

Part 1: My Story

Chapter 1

Peanut Butter and Sweet Pickles

Fond memories flood my mind as I recall mom putting out peanut butter and sweet pickles on a cracker. If you've never tried it, don't slam it. It's one of those things that just works for no good reason. This appetizer, using a crunchy Carr's water cracker, was served in the '70s and '80s in my home town of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. I learned as a child that peanut butter basically dresses up any meal from scrambled eggs to bologna sandwiches and happens to mingle nicely with a sweet pickle.

With no internet, my dear mother did her best to nourish her children based on guidelines from the dairy state, also known as the home of fried cheese curds, summer sausage, Johnsonville Brats, and Kingsbury beer. Believe it or not, most of my passion around food came from my mother and growing up in "Cheeseland." She worked hard to keep up on the health trends back in the '70s. You know, feeding your kids a big breakfast to make them smarter, preparing sauerkraut and pork chops for digestive health (or maybe just because that's what

good Germans do), and eating liver and onions for God-knows-what. Or how about the good old-fashioned egg-in-a-hole trick, which basically is just a cute way to get your kids to eat eggs? Of course, at some point eggs were no longer good for us, but Mom didn't buy it and decided that moderation was key. At breakfast for example, she alternated between oatmeal, eggs, cereal, toast, and maybe a treat on the weekends—homemade donuts made out of dinner rolls (quite resourceful, that lady). Even though “Cheeseland” staples weren't the healthiest of diets, my mother had simple, good ol' common sense when it came to nourishing her family and I took notice.

I distinctly remember my mom making her own tomato soup and I can still taste it in my mind. It was bland, mushy, and nauseating (sorry Mom). I guess her tomato soup made her human in my mind. My sisters and I played with our soup until she left the room at which point we ran to the bathroom and dumped it in the toilet. On a similar note, my mother also gave homemade V-8 a try (which basically was her tomato soup chilled with maybe some carrots added). She remembers us girls taking it outside and spitting it out as we ran around the house. To this day, she says she has only one regret and that was making us eat Spam.

Mom did the best she could. Clearly her wisdom didn't come from living in a friendly town with a smoky tavern on every corner that sported jukeboxes, served 12-ounce beers in a glass, and dare I forget to mention, the ever-popular bowl of fried cheese curds. I know this lifestyle well, as my grandparents owned a tavern, The Tee-Pee, attached to their home. It was here that we kids

danced to music on the jukebox and inhaled more second-hand smoke than any child should be allowed. Let's hope the benefits of the dancing and camaraderie compensated for any long-term lung damage.

To further emphasize the "Cheeseland" diet, rumor had it Wisconsin passed a law that apple pie must be served with a slice of cheddar cheese on it. Although I never actually verified that law, most believe this to be the case. Cheese was on everything. At any gathering or picnic (even today), one can find summer sausage, cheese, and crackers. Those staples alone could put half of us into cardiac arrest just looking at it. But it's so good!

I recall my mother drinking cola and not sharing with her children, as if it were a special adult-only, kid-forbidden treat. Perhaps my mother's common-sense knew that traces of cocaine (from the coca leaves) probably weren't good for her children's under-developed brains. Now that cola has high-fructose corn syrup or loads of sugar, this "liquid crack" is just as addictive and brain-altering, in my opinion. Thanks for sparing me, Mom.

My mother's influence taught me to always keep learning and doing better. With limited access to information, she did a great job tapping into her internal wisdom to nourish her family and bring joy to the dinner table.

Any *mistakes* made (are there really any mistakes in life?), turned out to be true blessings as I ventured on the path of healing my body and educating others in this crazy world of food. I cherish my mother's will and wisdom as well as the "Cheeseland" staples that have a special place in my heart.

