the ride. But, as I did that, he tightened his grip and held on to my shirt. He didn't want to let go. He wanted me to take him on the train. I took a deep breath, tugged him off my chest, and put him in Cathy's arms. There was no way I would fit on that train. They didn't make rides for people my size, let alone a children's ride. Anyway, Evan settled quickly and was back to being excited about getting on the train. Cathy handed their tickets to the ride attendant and climbed aboard. Evan was glowing as he sat down for the ride of

his life.

What happened next changed my life forever. While I was standing there watching them climb aboard, the attendant interrupted me and asked me to step aside and wait behind the metal railing. That's when it hit me. I looked down, and I was literally standing behind a metal barrier, just watching, as my wife and son circled the track, giggling, smiling, laughing, and having a great time. All I could do was stand outside the fence and watch. I felt like an outsider, an observer who wasn't allowed in to participate in my own life. I was unable to do something that I really wanted to do,



Anthony in 2005 at 360 pounds.

"This insurance company would not sell me a 20-year term life policy! I was only 33 years old, and they didn't expect me to live for another 20 years."

something that my young son really wanted me to do. As they rode around and around, I just stared and thought, is this the kind of father I am? Is this the kind of husband that I have become? I knew the answers to those questions was “yes,” and I worried what else my wife was going to have to do for us because I wouldn’t be physically able to do it. What I was experiencing standing outside that ride, on that day, was exactly the life that I created for myself, and I wasn’t happy about that at all.

I grew up heavy and lived most of my life obese. I tried to lose weight several times before, but nothing ever lasted. I felt different this time, though; I was going to make 2006 my year. I set a New Year’s resolution to lose 50 pounds in 2006. I immediately gave up sweets and soda and started eating less. I was determined and did that for a few months. But despite avoiding the sweets and soda and being constantly hungry, I saw absolutely no results. In two months, I had not lost a single pound. It was depressing. I still had time, though, so I continued searching for something that would work.

In March of 2006, I found it. While searching for weight-loss books, I found Dr. Fuhrman’s book *Eat to Live*. The cover promised “Fast and Sustained Weight Loss.” I read the reviews, and they were all about getting healthy. That’s what I really wanted: to be healthy! I ordered the book and started changing my diet immediately. I focused on eating more—more fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds—and less of everything else. It was simple. I did not make hard rules in the beginning about the things I would not eat; I just focused on eating more vegetables and fruit and letting that crowd out the rest. It was a good plan for me. There were no feelings of failure, and I woke up every day on a mission to eat more vegetables and fruit than I had the day before. And it worked.

By the time my second son, Henry, was born, just two months after buying *Eat to Live*, I was already down 30 pounds! I couldn’t believe it, but I loved it, and that was all the motivation I needed to keep pushing.

I continued eating more and more vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, and seeds and cutting out everything else, including oil, breads, flour, sauces, sweeteners, and even pizza. I ate huge salads and tons of greens. I made big batches of bean chili with mushrooms and kale. I made delicious



Anthony with his wife, Cathy, and sons, Evan and Henry

“I woke up every day on a mission to eat more healthy vegetables and fruit than I had the day before. And it worked.”

soups with broccoli and roasted red peppers. I ate everything over steamed spinach, kale, broccoli, or other greens, and usually with a side of steamed asparagus or some other vegetable. I snacked on fresh fruit, carrots, and celery. I ate more vegetables and fruit than I thought was possible. I felt amazing!

After those first two months of big weight loss, I settled in and was losing almost exactly eight pounds every month. It didn’t always come off evenly, at exactly two pounds a week. The scale would bounce around, and I just watched it to understand what was happening.

As my weight was dropping, my doctor started ramping down my blood pressure medication, and I noticed that I was experiencing fewer migraine headaches. She was impressed with my results and told me to keep doing what I was doing. I really liked hearing that. It was a totally different experience than the doctor visits I was used to.

By December of 2006, only 10 months after reading *Eat to Live*, my blood pressure was normal without medication, I was no longer experiencing migraine headaches, and I had lost a total of 90 pounds. I felt amazing and had more energy than ever. With all of this newfound energy, I decided that I wanted to start running. I had lost my first 90 pounds without doing any exercise, but that was about to change.

