



## Considering the Errors of My Ways

The following week, as planned, Maurine and Carey met at Georgia's Country Kitchen for lunch. Georgia's Country Kitchen was one of Dallas' premier casual family-style dining restaurants. Family-owned and operated, they featured daily home-cooked country breakfast, lunch, and dinner meals. The restaurant was ten minutes from Methodist Memorial Hospital.

"What are you gonna eat today, Carey?" Maurine asked, reviewing the menu.

"I think I'm gonna try the barbecue chicken. They have a three-meat special for \$8.99 with two sides, but I think I'm gonna get the one-meat entrée for \$7.49," Carey said.

"Me, too — even though the better buy is with the three-meat special. I'm gonna get the brisket with macaroni and cheese and potato salad," Maurine said.

"I think I'll have the broccoli rice casserole and mustard greens," Carey said.

"Sounds good," Maurine replied.



Moments later, Maurine and Carey's server came and took their orders. After fifteen minutes of idle chitchat, their food arrived. Continuing their discussions, they enjoyed their delicious choices, along with soda and tea.

"Ever since last week, I've been thinking about our conversation at Beth's funeral, particularly what we said about cancer," Maurine said. "Thinking about Bobby and his question about what causes breast cancer made me take a look at my eating habits. His father mentioned the most common reason: family history. A woman whose mother, sister, aunt, or daughter has had breast cancer is more likely to get it herself. Also, as women get older, they're more at risk for breast cancer. Diet and lifestyle choices, along with smoking, eating high fat diets, drinking alcohol, and not getting enough exercise, are all factors, and the environment can contribute to it, as well."

"Aside from age, I definitely fall into the category of diet and lifestyle choices. I eat foods high in fats and don't exercise. I love to eat — as you can see by my plate — and that's probably gonna be my downfall," Carey said.

"Carey, you're dousing those greens with a lot of salt and hot sauce. That's a bad habit I have: adding salt before tasting my food. The greens are probably salty enough; Georgia only uses salt pork," Maurine commented.

"You're right; I should have tasted my food first," Carey said, continuing with the conversation. "I do think you have to exhibit some control over the kinds of foods you eat. That's the problem with most of us — we refuse to deny ourselves any of the foods that can be harmful down the road."

"You're absolutely right about that; we refuse to impose any restrictions. What we're really saying is, 'I'm gonna enjoy myself the best way I know how.' Unfortunately, that's usually through unhealthy eating," Maurine stated.

"Unfortunately," Carey agreed.

"Recognizing that there's a genetic connection to cancer, Beth's daughter, Lorraine, has gone to great lengths to overhaul her unhealthy habits. She avoids the traditional foods and exercises regularly," Maurine shared. "I read an article

the other day that said diet and nutrition appear to be factors in a large percentage of women's cancers, men's cancers, and cardiovascular diseases. The author, who's a doctor, recommended that we reduce our intake of fat, red meat, smoked meats, and those preserved by nitrites, and eliminate white sugars from our diets. White flour products and soft drinks are harmful, too. He said soft drinks alone can cause many health problems because of the acidity, caffeine, and sugar."

"What do you mean 'acidity?'" Carey asked.

"Dark-colored sodas like the one you're drinking have phosphoric acid, which some experts believe may interfere with the body's ability to use calcium, leading to osteoporosis for women and the softening of the teeth and bones. Phosphoric acid also neutralizes the hydrochloric acid in your stomach, which can interfere with digestion, making it difficult for your body to utilize nutrients."

Carey picked up her cola and started to sip, admitting her addiction. "That's interesting, because I drink at least four cans of soda a day."

"I've cut my intake down to only one soda a day. After reading about the phosphoric acid and realizing how much sugar I was getting just from soda, I figured I'd better start reducing my intake. Did you know that one 12-ounce can contains anywhere from thirty-nine to fifty grams of sugar?" Maurine stated. "I'd started buying the 20-ounce bottles because of the better prices, and sometimes the 24-ounces if they were better deals. It's a proven fact that sugar increases insulin levels, which in turn facilitates the likelihood of developing diabetes and other related health concerns."

