

## Margaret's Story

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"I was sick, sick, sick all the time and as one of 5 children in my family, I was singled out at home as dumb, stupid and the hypochondriac," says Margaret with a mixture of frustration, sadness and resolve.

Imagine spending your childhood, among the happiest years of your life, feeling this way. No one could figure out what was wrong. As a baby, Margaret, was extremely sensitive and cried a lot as a "colicky" kid. And after an extreme reaction to a TB test, she nearly spent time in an iron lung. At other points, doctors thought she was going deaf and losing her eye sight. She remembers vividly having the doctors stick pins all over her scalp for an electroencephalogram, a very frightening experience too.

And it didn't get better for Margaret as she entered school. Doctors knew there was a diet problem yet didn't know what to do to help her. In second grade, she was given egg nog each day in the afternoon to give her a boost of energy. She was so unfocused and out of sync; the school put her down a grade into her younger sister's class which was a nightmare for both girls.

Although Margaret was always looking for answers, her ill health continued into adulthood. Margaret married and had a lovely daughter, Samantha. While she was pregnant she only gained 12 lbs. and threw up nearly every day. In her 20's, she opened a catering business, Margaret Fearey Walsh, Inc. She then attended the Culinary Institute of Art in Hyde Park, New York to enhance her knowledge of classic French cooking. In 1980, her business was rated top catering company in Philadelphia. However, because she was so tired and depressed, and not thinking clearly, Margaret closed her business; shortly thereafter, her parents took Samantha to live with them. Margaret wasn't capable of caring for herself, let alone anyone else. This was devastating for all. The saddest part was that her parents thought Margaret was an unfit parent and never helped heal the relationship.

Picking herself up, Margaret then found a job as a manufacturer's rep for a frozen food broker, whose main product was breaded prepared foods. This job required that she taste the foods when she was presenting them to restaurants. Margaret became highly anemic: there was no color in her hands, no iron in her blood. This was overlooked by the doctors who thought Margaret had cancer of the intestines, and they performed unnecessary major surgery. It took two years to recover fully, the only medicine was to heat healthy food and it was all so different. Luckily, because of the operation, they discovered her damaged villi in her small intestine and found the celiac disease. The proper diagnosis was finally made, while Margaret was in her early thirties. Later, Margaret found in her grandmother's memoirs that she had lost her first son - Margaret's uncle - to pneumonia, complicated by a problem with his diet. That is how Margaret was able to trace which side of her family gave her the disease.

The relief of finally understanding what was wrong after all of these years was followed by the discovery of her dyslexia through a series of tests. Today, thanks to the advent of computers -- and a new diet -- Margaret has reclaimed her life. The albatross of uncertainty and ill health have been removed from her shoulders. She became an active member of a national celiac support group and served on their board for a number of years. Someday soon she plans to write a cookbook using the recipes from her catering business to create a gluten-free, "Easy Meals Cook Book".

Margaret now takes the newly diagnosed with celiac to different markets to shop and then teaches them to cook the gluten free way so they can get back on their feet right away. Her goal is to help them to lead normal, happy, healthy lives. "Because of my life experiences and training, I mean a lot to me to be able to help others. We have all suffered for so long" says Margaret.

Margaret has had breast cancer, which she feels has a direct connection to her years of undiagnosed and untreated celiac disease. Yet she remains undaunted. Margaret is the proud owner of Changing-Places Inc., a high end Organization and Relocation service in Northern California. Turning her difficulties into strengths, she takes nothing for granted and provides her clients with a laser-like focus unusual in the industry. Providing excellence is important to Margaret -- a commitment she delivers every day.

And that commitment extends to helping others. Margaret has declared, "My intention is to raise \$1 Million for celiac awareness and research in the next 5 years."