

The Eat Smart Live Longer Club Saved Her Health

Battling extra weight, high BP and thyroid issues, Judy Cote's health answers were found in Hilton Head, South Carolina

by J. Lanning Smith

“**S**eeing cardiac surgery being performed on 30-year-olds is crushing,” says NHA member Judy Cote, a retired nurse who now volunteers in the operating room through the Christian organization, Mercy Ships. Through the program, she provides free surgeries to the people of Africa, but what is even more important to her is helping people to stay out of the operating room altogether. She does this through teaching about and introducing people to a whole food, plant-based lifestyle.

Whether it's with her own sister, with members of the Eat Smart Live Longer Club, or with patients of Volunteers in Medicine, Judy is always ready to help. And by being a member of the National Health Association, she stays current with events happening in the whole food, plant-based world.

Judy first learned about this way of eating in late 2012 after she was invited to watch the documentary *Forks Over Knives*. She had already

given up eating red meat before seeing the documentary, and her favorite meal had become a piece of salmon and a head of cooked broccoli. But her operating room schedule kept her from eating full meals, let alone healthy meals, most of the time. She often only had time for crackers with peanut butter. As a result, she became overweight, and developed high blood pressure and thyroid issues.

“She wanted to learn all she could about the whole food, plant-based way of eating, and she wanted to stay involved in a meaningful way.”

Turning a Corner

In December 2012, after semi-retiring and moving to Sun City Hilton Head in South Carolina, Judy joined the Bird Club, which conducts a bird count every year. Counters are teamed up with another person to go out in golf carts to search for, identify and count birds. She was teamed up with Karen Heitman, who was planning to start the Eat Smart Live Longer Club. Karen, a current member of the



At left, Judy Cote before converting to plant-based and at right Judy as seen at the NHA Conference.

National Health Association, talked to Judy about the whole food, plant-based way of eating as the two continued to count birds. Between that and *Forks Over Knives*, Judy became convinced that she needed to give a whole food, plant-based way of eating a try.

When Karen, with her sisters Leslie Haas and Mary Lou Beavers, founded the Eat Smart Live Longer Club in May 2013, Judy was one of the original 40 members. By the Fall of 2013, she was the club's secretary and on the executive board of the club. She wanted to learn all she could about this way of eating, and she wanted to stay involved in a meaningful way, not only to help others but also to keep helping herself.

After joining the club and beginning to eat the plant-based way, Judy lost eight pounds and found herself feeling better. She got off half her hypertension medications. And this was all while she was still traveling back and forth to Boston and working per diem in the operating room at



Up front, Judy Cote before her weight loss.

Massachusetts General Hospital. She also led, and still leads, a dining out group within the club that goes out to restaurants for lunch once a month. The group learned together to eat properly when eating out. Later, due to her mother's sudden death from malignant hypertension, and still needing to get her blood pressure down, Judy decided to attend a fasting program at TrueNorth Health Center in Santa Rosa, California, where she consulted with Dr. Alan Goldhamer, Dr. Doug Lisle, Dr. Anthony Lim, and others. There she underwent a 21-day fasting program.

By the third day of Judy's fast, she didn't feel hungry anymore. As a result of that fasting experience, she lost 17 pounds, got off all her blood pressure medications (which was her reason for going there), and cut her thyroid medications in half. She found the time at the health center so phenomenal that she plans to return in 2019.

Helping Others

Judy isn't the kind of person to make things all about herself. She is passionate about helping others. In that regard, nobody was more important to her than her sister, Norma, who had surgery for a blocked carotid artery and was fast becoming a candidate for surgery on the other side of her neck. Judy took it upon herself to help her sister not have to go through that again.

She contacted Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, Jr. at the Cleveland Clinic and discussed her sister's situation with him. Dr. Esselstyn asked her to come to Cleveland with her sister, which she did. Together, she helped Norma go through the program. As a result, Norma lost about 50 pounds and was able to discontinue a lot of her medication. And, she has not had to undergo that second carotid artery surgery. Today, when Norma goes into a restaurant, she tells the waitstaff that she is allergic to oil and that if she has even one drop of it, she could die. Not wanting a death in their dining room, the restaurants are always willing to



Judy, summer 2018

oblige her.

Judy is also an instructor in the Eat Smart Live Longer Club's 21-Day Kickstart program. There she has helped numerous people learn the basics of adopting a whole food, plant-based way of eating. She is also a Buddy in the club's Buddy system, which helps to answer questions on a personal level for new members and others wondering about specific issues around plant-based eating. She says she "enjoys helping people and watching their faces as they learn."


Outside of her activities with the Eat Smart Live Longer Club, as mentioned earlier, Judy volunteers as an operating room nurse on the Mercy Ship. She describes it as "the best thing I've ever done." The first time she went aboard the ship was in Madagascar, which was under threat from a Category 5 cyclone (or what we would refer to as a hurricane). Fortunately, the cyclone dissipated and did not affect the ship; but had it not dissipated, the ship would have had to move to calmer waters.

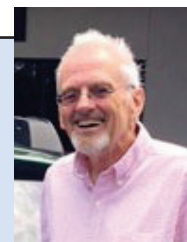
Judy has also been a volunteer with Volunteers in Medicine on Hilton Head Island. Originally starting out with them in the nursing area, she later moved to the wellness side where she coached patients on staying

healthy. She also taught cooking classes there with another member of the Eat Smart Live Longer Club, Sharon Toia.

When Judy's not volunteering, she enjoys walking on the nature trail in Sun City or on the beaches in Hilton Head. Being in nature brings her enjoyment and peace. One of her favorite activities is kayaking. The waterways along the coastal Carolinas and Georgia are perfect places for this.

Judy's advice to others who may be struggling with a whole food, plant-based way of eating: "Read, read, read. Educate yourself." She believes that the more knowledge a person has, the more likely it is they will make better health choices. "Keep growing," she says.

One way that Judy has continued to grow and learn has been through her membership in the National Health Association. Each quarter she devours *Health Science* magazine, thoroughly enjoying each article. She had a wonderful time attending the most recent conference of the National Health Association this past June in Cleveland. 



J. Lanning Smith (Jim) is past president and current board member of the Eat Smart Live Longer Club in

Sun City Hilton Head. He lost 150 pounds and got off of all prescription medications through following a whole food, plant-based lifestyle. He is a graduate of the eCornell T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies and the Rouxbe Forks Over Knives Plant-Based Online Cooking School. You can visit Jim's blogs at Finally-OurTime.com and TheArtofPlant-BasedMealCreation.com, and read his column in his community newspaper, *The Bluffton Sun*.