

EPILOG

How Did All of This Happen?

By J. Morris Hicks

It is crucially important that many more people learn the very important truths about the way we eat and how it affects our health and longevity, our environment and the future of life on planet Earth. This final piece may help you understand how we got into this mess in the first place and what we must do to get back to living in harmony with nature.

In 2007, after studying the global human feeding model for five years, I suddenly realized that the rare “big picture” knowledge that I had acquired on this most crucial of topics, must be documented. At that moment, I became concerned that I might die without sharing all of these truths with my loved ones, so I immediately got busy writing.

As I pounded the keyboard of my laptop on a Delta flight from Boston to Atlanta, I was thinking to myself, “This is what I would want to tell all of my closest family and friends if I knew that I had just *Thirty Minutes to Live*,” my original title for this piece. I later changed it to the less morbid, *Give Me Thirty Minutes and I'll Give You Thirty Years*. That letter to my loved ones begins here.

Dear Ones,

You may have trouble understanding and/or believing some of my message; but for now, just listen. Later, if you are interested, I urge you to do your own homework, read, study and discover for yourself the simple truth about the way all of the pieces fit together. Here's how I see it:

1. Let's begin with nature. All species were created to work together in sustainable harmony, and things worked pretty well for millions of years until just a few hundred years ago. That's when human beings started doing things that were not in harmony with nature. They began eating an unnatural diet for their species, one thing led to another and gradually things got out of control. In just the past 200 years, the human population of the world has grown from one billion to the seven billion-plus that we have today. During that period (a mere blink of history), as humans became what Mark Twain called "the infestation of planet Earth," mankind drifted far away from nature's course and created an unsustainable lifestyle that has resulted in a sad combination of global sickness, widespread starvation and a host of environmental problems throughout the world.

2. The good news is that it's not too late to repair the damage. I believe that the best place to start trying to fix this mess is by doing something about the healthcare crisis that is rapidly spreading throughout the world. Fortunately, the solution is refreshingly simple, although the process of making the change is extremely complex and difficult. A little background--we are not winning the war on cancer and heart disease is still the number one killer, while both obesity and type 2 diabetes have been on a meteoric rise for the past thirty years. What's going on here? We have gradually shifted to a diet that does not provide our body with the nutrients it needs to take care of itself; concurrently, that diet has also caused a tremendous

amount of environmental damage. So, if we can just teach people how to promote their own health, a by-product of that improved lifestyle will work wonders for the environment as well.

3. Did you know that, for the most part, you can choose the level of health that you desire? Our bodies have the power to heal themselves of, or prevent, most of the disease we experience in the western world. We simply must provide them with the nutrients, the exercise, the rest and the desire in order for this miracle to happen. By choosing health, you will be able to enrich your life for as long as you may live. Our bodies were designed to function with vibrant health for our entire lives, but they must be given the right fuel for starters. Most of us put much more thought into the type of fuel that we put in our cars than we do the food we put into our bodies.

4. Your food will be your medicine. Hippocrates, known as the Father of Medicine, said thousands of years ago “First, do no harm--your food will be your medicine and your medicine will be your food.” He was referring to the human body’s ability to promote health provided that we feed it the right stuff. Although our doctors still take the Hippocratic Oath upon graduation from med school, today’s methods of treatment bear no resemblance to the wisdom expressed by Hippocrates. What happened?

5. Today’s doctors do not promote health; they treat symptoms. Unfortunately, modern medicine took the wrong road many years ago, moving away from promoting health and toward treating all diseases with drugs, surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, etc. Sadly, our medical schools do not teach future doctors how to promote health; they only teach them how to diagnose problems, and then how to prescribe treatment, which often does more harm than good. Rather than addressing the underlying cause of the

problem, doctors typically prescribe drugs which are often toxic. Why don't the doctors learn to promote health? Well, you see, there is no money to be made in the medical industry by teaching millions of people how to take charge of their own health and get healthy for good.

