

The (long & winding) Road to Wellville

By Tim Brosnan

Living la vida wheat-free ... and pretty much loving it

Two years ago, I was suddenly and mysteriously what the blues singers call “a solid mess.” Eczema flaring, migraines multiplying, numbness in my extremities, black spots in my peripheral vision, chronic fatigue, insomnia, frequent nausea, constant diarrhea, dizziness, ringing ears, mood swings and, not that it mattered so much amidst all the rest, erectile dysfunction. (Yes, ma’am, I just went there.)

I thought I was dying. I was sure of it. I’d always considered myself to be an extremely healthy person, too, so this was terra incognita. I’d been accustomed to waking up every morning at six o’clock sharp fully rested after eight hours of sleep and eating any damn thing I pleased. I’d been inside a doctor’s office once in maybe fifteen years and then only to stitch up a cut finger, but those days were L-to-the-ong gone.

Determined to make a dignified end of it, I got my affairs in order. I hired an attorney to draw up documents designating a few friends as beneficiaries and saddling them with responsibility for pulling the plug should I become incapable of doing so.

I then ran a gauntlet of healthcare providers, both mainstream and alternative, not really wanting to die, scouring the internet for answers, finding none, a reluctant interloper in the halls of medicine ... general practice, neurology, endocrinology, holistic, reiki, massage, acupuncture, chiropractic, yoga ... at last arriving where one of my newly named residuary legatees had suggested that I begin: having myself tested for gluten-intolerance.



Which is what I did.

Which is what I have. In spades.

Along the way, one medical professional or another had tendered confident or speculative diagnoses of hypertension, inner ear infection, mini-strokes, tumor, vasovagal response, irritable bowel syndrome and my favorite, tossed off by a neurologist as he studied my quite normal (and insanely expensive) MRI scans, “anxiety.” To be fair, I *was* anxious, but he’d gotten the cause-effect sequence bass-ackwards.

So the good news from the genetics lab was that we’d discovered what was mak-

ing me sick. Changing my diet caused an immediate reduction in all symptoms and an almost immediate disappearance of many.

The bad news was that I’d been poisoning myself for years with a diet rich in gluten – essentially wheat, barley & rye. What’s worse, my body had been *quarantining* the gluten in my cells. I was a walking landfill.

Recovery slowed over time, gradually tapering off until the present when some days it seems that my one remaining symptom, a vague wooziness, will never let go. Patience is essential.

I’m being deep-cleaned in super-slow motion and some of the symptoms, like the eczema, I’d had for decades. I’d had mi-



Eating out

Here’s a small sampling of restaurants where gluten-free eating is a distinct and distinctive pleasure.

Cafe Paulista – Brazilian, Greenville. Almost entirely gluten-free and excellent! Try the cheese bread and trust Chef Valerie Rebellato.



Coffee to a Tea – Deli, bakery, catering, Greenville. Gluten-free breads and desserts!

Posana Cafe – Upscale restaurant in downtown Asheville. Entirely gluten-free kitchen. Un-freaking-believable food. (Photos at left)

Pomegranate – Persian, Greenville. My favorite is the Barg Kabob. (It’s worth noting, too, that many ethnic cuisines are largely gluten-free.)

Eating in

A diagnosis of gluten intolerance is NOT the culinary death sentence that some would have you believe. Far from it. In fact, considering the abysmal state of the typical American diet, it’s more like getting diplomatic immunity.



Schär and **Tinkyada** both manufacture gluten-free pasta that’s almost indistinguishable from wheat-based.

Bob’s Red Mill manufactures a complete line of gluten-free grain flours, as does **Domata Living Flour**. (At the time of this writing, Domata’s website has been hacked, so google accordingly.) Udi’s gluten-free breads are available in many grocery store frozen food aisles and more traditional manufacturers like **Betty Crocker** and **Bisquick** are expanding their gluten-free lines.



graines since my 40’s when, as I approached my 50th, I was popping \$20 triptan tablets (samples) like tic-tacs, but the tic-tacs had stopped working.

Now both of those symptoms are gone. I can’t remember the last time I had even a minor headache, let alone a migraine. Likewise the eczema. There was even a mole or wart or warty mole or something that I’d developed on my face. I was thinking about having it removed, but a couple of months ago noticed that it had removed itself.

Here’s the thing, though, and it’s no small matter ... *Why was it so hard for me to find a proper diagnosis?* How many other people are medicating symptoms, unaware that much of their diet is about as nutritious for them as used motor oil?

I was lucky. If my friend hadn’t insisted that I make an appointment with the dietician who’d diagnosed her, I might be dead right now, or bleeding money into the vast pharmacological sea.

Our vaunted healthcare system *should* be as informed about gluten-intolerance as it is about more profitable disorders, but it isn’t. Finding good medical advice *shouldn’t* be a matter of luck, but in this case, it often is.

These are reasons why, rather than “asking your doctor” as the drug commercials suggest, you might have to *tell* your doctor. And if your doctor doesn’t take you seriously, you might have to find *another* doctor. Or a good dietician.

I’ll be happy to give you the name of mine.



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