



## Kim's Journey to Embracing the Gluten and Allergen-Free Life

I've definitely had my fair share of twists and turns with their accompanying lessons along the path called life. Writing our first book as well as this subsequent edition has forced me to summarize my experiences and make sense of them. It's amazing how much I had forgotten or blocked out of my mind.

My health concerns over the years include 12 orthopedic surgeries, multiple broken bones and over 3 years of physical therapy, combined with 9-plus years of digestive disorders, skin conditions, fatigue, joint inflammation and misdiagnosis. It finally all made sense in 2002, when I was diagnosed with celiac / coeliac disease as well as dozens of food allergies and environmental intolerances. Then in 2008, I was diagnosed with osteopenia.

Although many of my health lessons have been extremely challenging, I think of them as gifts and something to be appreciated. I did sometimes question how I was going to get through all of them in one piece. Sometimes, that light at the end of the tunnel did seem like it had been turned off, yet in the end they were each unusual learning opportunities!

Looking back, I am now very thankful for each of these experiences which have led to my current path in life. Despite my health challenges, I continue to enjoy being as athletic as possible while having fun with family and friends. I am very grateful that I traveled extensively prior to my diagnosis of celiac / coeliac and food allergies, and still love exploring the world to this day. I also appreciate all of the opportunities, both personal and professional, that I have had to live, work and experience local cultures first-hand on four continents as an international management consultant. Working with global clients and traveling while safely eating outside my home continues to be an integral part to embracing my gluten and allergen-free lifestyle.

I would like to share my story with you, in the hope that it may help with your unique adventures. My journeys are organized within the following six areas:

- Early evidence of allergies and intolerances
- Adventures in traveling
- My journey with sports and health
- Discovery and diagnosis
- The road to empowerment
- Thanks to family, friends and restaurants

### **Early Evidence of Allergies and Intolerances**

Ever since I was a young girl, I've been allergic to cats, fish and seafood. My throat starts to close, my eyes water and breathing is difficult. Sometimes, I feel nauseous, start sneezing and wheezing. In my teenage years, after experiencing skin reactions, it was determined through the process of elimination that I was allergic to goose feathers, down and wool. I also had reactions to various chemicals and additives in detergents, soaps, creams and make-up.

In my mid 20's, I had swollen and blood shot eyes. Again, through the process of elimination, my optometrist determined that this was an allergic reaction to thimersol, a chemical in some saline solutions for contact lenses. It still makes me laugh thinking about the questions I received from friends concerning my appearance during that time!

In my late 20's, I experienced bladder issues which were extremely rare for my age. After visiting numerous specialists and extensive testing, I consulted with my general physician. Based on her recommendation, I removed caffeine as the first part of my elimination diet. My condition improved slightly; however, the symptoms were still occurring. Next, she identified another potential culprit—aspartame. After eliminating all foods with aspartame from my diet, the issues were immediately resolved. I was so relieved that we had finally figured it out. I am eternally grateful to this physician for identifying the causes of these symptoms.

A few months later, I realized that I had the tendency to get sick within 30 to 60 minutes after eating Chinese food. Once again, through the process of



elimination and investigation, we determined that Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) was the cause of my reactions.

Another situation occurred within a few minutes of receiving anesthesia for one of my surgeries. My throat started to close up and my breathing became extremely labored. Realizing that I was having an allergic reaction, I found out that they had given me penicillin. Luckily, I remembered that my great aunt had died from a shot of penicillin, so I was grateful that they immediately counteracted my reaction with an injection. Looking back, these may have been early warning signs of things to come. I just wasn't aware of my level of sensitivities at the time. In hindsight, there was a definite pattern emerging which unfortunately took over 15 years to fully decipher.

### **Adventures in Traveling**

I've always been very fascinated by new places, people and cultures. The first time I realized my love for traveling was when I was five years old and my family drove from Chicago to my Aunt Greta's farm in Ohio. Throughout my childhood, for two weeks every summer, my family and I trekked throughout the United States and Canada in a camper trailer, exploring different destinations and experiencing new adventures. I loved it! For my 8th grade graduation present, my parents gave me the choice of flying to New York to visit relatives or a new bicycle. I chose the trip, of course, and still remember where I was sitting on the plane to this day!

