

# NEWSLINE

## NO/AIDS TASK FORCE

VOLUME SEVEN, NUMBER EIGHT

AUGUST 1992

### PWA FINDS RELIEF AND NEW HOPE THROUGH NUTRITIONAL COUNSELING

I have a story to tell. The reason for telling my story and using my name instead of telling it as an anonymous case study is that many Newline readers know me and hopefully want to know my story. My hope is that doing this will be both a benefit to others and a freeing experience for me.

I've known for several years that I am HIV-positive. For the past two years my T-cells have been well below 100, but I have had no opportunistic infections. I have suffered extremely debilitating diarrhea and my weight has fallen from 145 pounds to 125. Over those two years, I've seen three G-I specialists and four infectious disease specialists, and had countless tests, many of which were less than pleasant. They all came up with the same diagnosis: "Must be HIV infection of the gut — take prescription medication to help control the diarrhea and be sure to get enough calories to counteract the weight loss."

Well, I became an anti-diarrheal drug junkie — six to eight pills a day, further exacerbating the existing G-I problems. I was told by friends who are physicians to drink Pedialite after particularly bad bouts to help prevent dehydration. I began to feel weak and tired all of the time, partly because my most severe bouts were at night so my sleep was constantly interrupted.

The low point came on May 5, after two hours of the worst cramps and diarrhea I had ever experienced.

Milton Seiler, my primary care physician, checked me into Southern Baptist Hospital's emergency room for tests and observation. Fortunately, I was able to convince my friend Mit to let me go home without an overnight stay.



Robert Lee

From a bad experience came growth. For the first time it was me in that hospital gown, in that hospital bed and wearing a plastic bracelet with my name on it, instead of one of the many friends I have visited over the years. I really had to face my denial of death for the first time. This has been a liberating experience. It motivated me to take care of old business which should have been done years ago: a new will and

medical directive. It brought me closer to my significant other and most importantly brought me the next day to Diana Callaway, my dietitian/nutritionist and new friend. Her conclusion was that I suffered from fat malabsorption. Though I was consuming many calories a day, I was starving to death! Diana immediately restructured my diet, greatly reducing my fat intake. She also found a new product called Alitraq (Ross Lab), which contains glutamine to help repair the lining of the gut, and is specifically designed for patients with stressed G-I function. Within one week the diarrhea lessened. Within two weeks it was down to two or three bouts a week. I have not gained any weight because I am now in a phase of HIV infection called "wasting syndrome" which my physician is trying to reverse. I may not live any longer without diarrhea, but while I'm here I'm healthier, happier and have a lot more free time on my hands now that I'm not spending so many hours in the bathroom.

I know this is just one story, but I feel in my heart for the first time in several years that I may just survive this HIV infection. I'd like for all of you reading this to survive along with me. ■

— by Robert Lee

*Editor's note: Thanks to Robert Lee's interest and funding, dietitian Diana Callaway is helping NO/AIDS Task Force Staff to better address the special nutritional concerns of clients with AIDS and HIV. See related story on page 4.*