



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 696, Interview with Ted & Carol Barnett

Jasmin Singer: Welcome to Our Hen House, Carol, and Ted.

Ted Barnett: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Carol Barnett: Thanks for having us.

Jasmin: Ted, should I call you Dr. Barnett or Ted or Dr. Ted, or should I alternate? *laughs*

Ted: You can call me Dr. Veggie. That's what a lot of people call me.

Jasmin: Really? They call you Dr. Veggie?

Ted: Yeah, or you can call me Ted. It doesn't matter.

Jasmin: I love it. I like Dr. Veggie!

Ted: My license plate is Dr. Veggie.

Jasmin: Oh, really? Interesting.

I'm so happy you're both here. You are many, many things; a Power Couple is just one of them.

I have so many questions for you. I'd love to start with- what is Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute?

Ted: Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute is an organization that we founded back in 2015 so that we could teach plant-based nutrition to the Rochester area.

And since then, it has grown to the point where we're now teaching plant-based nutrition to the world.

We've had people from 44 states take our programs. We've had people from a number of different countries, including England, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Greece, Mexico...

Jasmin: Wow, that's amazing.

Ted: We teach plant-based nutrition, but we're also doing medical research, and we're trying to march into the belly of the beast because we think that plant-based nutrition is not only the best for the animals and the planet, but also the best for human health.

But for whatever reason, the healthcare system has not adopted that yet.

Jasmin: Not yet, but the night's still young. Maybe after we hear this interview.

So when you say the belly of the beast, what is that? What is the beast?

Ted: Well, the beast is the healthcare system, and what a mess it is. Raise your hand if you think we have a great healthcare system.

You don't get a lot of people in the room who raise their hands when we ask that question. We spend twice as much on healthcare as any other country, and we don't have the best outcomes. We don't have the best life expectancy, and we certainly don't have the best satisfaction. We have a lot of people suffering from chronic disease.

Jasmin: So, how did things change for the Institute during the pandemic for you? It sounds like it might have actually opened up some things for you.

Carol: Well, I think it was the classic cloud with a silver lining. Everybody was kind of blindsided by COVID. But after just a moment, we realized we had to pivot somehow.

I think we had just finished a Jumpstart. And we were kind of caught in the headlights, and then we thought, "Well, we really should try to do this online."

And we had spent the previous year or so trying to figure out how we were going to scale the jumpstart, how we were going to take it to larger and larger numbers of people.

And we were, at that point, thinking about interviewing medical practices and vetting them to see if they could run Jumpstart, if they could be our partners, if we could license Jumpstart to them. And it all seemed pretty daunting and very labor intensive. And, we weren't quite sure how to proceed.

Then we realized that if we went on Zoom and gave Jumpstart, scaling was still necessary, but it was a very different thing and more easy to imagine. And we started from there. I think we might have missed one month and then went into Jumpstart on a monthly basis again in April of 2020.

And we've even doubled up a few months, I think we had our 50th jumpstart last fall.

Jasmin: Wow! Wow, that's amazing.

Ted: We run it every month, and we get somewhere between 40 and 60 people who sign up. So we've reached 1700 people, who've actually gone through the 15-day Whole Food, Plant-Based Jumpstart.

Jasmin: So I was just gonna ask, what is it? Tell us about it because it does seem like it's the heart and soul of the Institute. So what is the Jumpstart program?

Ted: Well, we have a big heart, a big soul, but that's kind of what we focus... that's how we try to bring people on board, through the 15-day Jumpstart and basically, usually the first weekend of every month, we take a new cohort through this 15-day odyssey.

I like to think of it as some kind of nature tour where you're getting on a ship with a bunch of other people. And we basically ask people to make a big change all at once. You know, there are different approaches to helping people change their diet.

One is this slow incremental one, which I think is torture, and you lose people because they don't see the benefit right away. Whereas when you have people jump in feet first, just do the whole thing, not only do they adapt surprisingly quickly, but they also see the benefits very quickly in a way that's very self-reinforcing.

So we get labs drawn just before they start, and labs drawn right after they're done, and so they can see, "Oh my goodness, I didn't have any idea that my cholesterol could actually drop 100 points in two weeks," but it did.

