

Prognosis Denied

A Medicated Life was not acceptable to this Husband & Wife Team.

by Susan Staffier

We live in San Antonio, Texas, but originally we are from a small city just north of Boston. Ralph is a commercial sales engineering manager and I'm a librarian. We have both recently retired and spend our time with our grandchildren, are involved in our church, and we love to travel.

We were both raised on the standard American diet. Mostly we ate simple foods like meat, potatoes, canned vegetables, cereal, dairy foods, and some fresh fruits and vegetables. Ralph was used to spicy Italian food and never had any problems—he ate everything. But my diet was milder in flavor. From the time I was a teenager I began having stomach problems. It seemed to run in the family, and so I just learned to live with it.

When we were married in 1967, our eating habits pretty much stayed the same except we began incorporating more processed foods into our diet, as they were popular back then and quick to prepare. Due to Ralph being in the Air Force, we moved to Germany in 1970.

Just before the birth of our daughter in 1971, Ralph became very ill and was hospitalized due to severe, persistent stomach pain. The doctors thought it was appendicitis, but when this was ruled out and the pain seemed to subside, Ralph was sent home with no diagnoses. Even with many follow-up tests, they still had no idea what the problem was.

In 1972 we were transferred back to Texas and Ralph continued to have stomach and digestive problems. It was right after the birth of our son in 1974 that Ralph was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. He ended up having nearly five feet of his intestines removed because they were so infected, which resulted in many complications. His wound wouldn't heal, he kept getting infections and, at one point, we thought the doctors may have left something inside of him. This turned out to be not the case, but it wasn't a pleasant adventure. He finally needed to have hyperbaric therapy to close the wound. After months of treatment he finally was able to go back to work.

At one point Ralph was taking 12 pills a day, which was very disturbing to us since we understood the possible long-term complications.



Ralph and Susan Staffier hope their testimony can help others suffering from Crohn's Disease to take action to eliminate their pain.

He was given several drugs to alleviate his pain, constant diarrhea, and fatigue. At one point Ralph was taking 12 pills a day, which was very disturbing to us since we understood the possible long-term complications. I recall thinking that he was not yet 30 years old, so what would the consequences be 10 years down the line? I envisioned the medications killing him before the disease.

The doctors told us his prognosis was very poor. They gave us the impression that Ralph would not be able to work full time and would not live a normal life. Because of this, he was medically retired from the US Air Force in 1976.

We did ask the doctors if a special diet would help, but they insisted that Ralph's health issues had nothing to do with his diet. This was absurd, I thought. The little bit I knew about how the body works and what I was learning about the disease just didn't line up with this type of thinking. At a certain point one doctor mentioned that some people find it helpful to avoid dairy foods. And with this, we began re-evaluating our diet.

New Dietary Changes

Dairy was the first food group we omitted, and it made a big difference. One amazing thing was that after a few months without dairy I could not recall the last time I had stomach pain. After years and years of suffering off and on, the pain and cramping just stopped. It was an epiphany!

We were used to eating a lot of ice cream, and Ralph felt bad since the kids still wanted ice cream. The solution was to take them out for an ice cream once in awhile since we knew it was problematic for the both of us. We couldn't have it in the house; it was too tempting.

In the early 1980s I heard about a book called *Fit for Life* by Harvey and Marilyn Diamond. We read the book and followed the diet for a short time. In the back of the book there was mention of a health clinic in Austin. I called them for more information and was given the name and number of the Natural Hygiene Society.

I called the NHS and from this, we were invited to and attended our first Natural Hygiene conference in Florida. This was the beginning of the road to Ralph's improved health. We attended several Natural Hygiene conferences and, quite simply, they changed our lives. We learned so much by listening to the lectures, speaking to the doctors, and learning how to buy food and prepare healthy meals.

At one conference, we learned that wheat gluten was one of the things to avoid for a person with Crohn's. This change made another significant difference in Ralph's overall health (he stopped having stomach pains and the diarrhea ceased). We purchased nearly every book on the subject and continued to read the early books about Natural Hygiene.

After the first conference, we stopped eating pork and beef. We stopped eating chicken soon after. It wasn't easy, but Ralph's health was improving and that was a big incentive. I did continue to make chicken for the kids, who were young teenagers at the time, choosing not to force our new diet choices on them.

I stopped buying canned and processed foods. I always had lots of fresh fruits and vegetables in the house. Little by little Ralph got off of his medications. The doctors did not object to this since his health was improving. Our children, now adults with several children of their own, are extremely careful about what they eat and what they feed their children. They do consume meat but virtually no sugary drinks, processed foods, and always have lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. They tell us they are evolving into vegans. They have seen their father go from extremely poor health to a person in better shape than some of their friends.

30 Years Later


Needless to say, many well-meaning friends thought we were going off the deep end. But after nearly 30 years, the same friends see what a change our dietary choices have made in our health. To this day we still (most of the time) bring our own food to holiday celebrations and other gatherings to assure that we'll have something healthy to eat.

When we are at a conference, on a retreat, or just eating out, we scan the menu and put together a meal. We look for the vegetable of the day, a salad, soup (always asking if milk is used or vegetable broth). We're used to it now. It's frustrating at times but the health benefits are worth all of our efforts.

Nowadays it is so much easier for people to live this lifestyle. Years ago we had to make our own almond milk, among other things. We continue to read the latest books by Drs. Goldhamer, Furhman, and McDougall, as well as writings by Jeff Novick, and many others. It's easy to search the Internet for recipes and change existing recipes to fit our dietary needs and tastes. I'm also a huge fan of Food TV, finding many good ideas there.

We try to spread the message in our environment. We have not been too successful in affecting family and/or friends in our dietary ways. And this is the hardest thing for us: to see friends suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure, and many other ailments that can be controlled with dietary changes. Sometimes we just want to scream, "Hey everyone, it's the food!"

I recall praying that Ralph would be able to see his children grow up, and now we are blessed with seven grandchildren. I consider this a gift! I thank God for all of you and the message that the NHA spreads.

Recently Ralph went to a new GI doctor, and after the initial colonoscopy the doctor said, "You look great! You can eat anything you want." We both really like this doctor, but it's clear we still have a lot of work to do! 



Susan and Ralph Staffier with their extended family.