Chapter 2

Signs of the Canary

As I step into my kitchen, I see, to my utter shock, a house guest dumping her smoothie down the drain. All the love I put into it, from harvesting the fruit, to pouring the pulpy goodness into fine glassware – all gone. My heart sank, as if a part of my soul went down that drain too. As I slowly step back into the bedroom, desperately hoping she did not see me witness the catastrophic event, it suddenly hit me as I collapsed onto the bed. The recollection of flushing my mother’s homemade tomato soup down the toilet brought it full circle—God help me, I’ve turned into my mother.

Now mind you, at this time in my life, smoothies weren’t even green yet. I was making fruit smoothies from the orange and pink grapefruit trees on my patio with maybe a banana thrown in. Trust me, they tasted good. I just don’t think she appreciated the thick pulpy consistency. God knows how she might react to one of my green superfood smoothies today.

What I didn’t realize at the time of the smoothie dump is that food being healthy does not trump taste for everyone. Even for those open to the smoothie revolution, most prefer to drink them, not chew them.

In addition, eating healthy isn't as common-sense as it may be for me, since I live and breathe food 24/7. Most people believe food manufacturers have their best interest in mind and food-in-a-box is for actual consumption. I've been there, believe me. It wasn't until I personally struggled to reclaim my health that I realized how critical food is—real food, that is. I have to remind myself that understanding the world of food is not always common-sense.

I am not a doctor and do not wish to interfere in anyone's medical care. I honor the medical community and what they do to save lives. But I also appreciate that they are not necessarily experts in preventing disease and living a pain-free, healthy life. I feel a strong pull to research, experiment, and educate to keep us on the side of health and prevention so that we can avoid the need for emergency medical care, because this medical care usually consists of medication and surgery, neither of which I'm eager to take on. Leaning toward fixing the culprits of our health challenges instead of "taking out" the symptoms may feel like a longer, harder path but the goal of lifelong vitality for the long-haul makes it worth the effort.

Along with the health research I am drawn to, my personal health struggles and celebrations (and those of my clientele) give me intimate knowledge and experience to share. I feel strongly about my purpose to be an educator of food and health. I have always been a big-picture visionary and putting the health puzzle together for myself allows me to assist others with *their* puzzles.

As an example of how my brain works, I observe the gross number of cholesterol medications people take today. Knowing that our brains *require* cholesterol makes me think we could be doing a huge disservice to brain health. The upward trend of dementia in our society alarms me; I wonder if it could be related. Another example would be the enormous amount of acid blockers in use. Most reflux is not an issue of too much acid but rather that it travels up the esophagus. These blockers may be helping to reduce acid reflux but they are also cutting acid production which is required to properly break down protein. Protein needs to be broken down into amino acids that the body can utilize. Without proper stomach acid, this is not done. Could this be preventing absorption of nutrients and wreaking havoc on the undigested food in the small and large intestines and associated with all the IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) today? I appreciate what the drugs are trying to accomplish, but many of them end up negatively impacting something else. I am baffled by the solutions presented to consumers today. These are some of the things a big-picture person thinks about in the shower. Connecting the dots of all the health trends and challenges facing us today is fascinating to me and is where I thrive.

Putting your own health puzzle together always seems a bit more challenging because we are in the thick of it. But I did manage to unravel mine (not without help) and will likely continue as things change. My personal health journey has lessons embedded I feel obligated to share. The food protocol changes I

implemented over the years were life-altering. And my challenges became gifts as I shared my lessons with others and witnessed transformation. Improving your food protocol works—I am witness to that. With that said, don't feel that my food protocol is something I advocate for you. It is the underlying lessons that are important and implementing the right protocol for your individual situation.

You see, I happen to be like the “canary in the coal mine.” If this phrase is unfamiliar to you, coal miners used to take a canary down into the mines and if there was any sign of struggle, or, God forbid the canary fell over dead from asphyxiation, the miners knew there was a health threat to them as well. It was basically a warning sign for the miners to clear out. I happen to be like a canary, which means I am super sensitive to environmental toxins, chemical fumes, electromagnetic stress, smoke inhalation, food additives—you name it. Some of us become the canary to show others the way. I have a love-hate relationship with this, as my journey will show.