6. Most disease results from nutritional folly. My friend, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, estimates that if everyone ate an optimal diet, we would need 90% fewer doctors. As he says, "We live in an era where the majority of Americans think that diseases strike us because of misfortune, genetics, or unknown factors beyond our control. When serious disease strikes, we run to doctors and expect them to fix us with a pill. Most people have no idea that most diseases--including cancers, heart disease, strokes and diabetes--are the result of nutritional folly and are avoidable."

7. What does he mean by nutritional folly? Most Americans eat what has become known as the Standard American Diet and it features animal products and processed foods three meals a day, 365 days a year. While humans have always craved calorie-dense foods like meat, oil and cheese, it was simply not available or affordable in great quantities until about 60 or 70 years ago. That is when a bunch of clever business people began to mass-produce and distribute those types of foods efficiently. As the average person became able to afford those foods at almost every meal, the trouble really got started. Whole populations began to experience the diseases that had previously been somewhat exclusive to the affluent class.

8. Diseases of Affluence. In the olden days, only royalty and the very rich could afford these "rich" foods and guess what? The upper class began to suffer from obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and other diseases that came to be known as the *diseases of affluence*.

Conversely, in populations where most people primarily ate whole, plant-based foods, those diseases have been almost non-existent--until now. With the exportation of our Standard American Diet (SAD) to Japan, China, India and other countries, those people are now experiencing surges in the diseases that are rampant in the good old USA.

9. How healthy is SAD? We have been eating this way for so long now that most people think that SAD is a pretty healthy diet and that it can be a superior diet if they simply “watch what they eat,” whatever that means. The truth of the matter is that SAD contains very little nutrition and is primarily responsible for the obesity epidemic as well as the prevalence of cancers, heart disease, diabetes and stroke, just to name a few.

10. How did all of this happen and why haven’t you heard of this before? Well, not knowing that these foods were unhealthy, humans started eating them because they tasted good. Over the years, food manufacturers got better at producing these foods cheaply, doctors got better at treating the diseases caused by these foods, pharmaceutical companies got better at developing drugs that relieve symptoms caused by these foods, the media has been smart enough to not say bad things about the products of its sponsors, advertisers gradually convinced the public that the unhealthy products are actually good for them and the government just tries to keep the economy going so that the politicians can get re-elected.

All of the above has worked together to create one of the sickest nations on Earth, despite the fact that our healthcare (disease care) costs are by far the highest in the world. It’s really no one’s fault. Most people who work in the “system” actually believe they are doing good things; they are just doing what they have been taught and are all

simply trying to make a living.

11. What is the answer to solving this dilemma? The answer lies in learning the truth about nutrition. Most nutritionists, dietitians, doctors and nurses only know what they have been taught and, unfortunately, they haven't been taught the simple truth about how we can promote health with food. Luckily, the information is out there for those who take it upon themselves to learn it. You see, the healing powers of nutritional excellence have been known for a long time but they simply haven't been embraced for the many reasons listed in Point #10 above.

If you really want to learn the truth, you should start with the written works of Colin Campbell, Caldwell Esselstyn, John McDougall, Dean Ornish, Neal Barnard and Joel Fuhrman. And don't stop there, keep reading and studying until your knowledge of nutrition is solidly embedded in your life permanently. The following paragraphs cover some of the many things that you will learn about food.

12. The optimal diet for humans. Human beings are herbivores; our hands, our teeth, our intestines, indeed our entire bodies are designed to eat plants. Sure, our forefathers probably ate almost anything they could get their hands on, but that doesn't mean it was good for them. Other herbivores include animals like gorillas, elephants, horses and giraffes; all of which manage to become big and strong without the "animal protein" that most Americans truly believe they must have in order to be healthy.

In addition to the essential vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals; this natural diet provides us with the fiber that we need. It is recommended that we get at least 25 grams per day but the average American gets less than 10 grams. An optimal diet will ensure that you average

between 50 and 80 grams per day--and when you do, you won't need reading material in your bathroom anymore.