Our record cholesterol drop is over 200 points. I can still remember this one woman whose total cholesterol was 299, and on day 15, it was 149. It dropped 150 points.

You know, we're all in shock when this happens, but we're not surprised anymore. But other things happen. Blood sugar gets under control. So all these things happen, and people feel better. Honestly, that's the big thing.

Like we have people who come because they want to get their blood sugar under control or their cholesterol under control, and they tell us on day five, "Gee, my joints aren't bothering me. I didn't even know my joints were hurting, but I'm jumping out of bed in the morning now."

So you get this very rapid, positive feedback loop.

Jasmin: I can imagine. I mean, you're probably bringing in people who are used to the standard American diet. Is that right? Or do you feel like you're bringing in people who have been sort of tinkering with plant-based eating, and then they're like, "Oh, there's this program I'm gonna try." Who is your clientele?

Ted: Well, that's an interesting question. We get both.

Carol: Yeah, we get both. What did we just discover? That women in their fifties, sixties, and seventies are our biggest demographic. I think it's about 60 to 40, something like that, women to men.

There are a few people who have been vegan but figured that that was enough to be vegan, and they didn't have to really pay attention to anything else, any other choices within being vegan. And some of them had health scares.

But I think most people are eating a standard American diet, or they've tried plant-based, and they just haven't managed to do that. You know, they've dabbled and, and they want the community. So often, they say to us that they really want to get together with other people and resonate with other people in a community.

Jasmin: Yeah, especially during COVID...

Carol: That's really what we have to offer.

Jasmin: Yeah. People were just so, so thirsty for that. And I feel like COVID sort of broke open this thing that we all needed anyway. It just gave us an excuse to say, “We need community. We can't do this without community.”

I went vegan 19 years ago, and I think about those days. I was thrust into a community immediately. I was living in New York City. There were all of these people who were just like ready to show me everything!

I know my wife went vegan 30 years ago, and she was living on her own in San Francisco, like reconstituting soy milk powder and TVP, you know, with no community. I think some people can succeed without it. Some people need it. I needed it.

What do you think? What role does community play?

Carol: Well, you know, in anticipating this interview, I was thinking, “Well, what took me so long?” because I was kind of on the fringes for really almost decades before Ted and I decided to become vegan. So that would've been in the late seventies and eighties.

And I think it's that if you had the idea presented to you, there was very little else. There weren't any cookbooks. There weren't any role models or societies, not many resources. There wasn't the internet. So there was really nothing to grab hold of. So I can think of incidents, episodes, where the idea was floated and, but there was nothing else there to grab onto.

And so it was the water on the stone, you know, those episodes had their effect, and they built up. But, I like to think that people who get introduced to the idea of veganism today, at least have the opportunity to actually go to the change much more quickly because there's so much more at their disposal, so much more available. I hope.

Jasmin: Yeah, I think so, for sure. What do you think about the documentaries alone? I'm just curious about your opinion. Like, *What the Health* and *The Game Changers* and *Forks Over Knives* and all of that. Tell me your thoughts on how documentaries have changed the world for vegans and vegan-to-be-s.

Ted: Wow. Well, we've seen a lot of the documentaries come along. I think they're huge now. We recommend them all the time. I guess the first big documentary was what? *Forks Over Knives*, Carol? Or...

Carol: Oh, what about *Peaceable Kingdom*?

Ted: Oh, *Peaceable Kingdom* came before that.

Carol: That's right. Yeah. I remember seeing a rough cut of *Peaceable Kingdom*. Was that in maybe 2000?

Jasmin: It was 2004. Well, I think it came out in 2004. Because that's when I went vegan.

Carol: I remember sitting and watching that and thinking, "I'm gonna have a heart attack watching this." *laughs*

It was so awful, you know? It was so awful to see those things and yet so important to see them and bear witness to them.

And, it's interesting that at least before, in those early days, there were a few at least vegetarian cookbooks and even a few vegan cookbooks, but I don't think there were any films like that until maybe even after we made the decision to be vegan. I remember seeing *Witness* at Farm Sanctuary when it was first brought out, and, you just can't...the impact of those films is so huge.

