My Journey to Better Health

STUART AND SUE, 2ND AND 3RD FROM LEFT, IN THE INN'S EARLY DAYS.

PHOTO BY RONALD WEISS.

by Stuart Douglas

As I sit in the library today thinking about my 83 years of life, my mind goes back to my connection to the American Natural Hygiene Society in 1977 at age 34. I grew up as so many of you readers did eating "okay" but not knowing the importance of what truly nurtured my body. Athletically, I participated in every sport I could. At the dinner table, I ate what was put in front of me—lots of meat and potatoes, not many salads, and plenty of homemade desserts that were full of sugar. College food, army grub, and bachelor meals did not change my routine.

Happily married at age 27, better habits emerged, as my wife, Sue, was an enthusiastic and creative cook. In 1974, we pursued a dream of owning a country inn in Vermont. The prior year, we had managed a ski lodge that included a restaurant, and that got us thinking more about serving all fresh foods and catering to vegan and vegetarian diets. Now, owning the Inn at Weston, we kept our menu to five choices (different every night). Nothing came out of the freezer, and our reputation spread rapidly throughout the nearby towns and in all the Northeast states. We both worked 100-hour weeks, and our staff grew from a few to 10, then 12, and ultimately 16 as we regularly served over 100 dinners per night and were mostly full, with 37 guests. For me, finding time to eat was challenging, and when I did, it was rushed and mostly leftovers.

In July, 1977, we got our much-deserved big break. The *Los Angeles Times* travel editor, Jerry Hulse, visited us during the height of our summer season (which was always busy with pre-theater dining at the Westin Playhouse) to potentially include our inn along with two others in a Sunday edition front-page feature article. The day and night of his visit, I handled my wide variety of duties to make the service for our full house and record 115 dining guests go as well as possible. During it all, Jerry watched and interviewed me. Sue and our full staff were right on task throughout it all. I cooked 60 breakfasts the next morning, and Jerry got some final time with both of us. Then he left, and we all wondered for over a month what his take was on his wild and wooly visit. One quiet morning in late August, I answered my phone, and it was Jerry's secretary. She said, "You'd better get ready. Jerry loved your inn so much that he has chosen it, alone, to be featured in an upcoming front-page Sunday travel section issue with eight million readers." The headline would be "The Inn at Westin" and below that, "It's so peaceful in their country." She said there would be pictures of me, my wife, and our dog standing by our sign. The article, which would be syndicated to every large city, came out in late September.

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This is what led up to my health crisis. You all know the saying, "Some things are meant to be." I made it through the ultra-busy foliage season (mid-September to mid-October), but I knew something was new and different in my body. At my doctor's appointment, he announced a diagnosis of early prostate cancer and gave me several options to consider. My wife had gone to a fasting clinic in Ohio six months earlier for stomach issues, and after making many extensive dietary changes, she was symptom-free. I was scared, devastated, and extremely hesitant to pursue the same route, but after reading *Fasting Can Save Your Life* by Herbert Shelton, it was off to Dr. David Scott's fasting institute in Strongsville, Ohio, in November, 1977, for a 30-day stay. Family and friends did not support my choice of action.

The staff were salt-of-the-earth Amish women, and I shared one of seven rooms in the inn-like home with several other fasters. I read book after book of Dr. Shelton's and others who taught a plant-based, mostly raw-food diet that included nuts, seeds, tofu, sprouts, organic vegetables and fruits, and avocados. Salt, sugar, processed anything, and some spices were no-no's.

I learned very early that fasting was a science, and everyone was carefully monitored. Every morning about 7:00 a.m., Dr. Scott visited every patient, checked our urine samples, and answered any and all questions and concerns before going to his chiropractic office in Cleveland. He made sure we were drinking the allotted water that was regularly filled by the staff. Every Sunday, he did blood tests on all the patients, and Sunday evening, he reviewed the results with us. Uric acid was watched carefully.

For me, fasting became easy. I slept mostly during the days and at night learned quickly that my mind stayed awake. I read books from the library about the lifestyle I was moving into, journaled, wrote poetry, and just relaxed. Since I had become a bit obese (190 pounds) from the rich food at the inn, it was an extra bonus to lose 7–10 pounds per week. I watched some fasters in their 70s walk in limping and in pain and leave walking spryly.