13. As herbivores, the natural food for our species is whole plants. We know from a vast amount of research that the healthiest plant foods for us are those still in nature's package--whole and unrefined fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. The gorilla in the wild eats almost nothing but raw plants. We Americans, on the other hand, get a paltry 7% of our calories from whole, plant-based foods; with the remaining 93% of our calories coming from meat, cheese, chips, sweets, sodas, fries, oils and other highly refined products with very low amounts of nutrients per calorie. Most Americans are over-fed and under-nourished; as SAD is woefully short on fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients.

14. Why traditional weight-loss diets don't work. Studies show that most diets have a 97% failure rate; only 3% of the people manage to lose weight and keep it off. So, what's the problem? Weight-loss diets are unsustainable because they lack critical nutrients and leave you continually craving more food. The answer to achieving one's ideal weight and optimal health is the adoption of a permanent diet-style based on nutritional excellence. Once you learn how to select, prepare and eat the right kinds of foods, your body will take care of the rest--without calorie counting, portion control or deprivation. How considerate of Mother Nature to make things so convenient for us.

15. What portion of our diet should be whole, plant-based foods? In nature, the ideal would be 100%; however, that is probably not practical in today's world. Experts, like Dr. Fuhrman, define the optimal diet as one where at least 80% of the calories are derived from whole, unrefined, plant-based foods. While moving from 7% to

40% of calories from these highly nutritious foods would definitely be a good move, the experts agree that in order to have the maximum protection against disease and to enjoy vibrant health your entire life, you really need to shoot for 80% or better. That will also ensure that you greatly exceed the minimum target of 25 grams per day for fiber. That alone will make a huge difference in the way your body functions.

16. Why should I shift to this plant-based diet? For me, the most important reason was health. This diet-style will protect you from diseases of affluence, provide you with vibrant health for your entire life and will very likely keep you out of the nursing home in your final years. Along the way, you will get sick less frequently, maintain a trim body without “dieting,” feel more energy, have a better complexion, sleep better, enjoy better sex, have less body odor, save money on food, think more clearly, reduce your chances of developing dementia, eliminate constipation forever, minimize menstrual cramps, improve eyesight, lower blood pressure, reduce or eliminate asthma, allergies and bad breath, lower bad cholesterol, eliminate most (if not all) prescription drugs and on and on and on. And that’s just a few of the *health* benefits. There are many other reasons for eating this way; read on.

17. Almost everyone claims to be an environmentalist. It’s hard to find anyone these days who doesn’t think that doing “green” things for the environment is a good thing. Unfortunately, just like with the nutrition issue, we haven’t been told the complete truth about what causes the most environmental damage. Take global warming for example; if we took a poll regarding that issue, I would bet you that that the average American would list the gas guzzling cars and trucks as the single biggest villain because that’s what was conveyed in Al Gore’s 2006 movie *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Would it surprise you to know that the raising of livestock for our dinner tables causes at least 30% more global warming than ALL of transportation in the entire world combined? That data was reported by the United Nations in November of 2006, but for some strange reason, the media has never seen fit to share that little tidbit with the general public. Why not? Refer to Point #10. And the great news here is that, unlike global transportation, which would be almost impossible to reduce very much if at all (considering population growth), with the raising of livestock, it would be relatively simple to eliminate the entire industry--just by shifting to a plant-based diet. This obvious solution is never mentioned in the media because very few environmentalists understand that eliminating meat from our diets would be a good idea from a nutritional standpoint.

18. Global warming isn't the only environmental problem. There are many more--and they've gotten our attention. Everyone seems to be buying hybrid cars and recyclable bags, restricting their use of water and trying to use less electricity--but darn few are even thinking about reducing their consumption of animal foods. Maybe if they learned about the other environmental problems caused by the animal foods industry--things like water pollution, topsoil erosion, depletion of our water supply, unprecedented species extinction, destruction of the rain forests and land degradation--things would be different. The key to all of this is education--everyone must learn what is really happening or there won't be much of a planet left for the future generations that follow us.