Hearing my grandparents occasionally recite phrases in French and German always intrigued me. I started taking French lessons at the age of 13 and adored learning languages. One of my teachers in high school even taught me Spanish in her spare time after class. My first trip to Europe was at the age of 16 with my French class as an early high school graduation present. After falling in love with Paris, my new criteria for choosing a university focused on two areas: a study abroad program and a Big 10 sports program.

During my third year of college, I lived in Strasbourg, France and studied all of my courses in French. My diet primarily consisted of baguettes (French



bread), petit pains au chocolat (chocolate croissants), yogurt and cheese. I backpacked through Europe, played tour guide when friends and family came to visit and felt great physically. To this day, I still meet friends in Paris every year to enjoy the culture and, of course, the outdoor cafés.

After graduating from Purdue University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the French language with a minor in business, I worked with domestic corporate clients for six years. I then earned my Masters in International Management at the Thunderbird School of Global Management and met lots of excellent friends along the way.

For the next 17 years, as a global business consultant with Accenture, the world's leading management consulting firm, I worked with clients all over the world. Leveraging my expertise in customer interaction solutions, I managed diverse project teams across global customer relationship management (CRM), worldwide technologies and business integration practices. We collaborated with cross-industry Fortune 500 clients delivering innovative sales and service engagements on four continents, including 12 first-ever industry leading implementations.

Discovering life and cultures in South America, Europe and Australia was also extremely rewarding, both personally and professionally. I lived in Sao Paulo for seven months, Sydney for five months, Turin for three months and numerous European locations such as Geneva, London, Munich and Prague for one to two months. While living in these countries, I learned conversational skills in Italian and Portuguese. Throughout this time, I continued to avoid foods that I knew did not agree with me and managed my knee-related problems.

Working in North America, my travel typically involved flying two to eight times a week. I consulted with clients from New York to San Francisco, Dallas to Toronto, Los Angeles to Washington DC, Montreal to Mexico City and everywhere in between.

Working my way up the corporate ladder to Partner, I loved my clients, my career and almost every minute of my personal and business travel. Since establishing GlutenFree Passport® and AllergyFree



Passport®, I have continued working with clients and organizations across the globe enabling me to travel to Australia, Europe, New Zealand and throughout North America on a regular basis. Over the past 25-plus years, I have flown over 2 million miles and have eaten the majority of my meals in restaurants.

As glamorous as this may sound, it required a lot of energy, especially during my recuperation from six knee surgeries and four stress fractures. While traveling from continent to continent, I was in more planes and taxis with crutches and pushed in wheelchairs through airports than I ever care to remember!

### **My Journey with Sports and Health**

Since childhood, the two things that I've been most passionate about are traveling and sports. From a sports perspective, I was a healthy athletic child, teenager and young adult who loved volleyball, tennis, cheerleading, softball, basketball, swimming, diving, surfing and yes, even baton twirling! I experienced my fair share of broken bones including my elbow, collarbone, fingers and wrist. These were all typical injuries due to athletics and I took each of them in stride.

In celebration of our 30th birthdays, my friends and I completed our first team relay triathlon. Swimming in Lake Michigan for a mile was a challenge for me since I already had overcome two knee surgeries due to skiing and volleyball, as well as four forearm reconstructive surgeries as a result of a severe car accident. Over the next few years, our teams of family and friends accomplished a total of three team relay triathlons and had lots of fun in the process!

By my mid 30's, due to continuous pain and instability, I was required to have three more knee surgeries within three and a half years just to be able to walk. My first was arthroscopic to repair my cartilage. The second was an Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) reconstruction requiring 6 ½ hours of surgery and 10 months of physical therapy to walk again. I gained weight and felt continuous abdominal bloating. Unfortunately, I never regained the energy level that I had before this surgery.



During this time, I began experiencing acid reflux, cramping, diarrhea, flatulence, vomiting, heartburn and indigestion. On top of all this, my third knee surgery was an ACL on the other knee, requiring three hours of surgery and five months of physical therapy. In hindsight, these traumas may have potentially triggered my celiac / coeliac disease, which was yet to be diagnosed.

