

Larry Groce, a one-hit-wonder singer and songwriter, hit No. 9 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1976 with the song, "Junk Food Junkie."

Sing along if you remember the lyrics:

You know I love that organic cooking

I always ask for more

And they call me Mr. Natural

On down to the health-food store

I only eat good sea salt

White sugar don't touch my lips

And my friends is always

Begging me to take them

On macrobiotic trips.

Yes, they are.

Here it is 30 years later, and it seems as if Groce could have been singing about the changes I'm trying to make. A few weeks ago I began meeting with Jill Sherman Skeem, a certified macrobiotic health counselor in Twin Falls and graduate of the Strengthening Health Institute in Philadelphia. The idea was that I would write a series of stories for the *Times-News* about this experience.

My biggest lesson, so far, has simply been learning to eat more slowly. And I quickly learned that the very same oatmeal I've fixed for years in a microwave and eaten in a hurry tastes better when it is cooked longer on the stove top. I also like the walnuts that Jill suggested I mix in with the oatmeal instead of raisins. Probably the biggest surprise so far is that I haven't disliked any of the food I've fixed using Jill's recipes or suggestions. My wife, Nancy, has liked most of it, too. Some of things we have tried have included mashed yams, sautéed mixed vegetables, tofu "egg salad" sandwiches and couscous with vegetables.

After three trips to the grocery store – one with Jill, one by myself, and one with Nancy – I have learned that some check-out clerks aren't used to customers who fill their carts with produce and bulk foods – items from parts of the store where I haven't spent much time or money in the past. Last week, during a trip to Boise, I even stopped at the Boise Co-op – Ground Zero when it comes to finding Jill-approved places to buy groceries.

I reached another conclusion after being invited to Jill's house for lunch and watching her cook.

She devotes a lot more time and energy to preparing food than anyone else I know. And I suspect this will challenge me until all of this becomes more of a habit.

Some of you have helped more than you probably realized. Thank you for the kind e-mails, phone calls and greetings with encouragement. One reader sent an e-mail the day I wrote about this for the first time. She wanted to know why it is better to walk outside instead of working out inside – something else I'm also trying to do on a more regular basis.

Here is what Jill said when I asked her about it: "Walking outside is better because of the exchange of air in the body, and the walking balances the right and left sides of the body. The right lung with the left lung, the ascending colon with the descending colon. The head with the body."

Now, back to Groce and the song he says he wrote in a Volkswagen bus as he drove from West Virginia to a gig at a coffee house in Boston. If you remember the song, you know old Mr. Natural shared a dark secret with many of the rest of us. His refrain tells a story that, with your support, can become a part of my past:

*Yeah, in the daytime I'm Mr. Natural
Just as healthy as I can be
But at night I'm a junk-food junkie
Good lord have pity on me.*