I had never run before, but I’d always admired runners. I started with a combination of walking and running. I would start walking, and then I would run for 30 seconds or so until I lost my breath, and then I’d go back to walking. I did that for a half-hour every day and just kept trying to extend the time I spent running. I progressed quickly, and then I could run a minute, then a quarter-mile, then a half-mile, then eventually I could run for a full mile. I would warm up, run a mile, take a walk break, and run another. The runs got longer and the walk breaks got shorter, until I could run a few miles in a row.

In March, I signed up for my first 5K. It was so cool being out there with everyone hustling around the registration area, signing up, getting bibs, warming up; I couldn’t believe that I was actually a part of it. After that race, I was hooked on living a healthy lifestyle that included eating a whole-food, plant-based nutritional diet and running.

I kept getting better with both in 2007. I continued eating

Continued on page 27




Watch Dillon Holmes prepare delicious health-promoting meals on the *Well Your World* YouTube channel.

as quickly as you can; it will only get easier as you continue to gain experience. Don't let the odd mistake derail your progress. Every time it gets hard, you're learning more and more about yourself, and that is what this process is all about.

6. Reflect and adjust.

After a month or so of sticking to your plan, reflect on your progress. Were you able to achieve your short-term goals? Was your

plan too easy or too hard, or maybe just right? If you made mistakes along the way, what led to those mistakes? What can you modify for next time so that you keep on improving and achieving your goals? At this point, go back to step 4, redefine your next set of goals, and keep on with the process. It's supposed to be hard at first; embrace the challenge, because once you have it all figured out, you're essentially set for the rest of your life! 

Dillon Holmes began the Well Your World YouTube channel and Facebook group to provide support and camaraderie for those transitioning to and maintaining a health-promoting diet and lifestyle. His videos include cooking demos, live Q&A sessions, and relaxed chats covering topics such as social pressure and calorie density. He is also selling a brand-new lineup of SOS-free bottled sauces, including ketchup, BBQ sauce, curry sauce, and a sriracha chili sauce, with bottled salad dressings coming soon! Learn more at WellYourWorld.com.

From Uninsurable to Passionate about Health

Continued from page 25

more vegetables, fruits, and beans, and I extended my running. I extended my longer runs a little further and further every time I went out. And, even with adding all of this exercise, I continued losing almost exactly eight pounds a month, every single month, until September 2007, when my weight loss stopped just as suddenly as it had begun.

At that point, I had lost a total of 160 pounds; my blood pressure, triglycerides, and cholesterol were all ideal without medication; I was no longer experiencing migraine headaches; I was down 18 inches to a 36-inch waist; and I reapplied and got that life insurance policy...in the preferred category!

The peace of mind that I have now, knowing that I am truly healthy on the inside, means a lot. Being an active part of my kids' lives and knowing that I am going to be with them for a very long time means the world to me.

I now feel good and have fun every day, and I am especially proud to be a positive role model for my family and others that I care about. The feelings I get from truly living life, the way that I do now, are beyond my wildest dreams. There is nothing in the world that would make me want to give that up. My new life is absolutely amazing!

My passion for quality of life has led me to become a National Board Certified Health & Wellness Coach, an educator, consultant, and speaker helping individuals and organi-

zations to prevent and reverse disease through lifestyle intervention. I cofounded the Healthy Human Revolution with Dr. Laurie Marbas and Jason Cohen to bring awareness, education, and support of these lifestyle interventions to people all over the globe.



Anthony, Cathy, and Evan crossing the finish line at the challenging 15-mile "Leadville Heavy Half" in Colorado in June 2018.

I learned about the NHA when talking with Mark and Wanda Huberman at a conference in New York City last year. I've been following their work ever since and am continually inspired by their drive to share healing information and transformational stories with so many. I love the way *Health Science* magazine brings all of this right into my home, and I look forward to attending their annual NHA Conference next year to continue learning from experts who teach the life-improving potential of a healthy, whole-food, plant-based diet and lifestyle. 