

# Motivational Moves

## Keep to Your Dreams

By Dr. Demetra Vagias

We have all heard the saying “life comes full circle”, but I had never observed it in my own life until recently. Since the first grade, I had resolved that science and medicine were my future. Fast forward some years later to my Family Practice Residency in a suburb of Chicago...

I started my residency dreaming of all the lives I was about to impact in the grandest of ways, believing that because I was a doctor, my knowledge and talent would get the sickest of people leaping out of bed in the mornings and feeling great for the rest of their lives. However, as the days and months passed, my dreams proved quite elusive. I listened to patients’ histories, made good diagnoses and wrote prescriptions for their symptoms, but failed to attain the results which I expected. Not only weren’t people leaping out of bed and feeling great, but the medications and respective side effects were now adding to my patients’ troubles. I soon realized that by merely suppressing their symptoms – which is what most pharmaceutical medications are designed to do – I was not addressing the root cause of their ailments. In fact, this course of therapy was driving their diseases deeper and causing them to manifest in other forms and more severely. These types of issues were never taken seriously by my attending physicians nor were we, the residents, encouraged to explore the mental aspect of the ailment. My frustrations grew deep and my depression even deeper.

To add insult to injury, I started noticing that medicine was very much a business, which had no place in my medical utopia. I began getting violently ill on my way to work in the morning; my gut would scream, ‘You must leave this environment!’ and my mind would counter, ‘What will I do if I leave the only profession I have ever known or wanted?’ This went on for a few more months until one evening while driving home from the hospital, I came to a decision, reached for my cell and called the chief resident to tender my resignation. While making the call, it felt as if I was having an out of body experience and watching someone else make the call. When all was said and done, I felt relieved and liberated. This reprieve was short lived, however, as an even harder task was still ahead of me: breaking the news to my family and friends. At the time, no one understood my decision and, I strongly suspect, no one supported it either. I believe people felt I had lost my mind. Maybe I had, but in hindsight, it was the best “crazy decision” I have ever made.

I spent the next few years soul searching, feeling restless, bored and chronically depressed. Then one day, I decided to visit the Anti-Cruelty Society, just to “take a peek at the dogs”, and came home with a beautiful 5 year old Australian Cattle dog named, Lucy. Little did I know this simple choice would lead me to a life changing journey.

As the days passed, we bonded grandly and all was going rather well until early one morning, about 3 a.m., when Lucy began nudging me incessantly. I assumed she needed to go out and begrudgingly obliged. It turned out to be more than a normal bathroom run Lucy was plagued with severe diarrhea and digestive dis-

***Naturopathic medicine (also known as naturopathy) is a school of medical philosophy and practice*** that seeks to improve health and treat disease chiefly by assisting the body's innate capacity to recover from illness and injury. Naturopathic practice may include a broad array of different modalities, including manual therapy, hydrotherapy, herbalism, acupuncture, counseling, environmental medicine, aromatherapy, nutritional counseling, homeopathy, and so on. Practitioners tend to emphasize a holistic approach to patient care. Naturopathy has its origins in a variety of world medicine practices, including the Ayurveda of India and Nature Cure of Europe.

tress, which lingered on for several days. Ultimately, the Veterinarian diagnosed her as having Irritable Bowel Syndrome and put her on a round of antibiotics. All was well for a couple of weeks until the 3 A.M. callings started up again. So back we went for more medications.

This cycle continued several more times until I began to start asking the Vet some theoretical questions. For example, in nature, where would a dog get antibiotics or anti-inflammatory medications for their ailments? (There was something about prescribing pharmaceuticals to my domesticated animal that now seemed unnatural.) The vet became more and more agitated with my questions and my discomfort with putting Lucy on more medications without an explanation of the root cause of her problems. Finally, the Vet suggested probiotics, as it was ‘natural’ and sometimes helped animals when conventional medications failed. I had no idea what a probiotic was at time and asked where I would purchase this; she told me they could be found at any health food store or natural supermarket. Within 24 hours, the Lucy’s diarrhea had ceased. I waited a couple of weeks to see if the symptoms would return but they did not.