Based upon my surgeries and injuries, I began an in-depth exploration of Eastern and alternative healing practices. These included acupuncture, Chinese medicine, herbs, reiki, reflexology and massage therapy. The combination of Eastern and Western practices with health professionals helped me recover from these injuries. However, no matter what we tried, I couldn't regain my energy level or lose the excess weight. My only "exercise" was physical therapy, restricted swimming and minimal walking. If that wasn't enough, I had to have one more knee surgery to remove the screws from my previous reconstruction requiring more anesthesia and physical therapy.

By this time, I had grown weary of recuperating from surgeries and physical therapy. I chose boxing as my new fitness challenge to jumpstart my metabolism and increase flexibility. Thanks to the patience of my boxing coach, my endurance, strength and agility improved with each lesson—all without boxing an opponent in the ring! Finally, my first new sport in years and a great change of pace from all the injuries. Hoorah!

My excitement was short-lived as a year and a half later I lost the range of motion in my arm and could only lift it a few inches from my body. After a month of testing, the doctors determined that I actually needed two rotator cuff surgeries in a matter of 4 ½ months caused by bone spurs. I was also still experiencing stiffness, muscle cramps and inflamed joints throughout the rest of my body. So back to physical therapy, walking and swimming once again.

A few years later, I was diagnosed with celiac / coeliac disease and dozens of allergies. Finally, after following a strict gluten and allergen-free diet, I started feeling as though my body was repairing itself and getting stronger. Being an athlete, I wanted to test myself





from a health perspective. Could I complete another mile swim in Lake Michigan as part of a relay triathlon team after all of my surgeries, physical therapy and latest diagnoses?

My friends and I decided to go for it. Just two years after my diagnosis, I finished the mile swim in the largest triathlon in the US. I wish that I could say that my finishing time was stellar—unfortunately, that was not the case. I was one of the last people out of Lake Michigan in Chicago that day. Nevertheless, the sense of accomplishment was incredible. I had achieved my goal!

For the next two years, I continued to enjoy swimming, boxing lessons and weight training supported by my healthy and strong body! Then, the next few years became rather challenging from a fitness perspective again due to bone issues as described later. Once resolved, I again set out to train for triathlons and get back to being physically fit, flexible and balanced. Finally, my road to health was coming full circle after 20-plus years of challenges, pain and great struggle. As my Dad always said, “You can accomplish anything you set your mind to as long as you’re willing to work for it. It’s just a matter of attitude and how determined you are to succeed to the best of your ability.”

### **Discovery and Diagnosis**

Throughout my surgeries and recuperation, my digestion, respiratory and skin related issues continued to escalate. After constant abdominal pain and diarrhea, I was so weak that I had to be driven to the doctor who immediately scheduled me for a colonoscopy. The doctor found polyps in my colon and diagnosed me with ulcerative colitis, leaky gut and Crohn’s disease.

After careful analysis, I found health professionals who specialized in digestive disorders. Based upon more testing, a strict regimen of a bland diet, protein drinks, sulphasalazine, herbs and various supplements were recommended. My insides were finally starting to repair themselves and my energy level was improving slightly. I still felt as though my food was not being processed appropriately, but at least my body was getting somewhat better with my symptoms occurring less frequently.

My acupuncturist, who was also an MD, began assessing the cause of my joint pain and bone spurs. She asked about my consumption of dairy, which I ate on a daily basis. Needless to say, I loved milk, yogurt, cheese and cottage cheese. Upon her recommendation, I eliminated dairy from my diet and immediately began to feel a difference in my joints and my throat. I felt better and decided to avoid dairy since I never wanted to endure another surgery again!

While traveling, I was also getting sick within 30 to 60 minutes after eating airplane meals and snacks due to preservatives. I started to eliminate various foods from my diet and focus on listening to how my body responded to different foods. I followed some rotation diet recommendations including vegetables, fruits, pastas and meats. Unfortunately, at this point, I was totally unaware of any hidden allergens in foods. Although I thought I had eliminated specific potential allergens from my diet, in reality, I had not.

