



*In this issue of **Health Science**, I have the pleasure of sharing my recent interview with NHA Board Member, Jeff Novick. As you will see, Jeff has had a remarkable and varied life.*

*Of all the "true blue" Hygienists I have met in my lifetime, Jeff is one of the ones with whom I have always found remarkable kinship. Like me, he lives and loves Natural Hygiene not just for its solid scientific foundation but for its profound simplicity and beautiful philosophy of life. Also like me, Jeff practices what he preaches and has done so for a very long time.*

*And as for his preaching, I consider Jeff Novick to be among the very best and brightest our health movement has ever produced. He has that rare ability to make complicated matters simple and to leave his audience informed, entertained and inspired.*

*If you have never had the good fortune to attend one of Jeff's lectures, make a point to do so soon. He lectures all over the country and you can find his speaking schedule by checking out his website or Facebook page. If you can't get there, order one of his excellent audio recordings of his lectures at NHA Conferences or purchase one of his many DVDs available on his website. To paraphrase that old James Bond theme song "Nobody does it better!"*

# An Interview with Jeff Novick

*by Mark Huberman*

## **Everyone has different roads to our way of living. What was yours?**

Many people come to this because of a health crisis but for me it was different. Healthy living was always an interest of mine since I was very young. In fact two of my earliest childhood memories made lasting impressions. One was with my grandfather watching the old Jack LaLanne health and fitness shows. It ignited my love for fitness and sports. The other was helping my grandmother while she was cooking in the kitchen. I loved doing little things to help her and that kindled my interest in food and cooking. The next influence happened during the time the counter culture was impacting our country. I was about 15 years old and was attracted to it by its philosophy and emphasis on back to nature, organic living, self-sufficiency and natural health. I grew my hair long, planted an organic garden in my backyard, learned to meditate and do yoga, and became a vegetarian, actually going on a vegan raw foods, "sproutarian" diet. I was also inspired by folks like Scott and Helen Nearing.

## **Were your parents vegetarians?**

No. My father was a butcher and my paternal grandfather was a butcher as well. So I actually grew up working in his meat factory and have some vivid memories that also produced turning points in my life. We would get in these 500 lb. barrels of cut-up meat parts and we would have to spot check the weight of some of the barrels. One day I was standing in the receiving room where there were these giant meat scales. I was unloading these barrels of tongues and placing them on the scale using this big hook. My father came up to me to see how I was doing and I said to him, "You know, dad, why do they call this tongue?" He picked one out, turned it over cleaning it up a little and held it up in front of me and said "this is why." And, in that moment I had one of those awakenings and realized for the first time that I was actually looking at a cow's tongue and this is what people were eating. Another startling experience occurred one day when I was in his office looking around at some of the papers on his desk and I came upon an inspection report from the government which analyzed some of the products we sold, like hot dogs. When I got to the very bottom of the report it listed things that I just couldn't believe — bugs, bug parts, droppings. I took it to my father and said, "Dad, I can't believe this. What is this?" He told me that it was an analysis of our product. The government sets limits for what they consider safe. I said, "That's crazy that we sell food with this crap in it!" He told me that everyone does, as most all processed food has it in it but, the government defines legal limits that the food has to stay below. I rarely ever ate processed food again.

### **So you came to that epiphany when you were 15?**

Yes, somewhere around 15 years old.

### **What did your family think of you becoming a vegetarian or a vegan?**

At first, they weren't that much against it. They just wanted to know that I was safe and that what I was going to do was going to be healthy. They sent me to the library to find books that would demonstrate that I wasn't going to hurt myself. They had all the concerns parents have, like, "How will you get enough protein or calcium?" Of course, back in the very early 70s there weren't a lot of good books out there and those that were like *Diet for a Small Planet* just got many things wrong as far as nutrition. So I didn't go 100 percent hardcore, but for the next ten years I found myself just experimenting with concepts like vegetarianism, raw foods, sproutarian, and organic gardening. There was also a period during that time that I got very involved in the vitamin and mineral supplements via Life Extension and Sandy and Durk Pearson.

### **Where did you go off to college and what did you study?**

I started off at State University in upstate New York in Oswego. I attended for a while but was still too much interested in having fun and traveling so I took a few years off. However in 1980, I went back to school to get a culinary degree. I always loved cooking so I went to the State University of New York at Cobleskill and obtained a degree as a professional chef.

### **Did you ever take a job as a chef?**

Oh yes, I held many jobs as chefs — including the sous chef at a natural food restaurant and at a small Italian restaurant, and as kitchen manager at national chains like T.G.I. Friday and the Bombay Bicycle Club. I also became the French pastry chef at a gourmet French restaurant in Grand Junction, Colorado.

