

We thought we would share our journey with you, EVEN, in the event it proves of interest or enlightenment in some small way to aid others in their journey.

Many years ago, one of my sisters began getting ill shortly after meals. Working with her MD, keeping a food diary uncovered the (to us!) unlikely culprit of beef. Or more specifically, she was reacting to hormones, steroids, and I don't recall what else. Oh my! In solidarity we decided the only thing to do was to eat more chicken. Yet, increasing her intake of that particular food product exposed her again to unwanted hormones, steroids, and a case of food poisoning from poorly handled chicken in the form of Salmonella.

What the heck was going on? As this was back before the WWWeb, we had to go to libraries and other sources to gather information. We started researching how that patty came to be on the bun, and were exposed really for the first time to the horrific 'food production' process that adds additives, flavorings, colorings, fillers and treatments to that innocuous patty. Sure, we'd heard the term vegetarian, but those tree and cow-huggers were 'fringe' folks living on the edges of society just wanting attention for being different, was our tacit opinion at the time.

At this point, a few months had passed with no ill effect attributed to not eating beef or chicken. We may even have called ourselves 'vegetarian,' but the main motivator was not wanting to expose ourselves to any adverse health effects from our food. There was pause for concern about the factory farming aspect related to the animals, but that is as far as it went for a time while we looked into concerns from friends, family and coworkers related to iron and protein deficiencies in our 'new diet.'

As new information came to light, pork, shellfish, and then turkey left the menu. (Turkey, after all, was central to Thanksgiving, and it's hard to buck tradition when your Grandmother is standing in front of you in an apron.) We were learning more and more, and finding more and more people with similar stories. We began to question who sponsored the studies or public campaigns related to milk and calcium, the food pyramid, and more. It seemed that perhaps the public should beware that our collective health may not always be in the best interest of big business and government.

After watching the film Milo and Otis, I couldn't believe how talented that cat was...or in Heaven's Gate, how those horses could have been trained so well. That feeling led to the discovery that the American Humane Society's oversight of animal treatment was *voluntary* in film production. Clearly, the collective well-being of animals may not always be in the best interest of big business government either. As consumers, we decided to become involved in voting our conscience with our entertainment choices.

<http://www.americanhumane.org/protecting-animals/programs/no-animals-were-harmed/>

We began subscribing to PETA, changing how we cooked, volunteering at local animal shelters...and we can never go back! In our case, once we had information about the health effects of the food, the treatment of animals in food production and entertainment, we could not in good conscience continue to contribute to them and chose instead to vote our conscience with our personal and household purchases as well as our diets. We uncovered information on the effects to the planet of factory farming; we started noticing which legislators were supporting bills that supported meat producers...versus those concerned with animal rights. We noticed food recalls and the spread of Mad Cow disease. To use a current term, the effects were viral. Every bit of information we took in was supported by increasing health and energy. We were actively shying away from the diet of our parents, and the repetitive rather than thoughtful choices families make as to where time and money get spent.

My sisters and I each have come to different destinations in terms of our diet choices today, but we share the same core values. We have influenced, and been influenced by, countless others. At 44, I was diagnosed with a couple of auto immune-related issues. Research led me to consider that perhaps the processing/cooking of foods in my diet were making it difficult for my body to absorb nutrients. As a result, I have moved to a mostly a raw, vegan diet. At 46, I take no medications and feel better than I did in my twenties! My husband dropped red and white meat from his diet, which gave him the energy to exercise and reach his ideal BMI at age 53. Our adopted daughter moved from 'failure to thrive' and from anemia to a thriving vegetarian teen beauty.

As a vegetarian extended family we have healthy BMIs, are active, healthy, and have great energy. We are educated, in blue and white collar jobs, and we are all actively involved in our communities. Are we fringe tree- and cow- huggers? You bet! I am proud to call anyone 'friend' who is interested in following their moral compass, watching out for other living beings, and concerning themselves with their impact on our shared environment.

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