During this time, I lived in Italy. I ate incredible pasta, Italian bread, salamis and salads. My favorite meals were Veal Milanese, Chicken Parmigiana and Beef Medallions with sauce. While home in the States for a week at a time, I would avoid these foods because I enjoyed them so much more in Italy. By the end of each week in the States, I realized that I felt a bit better. Back in Italy, I continued eating my favorite foods and experienced bloating, cramping, flatulence and indigestion again. I remember thinking that my reactions were a bit unusual and maybe I just needed to reduce the amount of pasta I ate, which I did.

I also found myself taking Mylanta, ginger, turmeric and other digestive aids on a daily basis. I was still experiencing very low energy, fatigue and lethargy. All of a sudden, extremely dark circles appeared under my eyes, my skin turned a pale grey and my nails became brittle. My headaches escalated to migraines. My nausea escalated into vomiting. My gums started bleeding and a couple of my teeth were loose. I started having palpitations and sensitivity to cold. I was unable to sleep for longer than two hours at a time and keeping foods in my body was a challenge.





What was going on with me? I attributed these reactions to my increased stress level due to working extremely long hours on more high-profile client projects after my promotion to Partner at Accenture. I just couldn't believe how bad I felt physically. Luckily, my two friends, Kelly and Allison, approached me in "the bunkroom" and insisted I investigate these symptoms with a doctor. I can still hear their words, "Kim, something is definitely not right and you have to check it out now." I am forever thankful to my friends for their encouragement and persistence in convincing me to seek medical attention.



As you can imagine, after 12 orthopedic surgeries and over 3 years of physical therapy, coupled with a high tolerance for pain, I tried to avoid doctors at all costs (nothing personal to those of you who are doctors!). I contacted numerous healthcare professionals for referrals and suggested that maybe, just maybe, this had to do with allergies. A multitude of medical tests were conducted by different medical teams. Although there were discrepancies between the various test results, they confirmed my allergic reactions to dairy, fish, shellfish, chemicals and cats. After years of misdiagnosis, I was told that I had celiac / coeliac disease as well as allergies to other food and environmental allergens. These included pork, preservatives, sodium nitrate, fluoride, ammonia, bleach and food dyes to name a few.

Once I understood what needed to be eliminated from my diet, with commitment to strict adherence, I began to feel a difference immediately. It was truly amazing! After more than 10 years of chronic pain and over 8 years to be properly diagnosed, my team of specialists determined what I needed to do to feel better. I finally started to repair my body.

Following a gluten and allergen-free diet combined with exercise, herbs and detoxification, my quality of life began to increase significantly. The majority of my recovery took place during the next two years. I just kept feeling better and younger. My energy level continued to increase as my body focused on processing the proper nutrients rather than trying to protect me from intolerable foods. For the next four years, I was

healthier, more energetic and happier than I had been in a very long time!

Then my next journey began. After a few months of unexplained pain in my right foot, I visited my orthopedic surgeon. I learned that I had a stress fracture and needed to wear an immobilizing boot for 2 months. Unfortunately for me, it took over 7 months to heal and finally be able to wear shoes on both feet again.

After this, I had my Bone Mineral Density (BMD) tested to assess the strength of my bones. The doctor stated that my Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) scan showed the BMD to be normal and that my next test should be in another 2–3 years. Based on this feedback, I started training for another team triathlon which unfortunately was short-lived.

Then, to make a very long story short, within 8 months, I had three more stress fractures. After lots of pain and immobilizers, my orthopedic doctor detected osteopenia in my left foot which describes a BMD which is lower than normal peak. How could this be the case if all of my tests were normal? I finally met with other specialists who determined that I had deficiencies in Vitamin D, calcium and magnesium to name a few. To keep my condition from progressing to osteoporosis, I started increasing my intake of specific supplements. I also focused on eating more safe gluten and allergen-free foods that supported good bone health coupled with exercise, acupuncture, reiki, Trager therapy and energy work to help heal my body once again.

After requesting my original DEXA scan test report, I discovered that I had originally been misinformed about my BMD results. In actuality, they had only indicated normal bone density for my lumbar spine and hip. For my femoral neck, the results showed, in plain black and white print, moderate osteopenia. To think, my situation could have been completely avoided if it had been addressed immediately instead of not knowing for over one year. Obviously, that doctor will *never* ever be consulted again!