### **How did you find your way to the ANHS?**

In the early 1980s Dr. John McDougall came out with his book, *McDougall's Medicine* and Nathan Pritikin came out with his book, *The Pritikin Program*. They both really influenced me because they were giving scientific documentation for all the things I had been experimenting with. A few years after that, *Fit for Life* came out, and to me, the beauty of *Fit for Life* was that it combined some of my earlier philosophies that went beyond just the food into an overall program that was simple. My approach was always more than just from a scientific perspective but also from a bigger philosophical picture. Nathan Pritikin and John McDougall were more about the health and medical, which was great because I thought that had been missing. However, Natural Hygiene applied the philosophy to the science and com-

bined them in a unified package. So starting somewhere in the mid 1980s while I lived in the Midwest, I started going to all the Hygiene conferences that I could featuring folks such as Dr. D.J. Scott, Hannah Allen, and Paula Duvall. I got to meet, and spend time with, Dr. Scott and went east to the Pawling Health Manor to fast under Joy and Robert Gross. Later on I fasted a few times at TrueNorth.

### **Did you fast to understand the phenomenon or because you had a health crisis?**

Just to understand the phenomenon.

### **How long did you fast?**

I usually would go about seven to ten days water fasting since I really had no reason to fast any longer.

### **Did the experience of being at a place like Scott's or the Grosses' broaden your perspective of health?**

Yes, because fasting at a health institute gives you an inside perspective that you just don't get any place else. We live in a country where the amount and frequency of eating just continues to increase and if you skip a meal, you are committing a sin. I remember meeting some woman who was on her 21st day of a water fast who was running around the center all day and I remember thinking this is amazing.

### **Did you observe some remarkable recoveries?**

I never stayed for a very long time but I did meet people who were in the process of these recoveries from heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, and cancers. And I would think "Wow, just from not eating!"

### **When and why did you get out of the chef business?**

In 1985 I got tired of working in kitchens due to their demanding schedule, which included working most every night, weekend and holiday. So, believe it or not, I went to work as a salesman for Kraft Foods selling truckloads of cheese — and I did that for seven and a half years. However, during the same time I was also running an organic co-op out of my home on weekends, teaching nutrition and health classes at the local community in the evenings, and writing a newsletter and articles for the local co-op. That dichotomy eventually really got to me and in 1992 I left Kraft and went back to school to get my undergraduate and graduate degrees in nutrition and physiology from Indiana State University. For my graduate work I created one of the first vegetarian curriculums for medical doctors, medical students and family practice residents. I taught it for three years and as a result, the governor of Indiana awarded me the Indiana State Public Health Excellence in Health Science Award, and Indiana State University

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presentation on that subject, he wondered if I would help him write that chapter, which I did. Then about three years ago I went to a VegSource Conference in LA put together by Jeff Nelson where Rip was the keynote speaker. Rip and I wound up sitting next to each other the first night and started chatting. I found him to be just like his dad and we hit it off like we were childhood friends and had a great time the whole weekend. At the end of the conference, Jeff Nelson came up to us asking how long had we known each other since he could see the camaraderie. He was surprised to know we had only formally met in person two days earlier. Six months later Rip invited me to participate in a program he was putting on for Whole Foods, where twice a year Whole Foods sends about 100 of their sickest employees to health “Immersion.” They picked three programs at that time to work with, one of them was Dr. McDougall and one was Rip. So Rip got his father involved in his program and asked me to join too. The next thing you know I am working with Dr. McDougall and with Rip on these five to eight day programs for Whole Foods twice a year. These programs were so successful that Rip then opened his up to the public, teaming up with Fork Over Knives and created the Farms 2 Forks events. We sold out all six of the events this year and just announced the 2013 events, which are quickly filling up.

#### **What impact do you think the movie *Forks Over Knives* has had on the progressive health movement?**

I think it has definitely raised awareness and gotten the message out. I think it has had a bigger impact than almost anything else I can think of in recent times.

#### **Speaking of the impact, how influential has VegSource been?**

It has been very influential. The website is a tremendous portal for information and resources on vegetarian and vegan diets, animal rights, parenting, the environment, raw food, and much more. As a result of the popularity of VegSource, Jeff Nelson started holding a conference each year in Los Angeles and they have also grown tremendously and we just had over 500 attendees at the one last month. On a personal level, Jeff has also been tremendously helpful to me. Jeff is a filmmaker and helped me get my first DVDs produced. Since that time we have worked together on my Fast Food Series and we are about to release the third one.

#### **I have always found you to be a great teacher. You manage to mix enthusiasm, humor and great information. Where did you get your training or did this just come to you naturally?**

I’m not sure. Maybe it’s just the result of growing up as the middle child in a Jewish family in New York. It’s funny — I have a friend I have known since we were seven. A few years ago we were talking on the phone and I was telling

him a little bit about what was happening with my DVDs. He asked me to send him one and after he watched it, he called me and the first thing he said was, “When did this happen to you and when did you get to be so funny?” since all he remembered was this shy, quiet guy growing up.