Lucy seemed to be doing well, so I started to research what exactly was in this probiotic. I soon found myself voraciously reading anything and everything I could get my hands on regarding natural therapies. I would stay up until 2 or 3 A.M. absorbing as much knowledge as possible. I could not believe the information I was coming across and started to wonder why I was never taught any of this in medical school. The more I read, the more medicine was becoming clearer, as I started to make connections about diseases and their root causes. From this new perspective it soon became obvious that *the body worked as a whole not in compartments*. This was in stark contrast from the conventional approach to medicine, which treats each system separately, and when the body is viewed as a whole, the approach to treatment changes completely. For example, a patient may be complaining of headaches but the cause may be a gut issue. From a holistic perspective, one must treat the gut disturbances along with the acute headaches. From a conventional approach, you treat the headache pain and move on. Medicine was finally starting to make sense and I began realizing just how sophisticated the human body is and how much it struggles to maintain its balance, even in the worst of circumstances. A doctor must support the body in its attempt to heal not suppress the symptoms which are manifesting to let us know something is wrong. This was my proverbial light bulb moment.

I also made one other very impor-

tant observation at the time and that was that my diligence stemmed from the love and concern I had for this animal. I was asking crucial and life saving questions about my pet’s health and refusing to accept medications as the standard practice of care. What alarmed me even more was why I didn’t ask these same questions when I was treating my patients. The answer was disturbingly simple, because I was only taught and conditioned to treat symptoms and told to NEVER take it to personal level with your patients. Lucy’s illness made me realize that in order to effectively address health issues, it must include personal attention. What the entire experience ultimately brought me to was the discovery of Naturopathic Medicine and the avenue that would lead me to fulfilling my childhood dreams.

I relocated to Connecticut upon acceptance in a 4 year accredited Naturopathic medical program. During my stint in school, I consistently saw incredible results with my patients especially in cases which conventional medicine deemed impossible or very difficult to treat.

For example, I had a patient (who also happened to be a doctor herself) diagnosed with severe cervical dysplasia (the next step was cancer). I treated her with strict dietary changes, whole food nutritional supplementation, isopathy and some psychological counseling. After 4 weeks she returned to her gynecologist for repeat tests; everything came back negative (HPV negative and cervical tissue was normal, with no trace of any dysplastic cervical tissue).

Upon graduation I returned to Illinois and started my own practice in Oak Brook. I have found my true calling after many years of painstaking introspection and a little divine intervention (my Lucy). I feel I can now build my medical utopia with a foundation which is based on real answers to the many unanswered questions patients have.

So you see, I started out wanting to be a doctor in the first grade, became a medical doctor, left medicine, rescued a dog, discovered Naturopathic medicine, and finally became a doctor who can properly help people heal and leap out of bed every morning loving and living what I believe! My circle is now complete.

*When we met Demetra Vagias, MD, ND, her passion for medicine and healing was immediately apparent and unmistakably sincere. We found her story so interesting and inspiring we asked that she share it with you. Thank you, Demetra! Please feel free to contact her at: 708-655-2651 or by email at: dvagias@yahoo.com. Her office is located at: 2021 Midwest Road, Suite 200 in Oak Brook. -CWM*

## Next issue

Elmhurst native, Dave Grotto, RD, LDN is the president/founder of Nutrition Housecall, a consulting firm which specializes in family nutrition, has served as a national media spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association over the last six years, is on the scientific advisory board at Men's Health and is a contributing writer to Prevention Magazine. Add to that, numerous national television appearances and the publishing of his first book, *101 Foods That Could Save Your Life* on January 2nd and the likelihood that 2008 promises to be a banner year for Dave, is absolutely an understatement. Known for his real person approach to eating sensibly and "non-preachy" manner, Grotto is one of the food pros you really want to know. **-CWM**

If you'd like to meet Dave in person, he will be doing book signings at the following Meijer locations: Saturday, January 26th from 11 am - 1pm in Aurora, Friday, February 1st from 5-7 pm in Bolingbrook, Saturday, February 2nd from 11am-1pm in Oswego, Monday, February 11th from 1-3pm in St. Charles and Sunday, February 10th, from 1-3 in Algonquin.

