

Some Cream With My Cholesterol

By Steven Lewis

Glancing ominously over his half-glasses, Dr. Gerber said, “Steve, your cholesterol level is *still* too high.”

My inner teenager slumped in abject failure. For more than a decade I had successfully eluded the doctor’s prescription pad and the heart-rending notion of taking a pill every day for the rest of my life. At each annual physical, I had solemnly promised to eat better and exercise more. Obviously, I hadn’t been good to my word.

The doc handed me a prescription. “And please fill it,” he said, proffering a cautionary tale about a former patient “generally in good health like you and with similarly high cholesterol readings...” who had been putting off the medication question for years. Of course, you know where this is going ... my LDL brother folded and slipped the small note into his breast pocket, but never actually made it to the pharmacy. Then some unspecified time later the unlucky or unwise sap dropped dead, face down in his lobster bisque.

I guess I should have been sitting there shuddering with intimations of my own mortality. Or you might think that I would have been anxious to hop down off the examining table and recommit myself to a cholesterol-free lifestyle. At the very least, I might have been grateful that the doctor had grabbed the invasive menace—and my attention--before I clogged all my arteries and fell to the pavement like a lump of chopped liver.

Not me.

I was menu planning. I pushed through the heavy medical office door, barely able to contain my glee, much less an urge to grab a light pole and dance like Gene Kelly. After wrestling for years to break the mystical 200 cholesterol level through various un-sustained, half-hearted commitments to jogging, biking, carrot sticks, sprouts, rice cakes, herbal potions and more dry turkey sandwiches than the USDA recommends for small countries, I was hungry for the magic pill. Freed from the psycho-sclerotic notion that natural remedies are best and that personal responsibility is the hallmark of good health, my unrequited love of mayonnaise, bacon, pastrami, egg salad, pulled pork, shrimp, crab, key lime pie, and mucus-producing dairy of all kinds had me drooling.

So, loaded for bear fat, or animal fat of any kind, I headed straight to the drug store to double-check with about potential side effects that the doctor might not have mentioned. And once satisfied that I was not trading food for other pleasures, I popped a tablet into my mouth and drove straight up to the Dallas Hot Weiners up in Saugerties for a cheese dog, curly fries and a large Dr. Pepper. And a big Ahhhh. And a cosmic Ohhhh.

As some of you might be aghast to imagine, with that chemical additive supposedly cleaning out my arteries like a daily can of Liquid Plumber, the following few months were much like the predictable period of sexual promiscuity normally associated with recently divorced men and women. I became the self-satisfied, waddling embodiment of the most

repugnant Wal-Mart YouTubes, able to chew massive empty calories while talking and walking ... and driving.

At the time, it was unclear how long that kind of wantonness could go on. Two years, it turned out.

Then, after some predictable indigestion headed north and I experienced a few breathless moments of what I feared was Redd Foxx's "Big One," I shifted into a course of what might be termed free-range moderation. I still enjoyed my occasional mayonnaise, bacon, pastrami, egg salad, pulled pork, shrimp, crab, key lime pie, and mucus-producing dairy of all kinds, but not every day. I balanced my hedonistic pleasures with all kinds of non-dairy, reduced-salt, gluten-free, sugar-free, taste-free food substitutes. And fifteen years later my cholesterol levels are still pretty good—and even the "moderate" weight gain can be partly explained by aging. I am 70, after all.

Maybe it's time to finally grow up for real and give up some of the more artery-clogging delights. Pretty much all the warranties are no longer valid.

Then again, maybe it's time to pick up my beloved Lucky Strikes again. Haven't had a smoke since June 2, 1977. Might be nice to have one with a glass of wine each day. Another after dinner.

Steve Lewis is a former Mentor at SUNY-Empire State College, a current member of the Sarah Lawrence Writing Institute faculty, and an active freelancer. His pub list ranges from the notable to the beyond obscure and includes The New York Times, Washington Post, LA Times, The Christian Science Monitor, Spirituality & Health, Ploughshares, Pulse, and a biblically long list of parenting magazines (7 kids, 16 grandkids). He is a columnist for Talking Writing and Literary Ombudsman for WritersReadOnline.com. His books include Zen and the Art of Fatherhood, The ABCs of Real Family Values, Fear and Loathing of Boca Raton, and a novel, Take This, published in 2015 by Codhill Press.