I just keep telling myself that everything happens for a reason, so I hope that my experiences somehow help some of you avoid similar issues along your path. Yet again, I am back to enjoying my healthy adventures



wherever they may take me. I continue to be amazed at what our minds, bodies and spirits are capable of accomplishing once we have all of the facts and determine how to balance the needs of our bodies.



### **The Road to Empowerment**

When I first received my life changing diagnosis of celiac / coeliac and food allergies in 2002, I felt relief that my team of specialists finally figured “it” out. I made the decision shortly thereafter that my health considerations were not going to limit me and that I was going to do what needed to be done to take back my freedom. However, a critical new question surfaced—“How do I live?”

At that time, I began yet another new phase of my journey which evolved into the foundation for Chapter 2—Approach to Safe Eating Experiences. The following are my four key stages of learning about special diets:

1. Awareness—What exactly have I been diagnosed with?
2. Information—What can I eat and what do I need to avoid?
3. Knowledge—Now that I have this information, how do I apply it to real life?
4. Empowerment—How do I live and enjoy myself while being diligent with foods anywhere in the world?

There was a lot of trial and error, a continuous learning curve and huge adjustments throughout the next few years. Going through each stage to eliminate all of the allergens as well as following a 100% gluten and allergen-free diet to become empowered was difficult to say the least. Yet it was all worth it in the end!

At the beginning of stage 1—awareness, I just remember sitting there dumbfounded, thinking, “Wow! What do I do? How do you even spell these words? What in the world do they mean? What exactly is my diagnosis? What is gluten? What are hidden allergens? More importantly, what can I eat when I’m at home in Chicago or away traveling in the States or overseas? How do I eat in airports, hotels and at client meetings?”

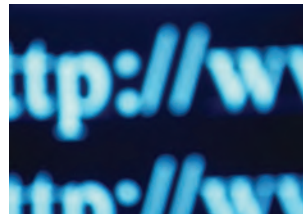
Most people recently diagnosed typically think just the opposite, “What meals can be prepared at home? What cookbooks can be purchased? How can my favorite recipes be modified? How do I ensure that my home is gluten and allergen-free? What items and brands can I purchase?” Eating outside the home and travel may or may not be at the top of the priority list for those newly diagnosed.

For me, learning to eat anywhere and traveling with celiac / coeliac and all of my allergies was priority number one. Global travel was an integral part of my personality and international business career. I was not willing to give up what I loved to do, both from a personal and professional standpoint. I had to figure out how to control my special diet instead of letting my special diet control me. In order to continue my lifestyle, I needed to quickly figure out how to eat safe gluten and allergen-free foods anywhere in the world, regardless of my location or destination.

As a result, I moved into stage 2—information gathering. I spent all of my free time researching what I could and could not eat outside and inside the home, both across the globe and in the US. I spent hours upon hours in grocery stores, diligently reviewing product lists and reading labels only to walk out completely exhausted. I reviewed cookbooks for ingredients trying to figure out how to order certain dishes when I was in restaurants.

I conducted extensive research to determine how to safely eat outside the home in restaurants located in both English and foreign language speaking countries. I scoured hundreds and hundreds of websites, subscribed to allergy-related publications and joined 20-plus international celiac / coeliac and allergy associations. With all of this information, I studied, took notes, memorized and felt like I was back at school again.

The focus of this literature was either on gluten and allergen-free cooking in the home or background information about coping with allergies. A very small percentage of these books discussed eating in restaurants and traveling with gluten and allergen-free diets. I was very surprised to realize that books devoted to these topics had not been written. There was a tre-





mendous void in the global marketplace for educating individuals and businesses about eating outside the home with special diets. I then contacted 100-plus global associations for information and researched various cities.

I began assimilating the information that I had gathered into knowledge which marked my progression into stage 3. I explored many cuisines, restaurants, stores and pharmacies first hand and even discovered the standard airline code to order a gluten-free meal (GFML). I created detailed spreadsheets identifying ingredients in various cuisines and dishes as well as lists of fast food chains and restaurants with potential foods to eat. I designed electronic and pocket-size paper tri-fold materials with foreign language phrases to communicate with restaurants overseas. I then downloaded all of these files to my mobile phone for easy access anywhere. What can I say, it's the consultant in me to always be prepared!

