

## A Personal Profile

by Jeff Novick, Registered Dietitian at the McDougall Program

I have been interested in food and fitness for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest childhood



memories involve helping my grandmother prepare food from scratch, and learning about wrestling from my grandfather. As a child my two favorite TV shows were *Jack Lanne* and *The Galloping Gourmet* with Graham Kerr. When I was in grade school, I petitioned my school to let me become the first male to take Home Economics instead of Industrial Arts (or "Shop" as it was called). I wanted to learn about food and cooking, not metal and woodworking. Sports, specifically gymnastics, wrestling, and soccer were also my interests.

In 1973, I had my first experience with vegetarianism from the book *Love Your Body* by Viktoras P. Kulvinskis. He recommended a raw food vegan diet. My neighbor and I tore up a section of my parent's backyard to plant an organic garden, started growing sprouts, turned my father's garage into a gym, and went on a vegan diet. While we didn't stay with the diet for long; this was a jumping off point for me to begin to explore ideas about vegetarianism, meditation, yoga, and other alternative approaches to health.

Eventually, my interests led me to culinary school in 1981 where I received a degree in Culinary Arts and Food Service management from the State University of New York. Over the next few years, I worked in many restaurants around the country including as a Pastry Chef in a gourmet French restaurant in Grand Junction, Colorado, and as the chef of a natural foods restaurant in Syosset, New York.

My father was a butcher, as was his father, so my new ideas about vegetarianism early in my life were a real shock for my parents. They were concerned that these ideas were not safe and healthy. They wanted some "proof," but at that time most of the "science" was poorly written, and too many articles were from Eastern writers with hard to pronounce names. "Real evidence" on the safety and benefits of a vegan diet was lacking. (Time spent working in the butcher business with my father was eye opening, especially in terms of where food comes from and what can legally be put into food.)

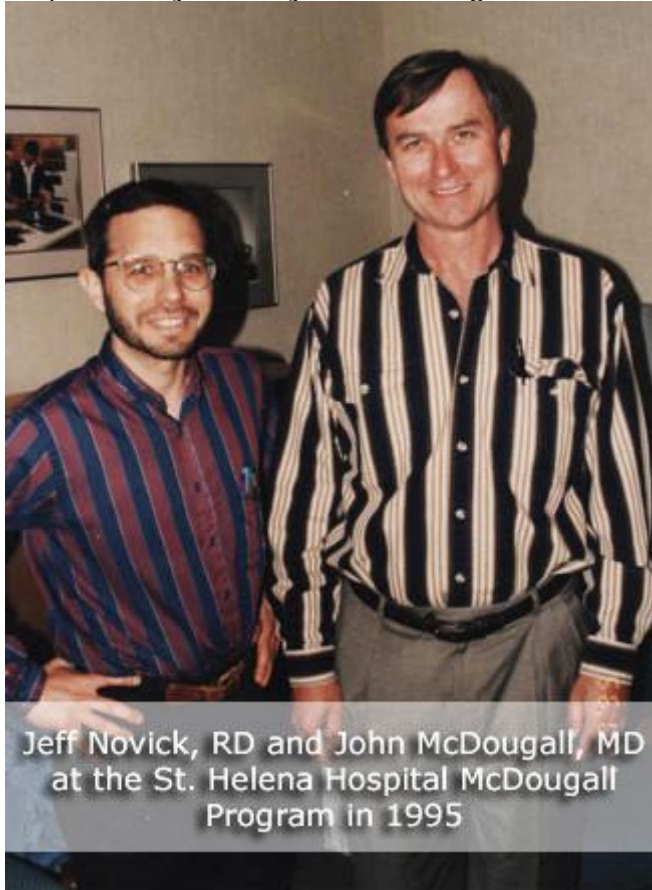
The real evidence finally arrived for me in 1983 with the publication of *The McDougall Plan*. Dr. McDougall's clear explanations of the science and exhaustive documentation were career changing. He uncovered many nutritional myths, including those persuasive ones about protein and calcium. After reading *The McDougall Plan* everything I had once been confused about nutrition and health made sense—I was freed to move forward, having both the knowledge of and the confidence in a properly designed vegan diet. I understood this was not an "alternative" approach, but rather a rational, safe, and sane way of eating to regain health. Of course, the first people I gave copies to were my parents.