I don't know what is best for *your* physical body at this time. But I do know that we have many commonalities when it comes to health challenges and can learn much from each other. Being a “canary,” I feel an obligation to share my story, lessons, and gobs of research to give insight and hope to others. I also feel incredibly privileged to do so and appreciate anyone who shows up for this knowledge. Ingest the health suggestions, let it marinate, and see how it feels for you. The suggestions in this book are based on a common-sense mindset, listening to Mother Nature, as well as good

old-fashioned experience—not necessarily advice a medical doctor might give you. Take the wisdom with a big chunky grain of salt and find what works for you.

Chapter 3

Immune System Speaks

How can some people live off soda and junk food? This has always dumbfounded me. It turns out the human body is quite resilient. Well, until it is not.

After coming to Arizona for college, I decided to stick around and enjoy not shoveling snow a bit longer. Many years later I found I was still hanging out and grew to love the lifestyle in Arizona. But I also developed some health issues that prevented me from fully enjoying the climate.

In my mid-thirties, I suffered from a chronic cough and wheezing deep in my lungs. This was probably the first time I saw my health degrade; I took notice. As I lay down to bed, the congestion would build and the cough and wheezing would persist, causing many sleepless nights. Anything that upsets my precious sleep is going to get my full attention.

After exhausting many efforts and buckets of cough syrup, a very potent anti-inflammatory “juice” came into my life just before my breaking point. I took an ounce two times daily of this powerful super-food and my body responded brilliantly, as I slept like a baby once again. I thought I found a silver bullet. But unless

we can dig up the source of the pain or illness, no silver bullet will keep us healthy long-term.

After thinking I had fixed my respiratory ailment with this miracle drink, the next ailment appeared. The Arizona pollen started to take a toll. I would lock my doors and windows just to keep it under control, and even then, I would feel drained, as my body tried hard to fight the invaders seeping in. I often contemplated why some people are affected by the pollen and others are not. Why was my immune system so unhappy? Most give into their vulnerabilities as something they have to live with and support as best they can. I am not in the “most” category and refused to take medicine because of the long-term consequences of that slippery slope. And every time we mask a symptom, we are basically telling our body to shut up. Our body is incredibly intelligent, giving us signs of distress. Listening to it is a wise choice. Whenever I feel I can manage without medicine, I do so.

My health is priority number one – always has been. When I don’t feel well, I am no good to anyone or myself. And so, I ventured out to my next move—herbal medicine. Some herbal remedies showed positive improvement in my health. Knowing the nutritional components of them, I kept making my herbal tonics and still do today—lots of stinging nettle for loads of nutrition and liver-detoxing herbs like dandelion root, licorice root, burdock root, and milk thistle seed to name a few. This is an important part of my regimen but didn’t fully wipe out the culprit draining my immune system. I still hadn’t found the

source and although I was using natural remedies, I was still only treating symptoms.

Then, when I was going through an advanced herbal certification course, I met a nutritionist who suggested I take gluten out of my diet to relieve my pollen discomfort. Even though I didn't seem to have digestive issues, and couldn't quite understand the connection between pollen allergies and eating gluten, I was willing to try anything. My friend explained that 70-80% of our immune system lies in the digestive tract. And if gluten is creating havoc with my immune system, it becomes tapped out and cannot deal with pollen in the air. This explanation allowed me to understand that it's best to look at a broader perspective of the whole body.

So out went the gluten (mainly wheat products) for two weeks and guess what? My pollen allergies vanished – just like that! This is a common result for people when they eliminate a food sensitivity. I was beyond thrilled. Words cannot describe the thrill of finding and clearing the culprit affecting one's health. As a bonus, eliminating gluten also cleared my knee and joint pain, allowing me to finally hike again without knee support. On top of that, I suddenly had a six-year stretch without a single cold or flu (until I got a flu shot and it messed up my system and my perfect record). Taking gluten out of my food protocol really was a jackpot moment and to this day I avoid it. Any help I can give my immune system is worth the effort.

