

Renee's Journey to Health and Wellness

Renee is one of the co-founders of Natures Juice Co-Op (a private club). She is in her mid-forties, a homemaker and the mother of six children and five grandchildren. She has only recently started to gain back her health. Her journey back to a now active lifestyle started in May of 2006. This "rebirth" has occurred through the help of some very special people:

Dr. Aajonus Vonderplanitz, Ph.D, Nutrition, and author of "The Primal Diet" and "The Recipe For Living Without Disease." (www.wewant2live.com)

Dr. Joseph Mercola D.O., founder of the Optimal Wellness Center (www.mercola.com) and his staff, especially Jim Marlowe, Nutritionist and Dr. Joseph Grasso D.O. SC.

Last, but certainly not least, Renee believes that she could not have made it through the last couple of years without all of the thousands of prayers from friends and family around the country.

Renee's Challenge

Prior to May of 2006, Renee had been diagnosed with several health problems. She had been diagnosed in 1992 with Bi-Polar Medullary Sponge Kidney Disease with stones. Over a period of fourteen years, her doctors had put her on no less than twenty-five different medications, gave her hundreds of x-rays and MRI's and she had 8 lithotripsy procedures (crushing of kidney stones with sonic waves). She would then have to pass hundreds of the crushed kidney stones through her urinary tract; a very painful process.

She was taking so much narcotic pain medication that she was literally losing her mind. She was in bed up to six months out of each year and rarely could string two "normal" days together. She got to a point that the doctors couldn't take away the pain with regular narcotics. She was taking 400 mg's of OxyContin ER every day. That's three times the amount given to terminally ill cancer patients.

Her doctors decided that it was time to implant a morphine pump into her abdomen that would deliver a concentrated dose of morphine. The morphine would go directly to the section of her spine that controlled the pain area for the kidneys. They said that this would greatly reduce the narcotic affect on her brain. The morphine pump was surgically implanted in 1998. From 1998, to late 2005, the pump worked well and gave Renee some sense of a regular life. However, she was still on multiple medications and always sick from the side effects.

In mid-2005, Renee contracted spinal meningitis, and she was hospitalized for two weeks to try and determine the cause. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) was contacted and she was put in quarantine for six days. The CDC determined that it was not bacterial meningitis but a rare strain of viral meningitis. Over the next ten months, Renee contracted meningitis five more times.

She was given a dozen spinal taps and dozens of steroid doses in an effort to stop the excruciating pain from the headaches, neck pain and back pain. Steroids were the only thing that had any affect on the pain and swelling in her brain. She was also given massive doses of oral and IV narcotics and antibiotics, on top of what her morphine pump was already giving her. Unfortunately, nothing worked.

Renee was bedridden for almost 10 months and was in the hospital for over 130 days. Her skin and eyes showed signs of jaundice and she had an ashen color to her; she was dying.

She had to sit in a totally dark bedroom and try, unsuccessfully, at getting comfortable. She couldn't stand to be in any kind of light. There wasn't an hour that went by that she didn't have an extremely painful and debilitating head and neck ache. Renee could no longer take care of her daily hygiene. Her husband had to bathe, clothe and feed her.

After trying more specialists, neurologists, some alternative medicines and a few late night ambulance rides from home to local hospitals, we decided to take the morphine pump out. It would be done in two separate surgeries due to her declining health.

They scheduled the first surgery to remove the morphine pump's leads that were implanted into her spinal cord. When they removed the leads, they found some long green/brown stringy deposits that had been growing at the end of the morphine delivery leads, inside the connection to her spinal cord.

The doctor wondered out loud if this could be the cause of the recurring bouts of meningitis. Gee, we wondered, what do YOU think? Could a direct opening into the spinal column, compounded with some kind of unidentifiable growth be causing the illness? Hah! The doctor then sent the growth to the pathology department but we've never heard back from them about what it was.

During the surgery the doctor struggled to seal the opening in her spinal cord, where the leads had just been removed. They worked for several hours and "thought" they had it sealed. They kept her in the hospital for the next week. She had to lie flat on her back and not move for 5 days. Finally, the doctors discharged her and told her they thought they had the hole sealed up well enough for her to go home. They told her to go home and remain horizontal and in bed.