#### **How in demand are you these days?**

I’m pretty busy. I am working all the McDougall Programs, the Engine 2 Programs, and all the Farms 2 Forks Programs. I also consult with EHE International, which is an executive health company in New York City. In addition, I consult with Whole Foods on their Healthy Eating Program, helped develop their Wellness Club Curriculum, and am working on implementing a tiered-food rating system for them that will help customers easily identify the healthiest foods. In addition, I have worked with Dr. McDougall and Jeff Nelson to create the Meals for Health Program, where we bring our health message to underserved populations. A year ago we did this for 21 families at a Food Bank in Sacramento and this January we are taking it to a church in Oakland where there are 200 families already signed up. And, occasionally I hang out with the NHA!

#### **For someone who grew up selling organic foods on a street corner, what is your reaction to the phenomenon of Whole Food Markets and the reaction to Farms Over Forks?**

I think it is really great but I fear that it is also a double-edged sword. Here’s why. There’s this incredible awareness that has gone on in the last few years and many people are getting involved and that’s the good news. The bad news is that there is also a tremendous amount of confusion that has also risen dramatically over what is healthy or not healthy. In fact, when I walk into a health food store, or grocery store, the marketing and advertising that is selling junk foods as health foods has exploded. I recently put up a post on Facebook called, “Turning Junk into Gold,” and it is a healthy lesson in unhealthy food marketing.

#### **It seems that even within the plant-based movement that we champion, our friends are billing kale, bok choy, mushrooms and other fine foods as being “super foods.” They seem to say that if you just eat tons of kale and bok choy every day you’ll get all these special nutrients and you’ll be healthy for life. Is there overstatement or overselling of this kind of phenomenon?**

Yes, of course. I’ve written some articles called “Super Food or Super Fooled.” The whole concept is misguided. We aren’t healthy (or unhealthy) because of any one food, good or bad. What makes us healthy or unhealthy are our overall dietary and lifestyle patterns. But we have these studies that come out that are interpreted to make kale, bok choy or walnuts into super foods and folks jump on the band-

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wagon. But the reality is that a lot of those studies are done comparing people who are on very unhealthy diets and they give them a serving or two of broccoli or kale or walnuts and compare them to another group that does not get them. And of course, you're often going to see a slight difference but this does not make them healthy. But, how does that apply to a healthy guy like you or me who is eating right, and already eating a plant-based diet that is loaded with fruit and vegetables, and whole grains and beans? There is no evidence anywhere that adding one more serving of kale to an already healthy diet is going to make that diet better. It's misapplying the information.

**Is that the brilliance, profoundness and simplicity of Natural Hygiene that has distinguished our health system from what everybody else tries to offer?**

Yes, I think that is because it has an overriding philosophy at its core and an emphasis on keeping it simple, which it integrates with the science.

**Russell Trall, one of my favorite pioneers of Natural Hygiene wrote almost a hundred years ago that the system we endorse and practice is true, in harmony with nature, and in accordance with the laws of the vital organism, correct in science, sound in philosophy, in agreement with common sense, successful in results, and a blessing to mankind. Is that how Jeff Novick sees it as well?**

That kind of sums it up.

**Right now we are all bombarded with every kind of vegan or plant-based diet in the world. How would you capsuleize Jeff Novick's diet?**

I have really been thinking about that lately and how best to describe the principles of a healthy diet, and I think, plant-centered, minimally processed, calorie dilute, low SOS really sums it up. It's not just vegan, vegetarian or plant-based because one could have a pretty bad vegan,

vegetarian or plant-based diet. So I like to say "plant-centered" but I also add that it should be minimally processed. I don't say "whole" or "unprocessed" as not all processing is bad. Processing per se isn't what's hurtful, it's processing that either detracts from the value of the food (i.e., refining) or adds something that is potentially harmful, (i.e., salt, sugar, etc.). So plant-centered, minimally processed, and then calorie dilute, because so much food has become so calorie dense which is a major contributing factor for obesity and many other diseases. The fourth principle is a diet low in SOS, which is salt, oil/fat and sugar. Even if you have a plant-centered, minimally processed, calorie-dilute diet and you cover it with salt, sugar, and oil, it is not healthy. I'm not going to say none, but low, as it isn't all or nothing.