Jasmin: Really is.

Carol: And they're hard to watch, but if you want other people to watch them, you have to be willing to watch them together with them, I think.

Jasmin: Definitely.

I remember when I was in Europe, like in 2019, right before the pandemic, the end of 2019. I was in Wales specifically.

I was waiting on line to get a ticket for the subway, and there were these guys behind me talking about *Game Changers*, and I turned around like the freaky American, like, "Hi, I'm sorry, I was just listening to you. And I just..." And they were like, "Okay, all right. Chill out, you American." But I was so excited because I was like, how has veganism become this?

So all right, getting back to your program, you recommend a telehealth visit prior to starting the Jumpstart program with Plant-based Telehealth. So tell me what that entails, and what are the costs for both the telehealth visit and the program itself?

Ted: Sure. So, we actually recommend a visit with *a* provider before you start. If you don't happen to have a local doctor who is sympathetic to what you're trying to accomplish, then we do recommend Plant-based Telehealth. And they're a great organization. One of the founding members was Dr. Michael Klaper, who has been vegan since...you know, I consider him to be the Moses of the vegan movement.

But we recommend that you see your doctor before, for one thing, because you want to get your labs drawn because you wanna have a baseline. And then you go through the 15-day Jumpstart, and then you see your provider again.

And that may be Plant-based Telehealth, or maybe your own local physician. Either way, it's fine. It's great, though, if you're in a place where you don't have a doctor who's sympathetic, then you can go with Plant-based Telehealth. Not covered by insurance right now. If you do it with a package with us, it's about five or \$600.

Because we charge 299, but if your doctor refers you, then you get a hundred dollars off. There are several hundred doctors now around the country who regularly refer us patients. And if the patient has a referral, they get a hundred dollars off.

Carol: I think it's important to emphasize that people don't have to see a doctor before and after, and they don't have to get tested.

We like them to do that because it is conducive to everybody's health to have... especially people who are on medications. Sometimes their medications need adjustment, even for reasons of safety and certainly for reasons of the effectiveness of the meds, if their need for insulin drops, or their need for blood pressure meds drops.

We want people to go vegan, and sometimes people don't have a doctor, or they don't have a great relationship with their doctor. They don't need to do that. They can self-prescribe, by which I just mean they can sign up and go.

We like to get results because then we're able to publish our studies and then we're able to get more credibility and more doctors referring and more good reputation and more Jumpstarts. But the goal is more Jumpstarts. So for the individual person who's thinking of doing it, they can just take it. And we just want as many people to take it for any...all reasons to take Jumpstart are good reasons, just like all reasons to be vegan are good reasons.

Jasmin: That's so well said! Go ahead, Dr. Veggie.

Ted: Sure, sure. So people can just go to our website and just sign up on their own. If you just Google Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute, you'll find it in an instant. But Carol's right, you don't have to see your doctor. But she also pointed out that we really think it's important to publish.

And you remember early on, I said we are trying to march into the belly of the beast. So one of the arguments that we always get is, "Well, where are the studies that prove that what you're doing is right?"

There are plenty of studies actually out there that people just choose to ignore, to be perfectly honest. But we've published at least three times about the Jumpstart itself and the organization itself. We've published a few more articles beyond the ones that were just about Jumpstart. So we consider ourselves to be academic in that sense. We have Dr. Susan Friedman, who's a professor at the University of Rochester, a professor of Medicine, and she loves to publish.

She was the lead author on...there was a white paper produced about healthy aging from the American Geriatric Society, AGS, and she was lead author on that. And so she's just constantly looking for different ways that we can publish. And that's great. And that's one of the reasons we really like to get numbers from people because everybody gets entered into our HIPAA-compliant database so that we can then go back and examine our data.

Oh, one thing that's kind of cool is, you know, we went two years before the pandemic, right? And we had about 400 people do the Jumpstart then. And our initial data were published on those 400 people. Well, then we pivoted and went to virtual on Zoom, and it's seven Zoom visits. It's 11 hours together as a group, plus all this time on the Google Classroom.

And we analyzed our results again a few months ago. And the results after the pandemic are exactly the same. I mean, a tiny bit better, actually, but basically the same.