Within one weekend, the hole opened up and started to drain all her spinal fluid. Another neurosurgeon was contacted and an additional surgery was scheduled to repair the large hole. Finally, after weeks of being immobile and learning to walk again, she went home.

Over the next few months, Renee contracted meningitis two additional times and had to be admitted to the hospital for each. At this point, all of the doctors involved didn't know what to do. They said they had never experienced a patient having this many bouts of meningitis. By the end of March of 2006, her medical team determined that the best place for her would be Loyola Hospital in Chicago.

The day she was admitted to Loyola, an attending physician routinely asked her what medications she was on. Renee ran through the entire list of drugs that the previous doctors had tried. She told this doctor that she was currently on IV narcotics to take away the terrible pain in her head and neck.

The next morning her new attending doctor came in to talk with her and went over a plan of what they wanted to try. It included a set of new experimental drugs. They included anti-seizure drugs, steroids and several other drugs that ultimately made Renee's heart stop beating. There were two times, over the next two days, that they had to perform CPR to get her heart started again.

They also lowered her morphine dosage from IV morphine injections every three hours to 1 pill, every four hours for the next few days. This put Renee into severe withdrawal from the narcotics. She went through an excruciating couple of days that included vomiting, convulsions, hallucinations and cold sweats just to name a few.

During this period, the attending physician kept accusing Renee of just being there for the drugs. The doctor couldn't understand why she had these terrible headaches and these withdrawal symptoms. The doctor immediately determined that she was faking all of it, and was just another "drug seeking junkie".

One morning, the same attending physician brought all ten of the residents on the floor into Renee's room and humiliated her in front of them. She proceeded to explain to the young residents that "this lady isn't here for our help; she is just looking for more drugs". The doctor could not believe what Renee was telling her regarding the amount of medicine she had been taking for the pain. She couldn't believe that any doctor in their right mind would have put her on that much narcotic medication.

The doctor still hadn't obtained Renee's medical records, and she also didn't believe that anyone could have six cases of meningitis. This is why she most likely thought Renee was lying. Renee was devastated. She broke down crying in front of all of them. She couldn't believe that after all she had been through for the past twelve years, that now she was being called a junkie and a liar.

The only real saving grace from her visit to Loyola that actually contributed to Renee moving in the right direction was that they took her off of all narcotics. They didn't gradually take her off; they just took it off all at one time. It was a cruel thing to do, especially the way they did it; however, it was what she actually needed. She certainly didn't know it at the time, but it was.

When Renee's medical records finally became available, the residents read through them and informed the attending doctor. The attending doctor realized her mistake and then tried to make light of it. She never took

responsibility for it and never apologized to Renee. One by one the resident doctors came in during the day and apologized for the attending doctors' behavior. They couldn't believe the doctors' mistake and the fact that she wouldn't apologize. They said that the ego comes with the territory! After all the attending was the chief neurosurgeon.

Just before Renee was about to be discharged from Loyola, they said, "We can't do anything more for you. We don't know why you continue to contract meningitis and if it continues, go to the Mayo Clinic. There's nothing more we can do for you". She left with yet another handful of prescriptions. They included anti-seizure medications, steroids, muscle relaxants, anti-nausea medicine and antibiotics.

It was at this point after her discharge on April 12, 2006, and with the help of Renee's sister Judi, and their combined faith, that she began to look for a totally different way to treat her health problems. After all, she had been told for years that she was getting the best possible care and treatment of her problems. At each and every turn, she was told that her next drug or treatment would help. Unfortunately, this never turned out to be true. She was only met with more drugs, steroids, treatments and false hopes for years and years.

We took an educated guess on the total cost of 13 years of Renee's "traditional path" on her quest for health and wellness. With all the doctors' visits, drugs, hospital stays, ambulance rides, emergency room visits etc., we figured the total cost to be in the millions. Yes, that's millions of dollars!! What a business traditional medicine can be, and yet, with no guarantee of positive results.

When we reflect back on the return on our investment, we see only pain, an empty bank account, Renee's weight gain of 100 pounds (from the steroids) and too many false hopes. No wonder they call it a doctor's *practice*. She felt like a guinea pig from day one.