At the time, I was solely focused on plain and simple foods that I thought would be safe to eat, based upon my research, both in restaurants and at home. I just could not bear the thought of having any of my old symptoms occur again since it took me so long to get to this point. Unfortunately, regardless of my efforts, I still got sick while traveling, although infrequently. In the early days, while doubled over in pain and recuperating for days, I sometimes would wonder to myself, "Why exactly am I doing this? It would have been so much safer for me to cook my own meals and accept the situation." However, staying at home or preparing meals in a hotel room kitchenette while traveling is just not in my nature.

Then, I reached the stage that, although still in pain for days, I would wonder, "How did this happen?" instead of "Why did I do this?" I immediately would assess what could have caused me to get sick, how this could have been avoided and what I would change the next time around.

I started experimenting with what snacks made the most sense to carry with me on airplanes and to my destinations. I still laugh when I think about the security guard at a US airport who said, "Is that a hard

boiled egg that I just saw in the carry-on luggage scanner?” I continued traveling to numerous destinations across the globe due to my client project commitments, learning about local cuisines, exploring stores and finding new snacks along the way.

Additionally, I started working on the multi-faceted 311 project for the City of New York. One of my friends from graduate school introduced me to Robert, a colleague of his from the restaurant business living in Manhattan. When we went out to dinner, I was still ordering plain everything and anything. With Robert’s culinary experience and extensive restaurant background, he started convincing me that my food choices could expand from plain salad, chicken or broccoli to new things such as red wine reduction sauce.

Based upon my dining experiences with Robert, we began to combine our knowledge of safe and unsafe ingredients. There was extensive trial and error determining what foods to eat in restaurants and what were the safest menu items. It took some time, but we began to discover what had the highest probability of having hidden allergens and where I might have issues with food preparation techniques.

We started to develop our own list of what questions to ask and what areas of food preparation may pose the biggest concerns. After identifying what could make things easier on the restaurant staff, we determined what could simplify the ordering process for both the guest and the server while still ensuring a safe dining experience. We started to cautiously experiment with various restaurants, cuisines and menu items.

My world began to open back up again. I started thinking that I could safely and confidently eat out like a normal person—just with special dietary considerations. Feeling empowered to live and enjoy myself while being diligent with foods anywhere in the world is truly incredible! I began to feel that I finally had the most difficult part of the learning curve behind me.

Realizing how valuable this research and knowledge could be for other individuals living with special diets as well as for businesses, my friends and family encouraged me to write a book that could potentially help millions on a global basis. Robert and I started to evaluate how



best to share our experiences with guests and restaurants around the world. We wanted to empower people with knowledge to safely eat outside the home, from a trip to your Grandmother's house to traveling internationally, as well as educate businesses on how to recognize and expand their gluten and allergen-free offerings.

I had the perspective of the individual impacted with celiac / coeliac and food allergies combined with my business consulting knowledge. Robert had the restaurant perspective of serving guests with special dietary requirements coupled with his culinary experiences. The combination of our backgrounds and expertise made the ideal atmosphere for collaboration on what eventually culminated into this internationally acclaimed multi-award winning book series!

### **Thanks to Family, Friends and Restaurants**



I am also very grateful for the support I received from family, friends and business colleagues over the years once they understood my situation. Thank you all for taking my dietary concerns into consideration and helping me when needed. Eating outside the home is a collaborative effort between the person impacted with special diets, their dining companions and the people preparing the food including restaurant professionals, food service and even relatives.

Sometimes, it gets a bit tiresome explaining special dietary requirements on a constant basis. Although I've only mentioned a few of you below, everyone's help, acknowledgment and understanding are much appreciated. These are also examples of how those of you readers can help family, friends and even customers with special diets while in restaurants, at social gatherings, school or your own home.

Mom - I'll always remember you perfecting your delicious gluten and allergen-free coffee cakes, Grandma's chocolate chip cookies, apple crisps and my angel food birthday cakes. Thank you so much for the many safe and tasty meals including the turkey at family parties. They will go down in history for me and when the grandkids want to eat my "special" food—you know it's good.

Bob - I very much appreciate your knowledge, diligence and expertise in helping to expand my options so I could confidently become a foodie again—yeah!