Jasmin: Wow, that's fascinating.

Ted: Yeah, amazing. We loved it.

Jasmin: Yeah. So how do you encourage people to stick with it for the long haul? And I'm asking this on behalf of all of my listeners.

I'm sure that there are people who are listening to this who will want to take the Jumpstart program. But beyond that, I think a lot of people are curious how they can advocate for veganism or a plant-based lifestyle to their family, their colleagues, especially beyond Veganuary.

Not that I'm dissing Veganuary; I think it's amazing, but like how do you keep people in it for the long run?

Carol: We support them. That's what we're really working on now because we have this growing group of people who are what we call alumni, and we have a monthly meeting, and we have other programs like, well, it used to be called CHIP, the Pivio program and the LIFT program.

But we're really developing our alumni program because people love that. We meet once a month, and we're gonna start to have more monthly meetings. We have a lot of people who want to volunteer, so we're trying to think of ways to leverage them or use them to get even more people involved on a continuing basis.

But you're right because I think one of the great things about being vegan is that time is on your side. I mean, when you first make the decision, your friends and your family give you a hard time, and they really need to see that you stick with it, and if they're decent people of goodwill, they're gonna stop giving you a hard time at least.

And then the next thing you know, they're asking you how to do it. So you've gotta stick with it long enough that the power of your example can actually make an impact on them. It's not going to happen overnight, but, like I say, most good people, they see you being vegan month after month, they start to accept it and even embrace it.

So, that's our next frontier is to help people stay with it. Yes, it is a good thing to have people be vegan even for one meal, but persistence, longevity, that's the real challenge.

Ted: But also in response to that, the example that people see during the two weeks...and Carol's right. We do have some longer programs that go on for 12 weeks, like the CHIP program, but they know that during those two weeks, these amazing things happened. And they know that if they wander off the path, all they have to do is go back to where they were, and they can get those amazing things to happen again.

So, yes, we do offer continuing support. We've had this alumni program for years now. Carol's calling it a frontier, but I mean, we've really been doing it for a long time, but we are definitely refining it now because that's always the complaint that you get from people in the healthcare system. "Well, you can make them do that for now. What's gonna happen in a year from now?"

And the response to that is, "Well, how many people stay on their medication for a whole year?" Right? So it's not like the medical system has this incredibly great track record for longevity for what their treatments are. And I'm speaking as somebody who actually makes my living in the healthcare system, right?

I'm an interventional radiologist. I don't do as much interventional radiology now. The last few years, I've been mostly doing women's imaging. I do a lot of mammograms, I do a lot of breast biopsies, and things like that. But I don't think for a minute that those are as helpful to people's overall health (as) what we're doing with Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute, which is really getting to the underlying causes of disease, including cancer, actually.

It's not just diabetes and heart disease and fatty liver disease and all these other metabolic syndrome things, but it's also cancer, believe it or not. And we know this from...we look at colon cancer and the reproductive cancers; they're all related to diet.

Jasmin: So, like, A. I agree with you, obviously, but B, we also don't want to position veganism, and I'm saying veganism, specifically, we don't want to position it as like a cure-all, you know?

What's that book? Like *Vegans Also Die*, or *Vegans Croak As Well*, right?

So speak to that. And you know, I'm sure this isn't something that comes up a lot when you're doing interviews because you're usually doing interviews to, like, the general public, and we're talking to a group of vegans.

So how do you address that? How do you address the fact that vegans...I've had many friends who are vegan get cancer and die, and I had one in particular who had leukemia, and she was actually a raw foodist for like 30 years. And I know that she really struggled with feeling like she was letting people down and feeling like she wasn't a good advertisement for a plant-based lifestyle, for raw foodism, in particular.

And I just was like, "You might have gotten this sick and been dying like 20 years ago. Maybe your veganism kept you alive for an extra couple of decades."

So, can you speak to that, Dr. Ted “Veggie” Barnett?

Ted: Sure. So all you're ever really doing in life is changing the odds of things, right?

Very rarely is it a zero or a one. And then, of course, there are different levels of veganism. So you can be a junk food vegan, right? And we talk about this all the time in our programs. You can live on chips and soda, and then you're a vegan, right? You can live on Oreos, right? But I don't think anybody would argue that that's a healthy diet.