In 1985, I left the restaurant industry and went to work as a Major Account Manager for Kraft Foods; eventually becoming a Supplemental Distribution Manager. At the same time, I was trying to spread the message about healthy eating. I wrote letters to the editors of the local papers and articles for the local co-op. I started teaching adult education classes and at the local community university program. In my spare time, I was running an organic food co-op out of my house, counseling clients, and taking several distance learning courses to further my education. Dr. McDougall was a real inspiration

to me at all times and I not only read all of his material, but attended conferences where he spoke. I was especially impressed with how he went back into the medical/health system to try to change it, instead of just criticizing it from the outside.

Soon, I realized that while my career with Kraft was financially successful for me, I was not happy. I was in conflict by working for a company that sold the same products that were causing most of America's health and weight problems. The enjoyment and self-satisfaction I received from helping others to change their diets made me realize my real passion. I decided to go back to school for a formal education in nutrition. In 1992 I left Kraft Foods to get university training—my goal was to get a degree.

As part of my senior year in undergraduate training at Indiana State University, I had to choose a "specialized" internship experience. When I submitted my proposal for the McDougall Program at St Helena Hospital in the Napa Valley, the internship supervisor asked if he was a "real doctor." Of course he was! Not only did I get to go, but also the University awarded me a scholarship to help with the expenses. In April/May of 1995 my dream to work with Dr. McDougall at his program came true. There I got to see for the first time the full implementation of proper nutrition in a clinical setting. I saw participants' blood pressures and cholesterols drop, and their health dramatically improve in less than 12 days. It was during these sessions that Dr. McDougall's study on his patients was accepted for publication. I remember feeling hope that finally the tide was changing. I applied for a position with Dr. McDougall, but none was available—so back to Indiana State University I went to pursue my graduate degree. Upon return, I was chosen to present the data I had collected to the Indiana State University graduate research conference.



Jeff Novick, RD and John McDougall, MD  
at the St. Helena Hospital McDougall  
Program in 1995

As a graduate student, I continued my community support groups and had the fortunate opportunity to meet the associate director of a local hospital. As a result of our meeting, and our shared interests in natural health and living, I was asked to create a nutrition curriculum for the family practice residents program which became my Masters Thesis. The project, known as *The*

*Nutrition Education Initiative*, was a wellness-based curriculum for the medical doctors, family practice residents, and medical students in the community, and featured vegan meals at each of the educational sessions. The project ran for almost 3 years. As a result of this project, and my other academic, professional, and community work, the Governor of Indiana awarded me the *Indiana State Public Health Excellence in Health Science Award* in 1997, and in 2003, Indiana State University awarded me the *Graduate-of-the-Last-Decade Award*.

In 1998 I received my graduate degree in Dietetics with a minor in exercise physiology. My first job was at the Pritikin Longevity Center in Florida. As the Director of Nutrition for Pritikin, over the next 10 years I was able to see first hand the impact of diet and lifestyle on thousands of people each year in a controlled residential setting. While the program was not vegetarian, the principles and guidelines were very similar to the McDougall Program. People threw away their medications and were cured of chronic ailments. In addition, the center was actively involved in documenting and publishing the results of their program and I was able to participate in both their ongoing research and their science advisory committee.

In 2005, Dr McDougall and I met up again at the annual North American Vegetarian Society meeting

and discussed again the possibility of working together in the near future. In 2006 I spoke at the McDougall Advanced Study Weekend program in Santa Rosa, California. The setting was impressive, but what moved me most was the intimacy and family feel of the program. With John, his wife and daughter, Mary and Heather McDougall, working together this was truly the McDougall Program.

In November of 2007, after almost 10 rewarding years with the Pritikin Program, I decided to seek other opportunities. In January of 2008 I formally joined the McDougall Program as their dietitian. I have never been more pleased with a career decision. In addition to my work with the McDougalls, I continue to speak and teach regularly. For example, this past year I lectured for the Florida Academy of Family Physicians, the Florida Cardiology Group, the University of Alabama Medical School, as well as many vegetarian groups and conferences around the United States. I also teach online classes in nutrition for the School of Health Sciences at Kaplan University (Online Learning). I serve as Director of Education for the Natural Health Association and maintain my own website and private practice, where I do nutrition and lifestyle coaching and medical nutrition therapy.

I facilitate a discussion forum at Dr McDougall's website, [www.drmcDougall.com](http://www.drmcDougall.com). Here anyone can ask questions and discuss health and nutrition issues. It is a very active forum with over 800 topics—I have personally made over 1700 posts.

I also facilitate a regular blog, free newsletter, and support forum at my own website at [www.JeffNovick.com](http://www.JeffNovick.com). People can also contact me at the National Health Association website at [www.healthscience.org](http://www.healthscience.org). I do personal consultations and coaching and am available for public speaking. Contact me [jeff@jeffnovick.com](mailto:jeff@jeffnovick.com)