Turns out, wheat in general is not as healthy as most believe it to be. Today, wheat is grown, harvested, and

stored in a manner that removes much of its health components. And due to the changes, wheat has much more gluten today making it harder to digest. On top of that, the plethora of pesticides used today degrade the quality of this once healthy food. And due to the abundance of wheat added to processed foods, people are consuming it often without realizing. Even if wheat is grown, harvested, and stored properly, it really needs to be fermented before consumption for digestibility. Today most bread is not fermented unless it is a true sour dough. We will discuss in more detail in book 2 of this series on gut health.

After the gluten realization and impact on my health, I was suddenly driven to learn as much as I could about food and its residual health effects. And that meant experimenting with more foods. Dairy was my next prey. Ridding my diet of dairy, including my cheese-and-cracker staple, was not an easy task. You can take the girl out of Wisconsin, but ... (you get the idea).

Not only is dairy/milk in most processed foods, cheese is addictive, and I had fallen victim. Cheese is a solid substance of fatty, salty goodness that you can sink your teeth into. When you are hungry, a slab of this mystical creation can really satisfy. If you can relate, you know what I'm talking about. I do love a good challenge, however, and gave it a go. Buckle up, willpower—it's time to take you out of the closet.

Turns out, removing milk, cheese, and butter was a simple experiment that would end up allowing me to breathe through my nose again. A little history. Basically, when lying down to sleep, my nasal passages

became blocked. I have a family history of sinus polyps, often removed with surgery. I knew I had them and feared going under the knife. Most people would accept this as hereditary but give me a bad gene and I'll find a way around it.

Turns out, when I took the inflammatory dairy out of my food protocol, the polyps healed on their own. I didn't even know that was possible. I could understand preventing them from forming but dissolving into nothingness seemed like a miracle. Our bodies do know what to do when given the right nourishment and eliminating inflammatory foods. At the time, I had no idea that dairy was the culprit. It was a fist-pumping moment, as most of my experiments were. Having full sinus capacity to breathe again was truly a gift and to this day I have never gone under the knife (or sunk my teeth into another slab of cheese).

Gluten and dairy elimination brought tremendous growth in my mission for optimal health. I was passionate to continue seeking and learning as I dove into more experimentation. At this point, most may think I'm going overboard with striving for health but understand this was my livelihood and how I give back to the world. My health struggles, experimentation, and endless research is nourishing in a strange but purposeful way.

Next, I went through a more intense food-elimination protocol to see what else might be creating turmoil inside. A food-elimination protocol is where you eliminate potential food sensitivities for two weeks and then reintroduce them one-by-one. After you

eliminate potential culprits and suddenly bring them back, your symptoms will be exaggerated should there be a sensitivity. Through this protocol I discovered yet another food that was dragging me down. It has to do with the beloved peanut butter that I slathered on everything from toast to ice cream.

After abstaining from peanuts and other high-allergen foods for two weeks, I reintroduced peanuts first. I took a good scoop of peanut butter in the morning and felt nothing out of the ordinary. I did that again at noon and by mid-afternoon, I found myself unable to get out of bed from extreme fatigue. This little love affair I had with the peanut had been stealing zest from my life unknowingly . . . sigh. I laid there lifeless in bed mourning this love affair that had suddenly ended. It certainly was a bitter-sweet moment as I forged ahead stronger than ever with a shrinking diet.

Are you starting to see a pattern with my health journey? I have vulnerabilities that relate to the respiratory system: chest congestion/wheezing, allergies, sinus polyps, fatigue. Keep in mind, your vulnerabilities may be completely different, as well as your food sensitivities. The underlying lesson is that your immune system will be compromised if you keep eating foods your body struggles with. If you have physical distress, your body is trying to send you a message. And do not think your distress must be only in the gut for it to be food-related. Health starts in the gut and what you eat impacts your health, period.