19. World Hunger. Are you worried about how we will manage to continue feeding the planet's booming population? A little background--it took the world's human population 99,900 years to grow from about 10,000 people to two billion. Then, in just the last 100 years

(1/10,000 of the time), we added another five billion people, bringing us up to the **SEVEN BILLION+** that we have today. So what kind of a job are we doing in feeding all those people? Not very well actually, considering that more than a billion people go to bed hungry every night.

Contributing to that sad state of affairs are the shortcomings of our extremely inefficient method of feeding ourselves. I am referring to the Typical Western Diet or SAD that we are now exporting throughout the world. Did you know that it takes about two football fields worth of land to feed one person SAD? Any idea how many plant-eaters you could feed on that same amount of land? Would you believe fourteen? Not only would everyone be a lot healthier, but we could feed well over ten times as many people, while doing some wonderful things for our fragile environment.

20. Pretty compelling stuff, huh? Let me get this straight; by just eating a nutritious plant-based diet, we can prevent or cure heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes, we can greatly improve the vibrancy of our lifelong health, we can save the environment and we can solve the age-old problem of world hunger. Why then, for God's sake, are there so few people eating this way? Does it taste bad? Is it expensive? Is it too much work?

21. The Majority Rules. Most people must think that the Typical Western Diet is a smart way to eat since over 90% of the people in the developed world are eating some version of it today. If you have heard what I have said so far, you should know by now that the TWD is a very unhealthy, inefficient, destructive and unsustainable diet. Even so, its popularity continues to grow, while only about one percent of us are eating the optimal diet, getting at least 80% of our calories from whole, unrefined plant-based foods. Why? Refer back to Point #10.

There are many barriers out there that only a solid education can tear down. Right now, most of us get all of our nutrition information from television, magazines, newspapers, the internet, our doctors, friends and relatives. The net effect of all of the above is that people who eat the optimal diet are in a very small minority and are often thought to be a little weird. Many people think that we have lost our minds and that we will soon be very ill or die due to a lack of animal protein in our diets.

22. Vegetarians get a bad rap. Be honest, what comes to mind when you think of a vegetarian? You probably don't think of gold medal winners like Carl Lewis, Edwin Moses or Dave Scott; all of whom are vegetarians. For the record, I do not refer to myself as a vegetarian. The problem with "labels" like *vegetarian* or *vegan* is that they only give people some clues about what you don't eat; they don't describe what you DO eat, and that is what's most important.

While the vast majority of my calories come from whole plant foods, on occasion I will have a bite of fish, cheese or eggs while visiting in someone's home; therefore I am not a vegetarian. So, what am I? I am simply one person who has learned the truth about nutrition and has made the decision to give my body the best possible foods that I can find. And since I ate SAD for almost sixty years, I don't want to waste too many of my calories on foods that afford me no protection but rather might damage my body. I have to think about the damage I may have done during those first 58 years.

23. When does heart disease start? Heart disease and other common western diseases start developing the day we start eating a diet that is heavy in animal-based foods and light in fresh fruits and vegetables. We have been led to believe that these diseases are a natural part of the aging process. That is simply not true. These diseases are the

natural result of eating a harmful diet like the TWD. Autopsies of U.S. soldiers killed in Korea showed that almost 80% of these young men in their twenties had significant coronary artery disease--it just hadn't been diagnosed yet. The age to start eating a healthy diet is as young as you possibly can. Studies show that our diet as children is one of the best predictors of the kinds of diseases we will suffer as older adults. We also know from numerous recent studies that heart disease is reversible with a superior diet.

24. Can't imagine life without cheeseburgers? I mentioned the many barriers that prevent people from embracing the healthy diet that I have described. One of those barriers is that people simply can't imagine life without some of their favorite foods. Some say that they would rather die young than give up their bacon and eggs, burgers, steaks, lobsters, cheese, pizza, etc. People actually feel addicted to these foods and think that they cannot live without them. But, in my opinion, those addictions can be broken much easier than addictions to cocaine, nicotine, and caffeine. To be sure, they are bad habits—but habits can be broken and can be replaced with healthier ones.

