

Introduction

It was 1972, in Chicago, and my husband and I made a bold and crazy decision to take our 10-speed bicycles to France and ride through the gorgeous vineyards of Bordeaux and Burgundy. We had no idea what we were getting into.

I decided I'd better "get in shape"—whatever that means—so one day I walked over to the park across from our apartment and went for a run. Only a few blocks, just to see how it felt.

I'll tell you how it felt. It was a near-death experience. My lungs nearly exploded. My heart was in my throat, the size of a honeydew. My legs—in complete shock—grew roots. I stumbled home and collapsed on my bed. I was out of breath, out of condition, and out of excuses: How could so little physical exercise make me feel like such a big lump of nothing good?

I somehow survived, loved that first bike trip to France, and came home with a bottomless curiosity to know more about my body and how to keep all its moving parts juiced and happy.

I've always been fascinated by the miracle that is the human body, how it works and plays. I grew up saying I wanted to be a doctor but never took a single pre-med course. After getting a Masters degree in journalism, my first job was in New York as a science writer for Medical World News. But at the time of my Doomsday running experience, I had a dream job at the Chicago Tribune, reviewing movies, theater, TV, and interviewing way too many Hollywood celebrities.

I was also writing feature stories on pretty much whatever interested me, which allowed me many trips to La-La Land in the '70s to research these new things called "holistic health" and "integrative medicine" and the "mind-body connection."

It was all happening in California. In Chicago, in 1976, yoga and yogurt were interchangeable terms and most people considered the mind-body connection another name for the neck.

After a few years of deeper exploration, including a five-part series on Pyramid Power, I went to Mike Argirion, the features editor at the Tribune, and pitched him on a new kind of medical column.

The traditional doctor columns were all about pills and pimples, headaches and hemorrhoids, but I wanted to talk to readers about fitness, wellness, injury prevention, stress reduction, smart eating, deep breathing, and a bunch of other subjects that now fit under the expanding and sustainable umbrella of "healthy lifestyle."

Back then, healthy lifestyle wasn't even a concept. Fitness was just beginning to creep into the consciousness of the nation, right up there with CB radio and needlepoint. Jane Fonda was in leg warmers, going for the burn, Jim Fixx was inspiring a running revolution, farmers markets were just for selling pigs and only tough guys belonged to gyms.

Argirion liked my idea. "Bring me some samples," he said, and immediately I reached out to Dr. David Bachman, team physician for the Chicago Bulls, a highly respected sports medicine doc. Smart, easy-going, open-minded.

"It's a column for people like me," I explained to him, "ordinary mortals who want to live healthier, happier lives and need some sound advice about being active and getting fit without damaging vital parts or giving up red wine."

David liked the idea, too, so we teamed up. I created and wrote the column, and David made sure we were giving out safe, sensible, up-to-date information. It started off in the Tribune's Outside section in September 1976 as a weekly Q&A column and I named it "Dr. Jock" (after Dr. Spock): "I'm a runner with knee pain. What do I do?" Or "How can I lose 10 pounds by Christmas?"

It was a hit in Chicago and soon after became a nationally syndicated column running in dozens of newspapers around the country. David and I did a book together, "Dear Dr. Jock: The People's Guide to Sports and Fitness" (published by E.P. Dutton), and after he moved his practice to the ski mountains of Colorado, I collaborated on the column with Dr. Mitchell Sheinkop, a competitive triathlete and another outstanding sports medicine expert in Chicago.

Meanwhile, I was becoming a sports medicine expert myself, journalistically speaking, going way beyond the 10,000 hours mark, researching for columns, interviewing doctors and scientists, reading books, taking courses, living the life, and giving lots of healthy lifestyle talks and workshops. In 1996, I became an ACE certified personal trainer, and then a certified Wellcoach many years later. And after 40 years writing what's become America's longest-running fitness column, I've never stopped being curious about what it means to live a vibrant, exciting, healthy, and happy life. (My latest discovery is the standup desk.)

A lot of what I've learned is in this book, 40 chapters with titles that sound like directives but are really just guidelines. If there's one thing I've learned for sure, it's you can't tell another person what to do.

Well, you can, but it doesn't work. It's not an effective way to help people change. And helping women and men and kids of all ages make positive, powerful changes in their lives is at the heart of "All Is Well: The Art {and Science} of Personal Well-Being."

Link Mind and Body. Live a Big, Juicy Life. Be Your Own Uncle Sam. Explore Endlessly. Think In Pictures. Mind Your Menus. Practice De-Aging. Live Long, Die Happy. Some essays will resonate. Others may sound like California dreaming. All are intended to help you discover what *you* personally value when it comes to living your best life, because that's the only way lifelong change is going to happen.

It's up to you, dear reader. I can inform, inspire, educate, amuse, cajole, and otherwise cheer you on, but when push comes to shove—two excellent ways to burn 100 calories—you're in charge of your own personal well-being. And that's the good news because the more you take charge, study up, and stay vigilant, the greater success you'll experience.

As for my successes over the years, and my failures, I am nothing but grateful. I eventually left that dream job at the Tribune to create and produce a nationally syndicated TV series on sports, fitness and adventure called "Energy Express." It ran in 120 cities, won two Emmys, was honored for excellence by the Women's Sports Foundation and NATPE (National Association of Television Programming Executives) and in the early 2000's, I decided to make Energy Express the name of the column too.

I've done many other things in my work life, including running a successful TV production company and having two plays produced, with a third one in the wings. I've performed on camera as the co-host of two TV series, including "Stay Tuned," a never took off rip-off of "Siskel & Ebert & the Movies" but with two TV critics. I am the founding chair of a life-changing nonprofit called Girls in the Game, and I still work as a relentless board member, helping girls get the healthy lifestyle training they need to become strong, powerful women. I was also the managing partner of a startup that staged the world's first Internet auction of independent films, and I wrote and exec produced a documentary in 1986 called "Adventure Travel in Israel."

I'll stop now.

The one true red thread that runs through everything I've done and believe in lives on in my ongoing column, and now, this book: Be active. Practice kindness. Eat real food. Live your best life. Be happy. Be grateful. Help others.

All is well.

—Marilynn Preston