"That's interesting," Carey commented. "You know all that research can be biased, though, Maurine."

"Maybe so, but I still decided to keep my soda consumption low," Maurine replied.

"Sometimes I drink the diet sodas," Carey said. "Are those better, in your opinion?"

"Regular sodas have the high-fructose corn syrup, and most diet sodas have aspartame. Once again, according to



researchers, there are numerous side effects associated with aspartame consumption. I've read that some side effects include brain tumors, birth defects, diabetes, emotional disorders, and seizures."

"Emotional disorders? That's really interesting. My cousin often complains about her boss at work. Apparently, the lady has erratic mood swings on a daily basis. According to my cousin, she drinks diet sodas all day, one behind the other, and I wonder if that could have something to do with her behavior. My cousin says that she's calm and accommodating in the mornings, but by the afternoon she's mean and disrespectful," Carey laughed. "I'm gonna tell my cousin that her behavior may be due to the diet sodas; maybe then they can get the lady to drink something else."

Maurine began to laugh. "Who knows? Nowadays, researchers, scientists, and health organizations say most of what we eat has harmful side effects. As far as the aspartame, its side effects haven't been validated by scientific studies. I just know I wanted to make some changes," Maurine stated. "If, for no other reason, I wanted to reduce my consumption after I was diagnosed with high blood pressure. According to my doctor, caffeine increases your heart rate and elevates your blood pressure, which can contribute to the development of heart disease. Like you, I was drinking about four sodas a day...I'm sure between the sodas and other unhealthy habits I was slowly killing myself."

"You're down to one soda a day? That's good," Carey responded, taking another sip. "I don't think I could do it."

"Sure you can! Even if I ate healthier, my doctor says caffeine blocks the absorption of some nutrients and can cause the excretion of not only calcium but also other essential minerals like magnesium, potassium, and iron in our urine. Instead of the vital minerals being stored in my body, the caffeine prompts them to make an untimely exit — one that can be harmful to my body's preservation efforts. When I took into consideration the potential impact of both phosphoric acid and caffeine, I knew I needed to make some changes. If

we don't know anything else, we know how vital calcium is and that the loss of it leads to an increased risk of osteoporosis. And with the diet sodas, considering the possible impact of the aspartame, there's a triple whammy effect."

"Osteoporosis is really a debilitating disease. Working as an occupational therapist, I know you've seen a lot of it," Carey said.

"I have a patient with a broken hip bone that's forced her into a life of dependence since she's no longer able to walk on her own. I have other patients with spinal and vertebral fractures that have severe back pain, loss of height, and deformity. When you really think about it, all we need is a sufficient intake of calcium and bone-strengthening exercises," Maurine said, eating her macaroni and cheese.

"I recently heard a news report that suggested coffee has significant health benefits. Studies linked coffee consumption to lower occurrences of certain cancers and chronic diseases, lower risk for developing Type II diabetes, and added endurance during physical workouts. Researchers are saying that regular and decaffeinated coffee contain significant amounts of antioxidants, substances that have the potential to protect cells from the damage caused by free radicals."

Looking down at her plate, realizing that she had neglected to get some green vegetables, Maurine shared her thoughts on the subject. "It just goes back to whose research you believe. I tried to explain free radicals to a church member the other day when I told her about Beth's death."

"What did you tell her about free radicals?" Casey asked.

"I tried to keep it as simple as possible. You almost have to go back to our chemistry class and talk about atoms, nucleus, neutrons, protons, and electrons, not to mention the connection between molecules and free radicals. The main thing I wanted to stress was that our bodies have free radicals, but it's the ones outside our bodies, the ones that are inside insect killers, cigarette smoke, gasoline fumes, and air pollution that can cause us to experience health problems," Maurine stated.