25. The Joy of Eating. Let's face it; food is a very big part of everyone's life. Almost everything we do centers around some form of feeding ourselves. We eat at church socials, wine and cheese receptions, parties, business lunches, when we drink, when we smoke, when we watch TV, at sporting events, graduations, weddings, in the movies, as a bedtime snack and on and on. And we like it. We have also become accustomed to eating the same kinds of unhealthy foods for most of our lives. So how do we change?

We must become educated to the extent that we can make a real commitment to a healthier diet-style. And then, when you do that, guess what happens? You will find, as

have thousands before you, that you will truly find more joy in eating than ever before. Your taste buds will change, you will savor natural flavors and it will feel good to know that your meal did not damage the environment. Further, you will never have to worry about eating too much or being overweight again--just eat all you want. Finally, not a single animal will have suffered or died so that you could have their dead flesh on your dinner plate.

26. So what about the animals? As a young boy, I worked in my dad's dairy, hog and chicken operations and found myself feeling a closeness to some of those farm animals. I also saw a few slaughterhouses and can remember them vividly to this day. I sincerely believe that if all of us were forced to spend one day a year working in a slaughterhouse, that the consumption of animal foods would take a very sharp decline. Paul McCartney says, and I agree, "If slaughterhouses had glass walls, we would all be vegetarians." Almost everyone claims to love animals, yet we casually eat animal flesh from billions of animals without any thought about the barbaric treatment and disgusting torture these animals must endure for their entire lives. We buy our nicely-packaged meats with names like sirloin steak, pork sausage, veal cutlet and we feed our children *Happy Meals*. I wonder how many children would become vegetarians at the age of six if part of the first grade included a mandatory trip to a slaughterhouse.

27. It's not going to be easy, but it's worth it. Nobody in the very small minority has ever had it easy while bucking something as wildly popular as SAD. But, that doesn't mean that we should stop trying. Once you are educated, and know for sure that you are right, you must never stop trying to promote a healthier diet for all--for your health, for the starving children, for the environment, for the critters and for your future great-grandchildren who will follow us on planet Earth.

28. If you give it four months, it's really not that hard to change. When you have become educated to the extent that you have a conviction to shift to this wonderful diet-style, I recommend that you take the *4Leaf, 4-Month Challenge*. Clean out your cupboards of the unhealthy items and remove all meat and dairy from your diet. Start putting the high-powered, nutrient-dense plant-foods in your body and see how you're feeling at the end of four months.

You may suffer a few unpleasant effects of detoxification during part of your journey, but this will pass. Just stay with it and the chances are very good that you will never want to go back to your old way of eating. Why four months? To be sure, you'll notice many benefits within weeks, but the longer you stick with it, the greater the odds that this healthy change in your diet will be permanent.

29. Give Me 30 Minutes and I'll Give You Thirty Years. You see, the average period of good health ends for most people by the time they are in their fifties or sixties. With proper nutrition, exercise and motivation, there is no reason you shouldn't enjoy vibrant health for your entire life--well into your eighties and beyond--maybe even to 105 or older.

30. Who would want to live to be 105 anyway? My answer to that question is simply this, "How about a vibrantly healthy 104 year-old who had great sex last night?" Acknowledging at my ripe old age that I still have a sense of humor.

And so, "Dear Ones,"

I pray that you will learn from this message, enjoy your life and do all that you can to leave our planet in better shape than you found it.

KERRY GRAFF, MD – J. MORRIS HICKS

Once you understand how all of the pieces are connected, you will know what actions to take for your own health and for the health of the planet that supports us all.

Sincerely, Jim

J. Morris Hicks, CEO, 4Leaf Global, LLC
Writer. Speaker. Activist.