**With the avalanche of books on health, even plant-centered health that contain thousands of recipes, are we making "healthy" dining way too complicated?**

Yes, especially with all the books and even cooking networks that we're seeing even in the vegetarian, vegan and plant-based world. I just put an article up on Facebook that discusses how many of the leaders in the national food movement have become the new rock stars of our culture and rock festivals have been replaced by food "festivals." All of this though, has made eating healthy way too complicated. One of the things we have always taught and known in Hygiene is that you have to keep it simple. I hardly ever meet anybody who is willing to spend more hours each day in the kitchen. That's why my Fast Food DVD Series is so popular. In it, I show you a system that in under ten minutes a day, with less than five ingredients to any meal, you can prepare food that if you ate 2,000 calories you would pass RDA and DRI of every nutrient there is except Vitamin B12 and D. So take a supplement and eat them in the sun. And all you need is a knife and a scissors and maybe a can opener. You can buy the needed food anywhere, anytime, at any grocery store and you can do this for about \$3 to \$4 a day.

**Jeff, you are obviously on the road a lot. Have you developed the art of healthy traveling?**

Sure. It's very simple. I carry my same food with me to get me where I'm going. When I get where I'm going I stop at a grocery store to get my same preferred foods and I always try to pick hotels that have little kitchenettes where I can prepare my foods. Sure, there are now so many vegetarian, vegan or raw food restaurants around where you can go to eat in but to be honest with you I can't eat in most of them. Most of the food has way too much oil, salt or sugar or is made with white flour or is fried. I just don't want to eat it. I actually find that I can do much better in ethnic restaurants where I can get a huge plate of steamed

brown rice and vegetables, and for a lot less money too.

### **So you practice what you preach?**

I practice what I preach 100 percent.

### **What about exercise, rest and all the other components of Hygiene?**

The two that get compromised slightly because of my travel are rest and exercise. I try to schedule my travel to allow for sufficient rest but with the security at airports and other delays, it doesn't always work out that way. As far as exercise, I try to keep that very simple. I don't need any fancy equipment and I don't belong to a gym. My three favorite pieces of exercise equipment are my body, a pair of running shoes and a jump rope. So between doing body weight exercises, (i.e., pushups, sit ups, squats, burpees, jumping jacks, etc.), jumping rope and going for a run and a walk, I manage to keep it pretty simple. I don't mind using a treadmill or exercise bike, but I do not depend on them.

### **I noticed that at the Farms 2 Forks event that I attended this past summer in Chicago you were able to go parallel on a pole. Were you a gymnast at one point in your career or are you just pretty agile?**

A little bit of both. That was called the human flag. I enjoy gymnastics but I was never formally a gymnast and I still like to do some gymnastics that promote balance and strength like walking on my hands. Part of it is how I get my exercise and stay fit. When we were kids growing up we all did those things, we climbed trees and played on monkey bars, but now that we have grown older, nobody does that. I still enjoy doing it. I even have a pull up bar in the door frame between the bedroom and living room and I'll do a half dozen or so pull ups every time I pass it.

### **You have become a very prolific speaker and author. How do people get a hold of your DVDs and the like?**

The best ways are my website, [Jeffnovick.com](http://Jeffnovick.com), Dr. McDougall's website where I run a very active discussion forum, and be sure to visit me on [Facebook.com/jeffnovickrd](https://www.facebook.com/jeffnovickrd).

### **Finally, tell me about the most important part of your life — your wife Linda. Does she share your lifestyle?**

Yes. We met about three and a half years ago on the beach, and in December, we celebrate our one year wedding anniversary. She was walking down the beach, flashing a beautiful, big, bright smile that lit up her face and caught my attention. A couple of weeks later I met her in the supermarket at the sushi counter. I got her phone number and we have been together ever since. What is fascinating is that when she first asked me what I do, I was hesitant to answer because a) how exactly do you answer and explain it; and b) it can be a turnoff and it is already hard enough



to meet people as it is. So I said I was in public health and work with this program in California. She must have googled me because the next day she asked me if I knew Dr. John McDougall. Not knowing if this was a good or bad thing, I asked why. She said 20 some odd years ago she was dealing with some chemical sensitivities and read John Robbins' and Dr. McDougall's first books and went on the program and has been following it ever since.

### **You sure seem to love what you do. Are you living the good life right now?**

I feel honored and blessed that I get to do what I love, with people I love. You do what you do because you love to do it and, if it gets well received, that's an extra bonus. Fortunately, I get to do what I really want and love to do and I get to do it with some wonderful people. It also is very well received and seems to be making an positive impact on people. So I say I have the greatest job in the world.

### **At the end of my interview with Rip Esselstyn I quoted Confucius as saying, "If you love what you're doing, you never have to work a day in your life."**

At my Facebook page, I have a similar quote from James Michener. "The masters in the art of living make little distinction between their work and their play, their labor and their leisure, their mind and their body, their information, their recreation, their love and their religion. They hardly know which is which. They simply pursue the division of excellence in whatever they do at whatever they do leaving others to decide whether they are working or playing."

**That's a great note to end on, Jeff. Thanks for taking the time.**