Club Girls including Shar, Hops, Cindy, Slukes, Karen, Kathy, Jody and Kathy - Thanks for considering my special diet concerns when preparing goodies for our fun get-togethers.

Ivanka - My appreciation for thinking about what I can potentially eat wherever we might be.

Faris - Thanks for your support and understanding from exploring fun restaurants to eating my portions at the cooking school to our wine-tasting adventures.

Brad - I appreciate your help when we go “spelunking” to discover new places and open up our choices of possibilities.

Betsy and Gary - Thanks for calling me to check what I can eat and what is safe when you’re hosting your infamous dinner parties!

Consuelo and Dawn - My gratitude for thinking about my special diet when considering places to eat!

Jen and Tom - thanks so much for lots of fun with excellent gluten / allergen free meals and wine, of course!

Beth and Kathy - I appreciate you asking questions and thinking about what I could and could not eat at our various family gatherings.

Katinka - Changing plans to an allergen-friendly restaurant meant the world to me.

Todd - I still laugh thinking about the restaurant in Washington DC that wouldn’t serve me and you politely asked, “Can’t you just make her a salad?”

Camille and Eva - Thanks for your concern and diligence when ordering safe take-out for me on those long nights of work during our client project.

Bev - My gratitude for the pep talk a few days after my diagnosis, while I was still in shock and sitting on the floor at a closed O’Hare airport with my raw carrots and a bottle of water.

University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center - I’ll always remember the welcome package that initially opened my eyes to the world of gluten-free foods!







Highlights of my restaurant experiences are thanks to the respective waiters, waitresses, managers, room service staff, owners and chefs from all over the world. You may never realize just how much you may have impacted someone's life, health and memories while you were preparing our safe foods, taking our orders and listening to our needs!

I hope that you, the reader, also experience similar benefits and gifts on your journey to health, adventure and travel. A small sampling of my most memorable eating experiences that are safe from gluten and all of my other allergen concerns include:

- Ristoro Di Lamole in Tuscany for surprising me with gluten-free pasta
- Walt Disney World's Innovation Kitchen in Orlando for my "Mickey" meals
- Christchurch Cathedral Café in New Zealand for my first soup and bread lunch
- Matteos Pizza in Tennessee for my first personalized delivery order
- Chesterfield Beer Festival in the UK for bartending and taste testing 16 gluten-free beers
- In-N-Out Burger for my protein burgers wrapped in lettuce
- Café Marley in Paris for my first main dish served with an amazing sauce
- Palacio Nazarenas in Cuzco, Peru for a fabulous 3-course meal
- Rotorua food stand in New Zealand for my first cake at an airport
- Il Bistro in Seattle for the first time I had three allergen-free dessert choices
- Gaucho Grill in London for delicious Argentinean dishes

I am also grateful for those amazing moments in time that can only be experienced outside your own home. Favorites that inspire me to explore new restaurants and places with friends and family around the world are the Enoteca in Montalcino, Rothschild Chateau and the Parisian cafés. I also remember those travel adventures in English-speaking destinations that are among the top of my list including the Ocean Spirit catamaran at the Great Barrier Reef, sunrise over the Grand Canyon, wine tasting in Martinborough New Zealand and my hideaways in Miami, Santa Monica and Sydney.

Even more challenging is safely eating in foreign-speaking countries, especially in cultures with different alphabets. Of course, more research, planning and education are required when you are on your own without the benefit of tour guides or translators. I will always cherish Paris, Egypt, Machu Picchu, sailing the Greek Isles, New Years in Florence, the Baltic Sea in Latvia and exploring both Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia. Experiencing local cultures, foreign cuisines and new restaurants are key and all part of the fun adventures even if it takes more effort and preparation!

In closing, I want to share some of my first-hand insights throughout my journey:

- The amount of hard work, adjustments and frustrations are worth it
- Recovery is definitely possible and doable—it just takes a lot of effort and determination
- You are in charge of your health and always listen to your body
- Learn something new every day
- What goes around, comes around
- You *can* safely eat out anywhere—just educate yourself, be prepared and communicate your needs
- Live each day to the fullest: work hard, play hard and most importantly, have fun!