Renee's Rebirth

At Judi's insistence and through the grace of God, Renee soon agreed to try an alternative approach to help her. She went to a doctor's office in Schaumburg Illinois. The doctor's name is Dr. Mercola. He is the founder of the "Optimal Wellness Center".

On her first visit, she began to see that there just might be some light at the end of the tunnel. She actually began to think that maybe life was still worth living and that there might be a day when the pain would go away. After several tests to determine her "metabolic type" and to gather a baseline of her blood levels, she was given a plan that started her on her final *quest for health and wellness*.

On her second week of visits, she was also introduced to Jim Marlowe, her nutritionist. He taught her to use food as medicine and how it could heal. He also advised her to purchase a book called "The Primal Diet", by Aajonus Vonderplanitz (AV). She began to read and discover that there were some similarities from this book and the path she had started on with the Optimal Wellness Center. The combination of several visits to see Dr. Mercola's staff and knowledge she gained from Vonderplanitz' book, proved to be her light at the end of the tunnel.

Within weeks of beginning on this new path, she began to feel better. Her mind started to clear. The sense of lost hope slowly began to disappear and life actually seemed worth living again. She actually let herself think that these folks might really know what they were talking about.

However, with every new consultation at the Center, her previous "knowledge" fought her, trying to tell her that this path was all wrong. It was a constant inner battle. After all, she had been educated. She had raised a family with six wonderful kids and she even was a trained EMT (Emergency Medical Technician). Everything the Wellness Center and AV told her went against all the things she was taught growing up; that germs were bad, that non-pasteurized food was dangerous, that eating non-refrigerated eggs would give you salmonella, eating raw dairy and raw meat would kill you. All the new things and ideas she was being taught went against everything she *thought* she knew. In spite of that, she really was feeling better, so she pushed on.

Her body was telling her the undeniable truth. With each meal, doctor's visit or with each paragraph she read, the reality of the situation became more and more obvious. She was getting well! She started to lose weight.

She actually let herself start thinking beyond next week. She began to build a foundation that would lead her down a path to having what most folks take for granted; their health and wellness.

After several weeks, the clouds in her mind were gradually going away. After several months, the intermittent body shakes and hot flashes started to dissipate. Her headaches and neck pain were no longer severe enough to confine her to a dark room. She lost 35 pounds of the weight that she had gained from all of the steroids. *(Most doctors will tell you they don't like to administer more than 4-5 steroid doses in a six month period. She had received dozens in a ten month period; so much for their expertise!)*

She started to visit friends and family again. Her friends started to notice the difference in her. They could see that whatever she was doing was obviously working. And of course, Renee was anxious to tell everyone about her newfound knowledge and this path to health and wellness.

Once she began explaining her new journey to people, she would get looks of disbelief, horror, craziness and even some reactions beyond mention. The people who didn't know Renee well were glad they didn't. At best, most thought she was a little goofy.

Her friends and family though, knew better. They knew Renee as a wonderful, thoughtful person, a great mother and wife and an all around good person. They knew that if she was telling the story, it must be true.

She has been able to spread the word about her wonderful new path and the priceless benefits she has obtained from it. Many of her friends and family now want more information, so they can have what she has. They are thirsty for more information and knowledge and are willing to sacrifice to get it. After all, if she can come back from total despair and no hope for the future, then she must have the right combination of answers. She must know the secret to health and wellness!

Renee's Hope for the Future

Renee doesn't have any real secret. She has simply gained some knowledge that unfortunately most people will never be open-minded enough to explore. She has learned that most people will not change their lifestyles for good health unless they have lost it. She says that, "It is human nature to take one's health for granted, and not cherish it, until it is gone." She has also found that the secret to happiness starts with feeling healthy.

She hopes that by starting the "Natures Juice Co-Op" and this website, she will be able to help other people to find their own health and wellness, without going through what she went through. It was not an experience that she would wish on anyone. If our co-op can spread just some of the knowledge that she has learned over the past year, she feels like it will be all worth it.

She wants everyone to know that if they have any questions about their health, they should post their questions on the *(coming soon!)* website community forum. There are many people who have gone through much worse, than what Renee has gone through. If we all come together, we will collectively benefit from each others knowledge and experience.

We thank you for exploring our website and hope will you find your secret to health and wellness as Renee has!

John and Renee
Co-founders of Nature's Juice Co-op