In addition to providing health consultations and lessons, I happen to manufacture medicinal salves for skin issues (warts, growths, sun-spots, burns, bruises, etc.). Customers often ask if a salve will work on eczema or psoriasis, for example. I tell them yes it will relieve your discomfort but as long as you are eating something causing the outbreak, it will be a constant struggle. Unless you rid yourself of the cause, no salve will keep it away. Even my creosote salve that draws out warts and other abnormalities from deep under the skin, will not keep new ones from forming if you do not remove the cause. If you are serious about health and vitality, tackling your symptoms—even if you use natural remedies—will never get you there. You must get to the root cause and sometimes that means experimentation.

If you have symptoms of distress, ask yourself what you are constantly putting in your body. It could likely be a food you eat daily. It could be your environment in which you live or sleep (chemicals in mattress, carpet, paint, mold). It could also be a pet sleeping next to you. I find, however, that the biggest culprit that comes up time and time again is the food you are putting in your mouth. That has a huge effect on one's immune system. In fact, I was allergic to cats until I got gluten out of the picture. Your whole world can change if you simply stop feeding your body foods that cause distress and inflammation. If you remember one thing, remember that 70-80% of your immune system is in the gut; this makes it very likely that your ailments are due to something happening in there.

Please do not get discouraged by what may seem to be my very limited diet. I represent the canary and you likely do not have as many sensitivities as I do. And, with the secret weapon, The 4-Minute Miracle, you will be able to relax more with your food choices, as I have over time. But to be completely transparent, I steer clear of gluten and most dairy products, as I feel they do more harm than good. But understanding what is attacking *your* body is ultra-important. Some simple experimentation may reveal your answers. And often I find people already know what it is and are in denial (like my love affair with the peanut). We will go into more detail about how to perform diet elimination to identify your culprits in the next book in this series on gut health.

In this next section, we are going to dive into The 4-Minute Miracle practice that takes our relationship with food to a whole new level. Beginning this practice right off the bat even before we talk food protocol is key to the simplest, most graceful path to attaining your sexy. Take a deep breath, take a moment to just be here now, and open your heart for this simple yet life-altering practice.

About the Author

Linda J. Curry is an author, speaker and teacher in the areas of spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Dedicated to living her best life, Linda assists others with cultivating health through her expertise in spiritual growth, herbalism, plant-based culinary cuisine, and coaching.

Gifted in healthy food preparation, she spends much of her time simplifying nutrition for individuals and groups, teaching them how to cleanse and nourish the body through whole plant cuisine. In addition to being a health foodie and vegetable advocate, Linda utilizes a variety of wellness approaches to balance her life and enjoys sharing her wisdom with others.

Linda has worked as a raw food chef at an alternative cancer clinic in Mesa, Arizona and featured her skills as a plant-based chef on ABC's Sunday morning show in Phoenix, Arizona. In addition, she established a two-year Meatless Monday's luncheon from 2012 – 2014 encouraging others to improve their health as well as making a positive impact on global warming. She sells her recipe books at www.TrueBalanceWellness.com as well as a natural skin-care line where she offers her own

handcrafted medicinal salves, facial creams, deodorant, oils and more.

Linda lives in Mesa, Arizona with her husband, Rich, and their beloved cat, Gracie Mae. They have deep respect for the earth and try to live as sustainably as they can. They have co-created a sacred space at home with many friends such as coyotes, javelina, rabbits, owls, bobcats, quail, rattlesnakes, scorpions and more. They grow much of their own food, attempting to keep the wildlife out of the garden. Linda enjoys spending time with her extended family as well including her nieces and nephews who continue to remind her how precious life is and to embrace each moment.