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STUART WITH MARTHA GONZI

So, that fast ended on day 21. Seven days followed to break the fast correctly and rebuild energy before going back to the real world. The first two and a half days of refeeding were fresh orange juice (a larger amount with each serving), then several days of apple/carrot/celery smoothies, and, finally, getting to go into the kitchen to share meals with others who had broken their fasts. Platters of finger foods (vegetables) plus sprouts, lots of lettuce, and avocados all tasted extra good with our new and healthy taste buds. Hearing others' interesting stories and sharing our new knowledge and goals during our meals was the perfect way to end our life-changing time at the clinic. I left feeling optimistic and very healthy at my new weight of 165 pounds.

During our winter season, I lost 25 more pounds and loved every bite of my salads and fruits. I made time to eat in our dining room, and many of our guests took notice and asked a variety of health questions. At that point, Sue was offering our regular menu, but she also offered large dinner salads and more vegetarian options which, little by little, became more popular.

I chose not to see my doctor at this point. I also chose to return to Dr. Scott's for another 21-day fast during our closed time after the winter, from Easter to Memorial Day weekend 1978. I was an avid off-road runner and felt so much better doing what I loved.

My second fast in six months was easier. I needed the rest, and I knew well what was before me. More books to read, listening to natural hygiene lectures and programs, meeting more like-minded people, and, during my last week, going with Dr. Scott to the Market Source in Cleveland for all the institution's organic food. It was all perfect. And now, I weighed 110 pounds.

I had driven to Ohio from Vermont, and now I headed to Richmond, Virginia, to my younger brother's wedding. The smallest tuxedo I could find was still baggy on my new body. My friends and relatives mostly avoided me, thinking I was very ill, but I felt great and soon was back to work. Slowly but surely, my weight went back to 140 pounds, perfect for running. I went back to the same doctor I saw originally, and he reported good news—no sign of any cancer. He asked what I had done, and after hearing my answer all about diet and extended water-only fasting, he said, "It must have been something else." That is when I knew I made the right decision!

My new lifestyle not only brought me perfect health, but it also made me an example to so many others. Sue and I never missed an ANHS convention in Florida or elsewhere for many years. I did return to Dr. Scott's two more times, once in the mid-1980s and another time in 1999. Both of those were also 28-day fasts, mainly done for maintenance.

Our inn was sold in 1986, and we moved with our four-year-old daughter, Molly, to Kona, Hawaii, where we owned and operated a seven-acre macadamia nut farm. Our land and gardens provided our quintessential raw-food diet, and our health and lifestyles couldn't have been better. Post-farm years, I remained in Hawaii and lived off the land until 2000. Now, after 26 wonderful years in southern Oregon, I am still 145 pounds. Due to the lessons I learned from my serious health challenge, I remain very active, even winning some golf tournaments (golf is my lifelong passion) and traveling the world with my soulmate, Martha, including four times to her country of birth, Malta. (Google it to learn about a country that has survived for centuries.)

I have thrived on my chosen "road less traveled by." It is yes to all 50 states visited, the last at age 70, and a 61-day road trip to Alaska by myself, tent camping every night. It is yes to visiting nine out of ten Canadian provinces and two of three territories. In 1993/1994, 10-year-old Molly and I spent a year in New Zealand and hiked the famous 34-mile Milford Track. It is yes to many European countries, China, Fiji, several in Africa, and four in South America. Life has been good, but that is because I am the boss of my own body and the career I chose.

I am a dreamer and strive by imagining peace every day. I choose it, write about it, and make peace signs on Mother Earth for neighbors, for friends, and wherever I am called to slow down and make one. My email is peaceman888@gmail.com, and I'm happy to hear from anyone. My bumper sticker reads, "Humankind. Be both." My voicemail asks callers to do at least one act of kindness daily.

I might not be writing this story if Mark Huberman, his wonderful dad, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, Dr. Frank Sabatino, Dr. Alan Goldhamer, and the like hadn't come into my life. These people and so many more NHA members are the best teachers and providers anywhere. I can't thank the NHA enough for supporting my continuing journey with the best health magazine ever printed by far. In the West, the TrueNorth Health Center is an oasis for all health challenges and includes several MDs on staff.

I dedicate my story to my remembrance of Dr. Philip Chapman, a not-so-well known hygienist who, along with his sweet wife, June, became a best friend. The last two years we owned the inn, they lived with us, and during our off-seasons, Phil conducted several well-attended retreats teaching natural hygiene principles. He was my go-to person whether I had health questions or just needed to talk. We also had some serious racquetball matches.

Here's to the continuing growth of the NHA. The world needs more of you! You deserve an award, Mark—maybe we should call it the Avocado Award!