



THE DIAGNOSIS

When were you diagnosed?

I was still in college and began suffering from a slew of unexplainable health problems. My mother who's a food chemist was also suffering with similar gastrointestinal issues, so she started to do some research and found out that our symptoms fell in line with Celiac Disease. Since Celiac is hereditary my mom got a biopsy, which was positive, and my blood test confirmed I was positive for Celiac too.

How did you know something was wrong?

You know in herbal healing they say your stomach is your second brain, so I knew something was wrong with my gut. I was chronically sick, including allergies and skin problems that I never had before. But mainly I didn't feel like my normal self, I was constantly bloated, and just didn't feel comfortable in my own skin.

How did the diagnosis change your life?

I had been around and loved food all my life, not to mention I was married to a chef, so to be told life as you know it will be swept out from underneath you, it was a shock to the system. So being diagnosed with Celiac changed my life wholly and completely.

Someone asked me a really interesting question the other day, they said, "Do you ever cheat and have a piece of bread?" I had to kind of laugh inside, because it's not about cheating, this is about getting deathly sick. Gluten-free living is a lifestyle, not a fad.

How did you get out of the victim mentality and say, okay, I'm going to use this for good?

I chose to look at it from a different angle, because I really wanted to have pleasure in my life when it came to food, it was always more about finding a way to maintain my lifestyle that I had before my diagnosis. And as my recipes matured and grew, so too did my ideologies and excitement about living the gluten-free lifestyle.

BLACKBIRD BAKERY

What was the impetus to creating gluten-free recipes?

The main reason I even started tinkering in the kitchen was all the gluten-free products on the market were so below par that I couldn't believe I was paying good money to put sand in my mouth. So, I set out to do something about it with a goal to create recipes and treats that make you forget you're eating gluten-free.

Had you ever imagined that you would be a cook?

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would become a chef, honestly, I thought I was going to be a starving poet.

But when all the pleasure you knew when it came to food is taken away, you're left with a tremendous sense of helplessness. I just remembering sitting on my kitchen floor utterly frustrated, crying and thinking to myself, "Is this really my life as I know it?"

Fast forward 8 years, by following my heart and my stomach, I'm now helping those with Celiac and similar autoimmune disorders overcome that sense of helplessness and become empowered. And that's way better than being a poet.

Tell us what consumers can expect from Blackbird Bakery goods?

Blackbird Bakery offers gourmet, gluten-free products. A firm believer in nutrients, I only use organic produce and dairy products, and because organic means you're buying locally, the flavor of the products are going to be better. I want to educate consumers' palate that they don't have to accept what's being put in front of them, they can push back and crave and deserve better.



You talked to me about how everything is really connected, you have a website, bakery, and share with your followers tips on how to live a totally gluten-free lifestyle... Talk a little about that...

My blog is living, loving and baking, because living gluten-free goes beyond food—it's a lifestyle. Every week, I update savory and sweet recipes, review gluten-free beauty products and immune-friendly home products, and talk about the global implications and the role the by-products of plastics are playing in the sharp rise in auto-immune disorders such, Autism, ADD, ADHD, Celiac and so many more.

ROLE OF GLUTEN AND PLASTICS IN OUR DIET

Why are we seeing an alarming rise in auto-immune disorders?

For the past 50 years, the chemicals leaching from plastic have been building up in our genetics, and that's why it's all coming to a head now.

Honestly, I think we're all in denial, because plastic has made our life so convenient, from Teflon cooking pans to plastic storage containers.

We need to eradicate plastic in our lives, because not only is it destroying our environment, it's destroying our bodies from the inside out! I tell my clients all the time to get rid of their Teflon pans, use parchment paper to wrap-up your kids' lunches, and use glass containers to store leftovers. These are small but significant steps average Americans can take to ensure the health and safety for themselves and their families.

You're a mom to 5-year old Leo, does he eat gluten-free?

Half and half, when Leo is with me he eats gluten-free and is well aware of why his mom has to eat a certain way, but when he's with his father, he eats like a regular kid. Though I do notice a difference in his behavior when he eats gluten-free, he tends to be much calmer and can sit down and concentrate for longer periods of time.

Do you find that surprising that gluten can have that huge of difference on a child's behavior?

Absolutely not, because the number one treatment for kids with autism and ADD/ADHD is a gluten-free diet.

Do you think everyone should eat gluten-free?

To eat gluten-free is not a radical idea. It's more about going back to our dietary bedrock, and incorporating grains that we've been eating for millennia, like—millet, sorghum, amaranth, quinoa, etc. Not only are they easier to digest, they are cheaper to produce.

And the evidence is mounting on the benefits of eating gluten-free. In fact, the American Cancer Society recently reached out to me to make donations for their annual fundraiser, because recent studies prove cancer patients on a gluten-free diet have a remarkably better chance of survival. The thinking is while your body is being attacked by cancer cells, a gluten-free diet, which requires less energy to digest, leaving your body with more energy to heal itself.

SHOPPING AND EATING GLUTEN-FREE

When being on a gluten-free diet, don't you just have to stay away from carbohydrate products, like bread and pasta?

No not necessarily, most processed foods have gluten, but a lot of companies won't list wheat as an ingredient, instead it will say modified food starch. So you have to read labels. For example, most people don't realize that Coca-Cola and Dr. Pepper's dark caramel color is derived from gluten.

What does that mean when I go grocery shopping?

As a rule thumb, you shop the perimeter of your grocery store, bypassing the processed, boxed foods. Now that there seems to be a consensus on what it means to live gluten-free, supermarkets including Wal-mart and Target, have designated sections that carry a bevy of gluten-free products, like rice flour, breads, crackers, pasta, even cookies. Of course, in my humble opinion, a lot of the gluten-free products leave something to be desired, especially if you have a sweet tooth.



Why do you think we've forgotten about these grains?

I think two reasons; first, up until recently it was difficult to find non-traditional grains, like quinoa, which in turn deterred people from seeking these grains out. Secondly, once the grain is out of circulation, then our imaginations become rusty on how to prepare and use them.

Thank heavens for the rise of organic food markets, like Whole Foods, because with their extended produce and bulk sections, I think Americans are starting to come around to all the delicious food adventures that lie ahead of them.

What's the most difficult part of maintaining a gluten-free diet?

Fiber. That's why I think it's so important for us to go back to complete protein grains, which have been in our diets for millennia.

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SPECIALIZING IN THE ART OF GLUTEN-FREE COOKING