And we certainly see people who have been vegan for a long time actually come through our programs, and they say, “Wow, this has really changed me because I never was doing what you are suggesting.” Which is oil-free, which is avoiding processed food.

So there's different...you know, there's vegan, and there's vegan. So if you could see my hands right now there's a really big circle which is vegan, which is basically just no animal products. Our circle is much smaller.

It's this little circle inside of a bigger circle. But since the big circle is infinite, the little circle is also infinite, just doesn't look as big. But it's basically eating healthy vegan. So no processed food, no oil. And it makes a huge difference. It really does.

Carol: I just want to jump in here and say that the book is, *Even Vegans Die*.

Jasmin: You didn't like my version?

Carol: I like *Even Vegans Croak*; that's good too. It's by Patti Breitman and Carol Adams, and Ginny Messina. And I'm not sure which order the names come, but I might have gotten that wrong. Yeah. But I really like that because it gets to the heart of why we do what we do.

You know, people talk about the why, and I think for us, the why does have to do with values. It doesn't have to do with selfishness, although I don't think it's selfish to want to be healthy. I mean, it may be in some sense. But the thing I love about being vegan is there are no bad reasons, and I love anybody who's vegan for any reason. That's why I love what I...my heart is with running the Rochester Area Vegan Society because you get people who are there for veganism, whether it's for their health or whether it's for the animals or for the planet, or for spirituality, for the environment, and there are only good reasons.

And it, you just feel this immediate connection with somebody who's made that decision. But, one of the things that I think that we've done with Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute is we've gone with our strengths. I mean, I think people have to use what they have, right? Like you see celebrities endorsing veganism, and you think that doesn't make them qualified to recommend it, but it's still the right thing to do.

And so if it persuades somebody to at least try it, that's a good thing. So you use what you have. I mean, for decades, we've run the Rochester Area Vegan Society, and it's so close to our hearts. We love it, but like so many people, we want to take it to the next level. And so we used what we had, which was basically Dr. Veggie! *laughs*

Ted has medical credentials, and he gave us this great lever, I think, to get people to try it for health and medical reasons and to kind of have the interface between the values. We do venture to introduce people to the ethical and the environmental benefits after they've tried it and they've seen the benefits in their own health.

So we like to think we kind of bridge both worlds, but I don't think we could do what we do if Ted...well, we couldn't if Ted didn't have his own angle, his own qualifying credentials. And it's the special thing that we can bring to the movement.

Jasmin: I didn't know that you went there with the ethics and the environmentalism.

That's like music to my ears. I'm so happy to hear that you go there.

Ted: Yeah. Well, we've been doing that longer. We started running the Rochester Area Vegan Society in 1995.

Carol: But I think Jasmin means with Rochester Lifestyle Medicine.

Jasmin: Yeah. Definitely...go ahead.

Carol: Well, with Rochester Lifestyle Medicine, we have had some...I don't know, we've had some...

Ted: Yeah, we call it the V word. Veganism is the V word. Right? *Carol laughs* We call it the V word.

Carol: Well, you know, I'm sure you know James LaVeck and Jenny Stein of Tribe of Heart. One time at Summerfest, we heard them talk about their technique. I guess it's not like a “technique” technique, it's just their strategy in building a film is to build the viewer's trust.

And so they lead you along in a narrative, in a story, before they show you anything that's hard to watch. They get you to the point where you know that you're safe with them. That they will show you things that are hard to watch, but they'll be with you, and they'll support you. They stage it carefully.

And so I think that's what we do with the Jumpstart and with everything Rochester Lifestyle Medicine does. We present it at the end because we say to people, “With what you know now about what your body can do and what a plant-based diet can do for your body, now you have a decision point. Are you gonna keep this going? Are you gonna make some adjustments to your plant-based diet? Are you, you know, maybe you're not gonna eat quite as...” And I actually have something to say about that, too, because we have them on a pretty strict whole food, plant-based diet, and some people might like to open it out and have a little more of certain kinds of foods that are still plant-based.

But we also talk to them about, “Well, what are other reasons that you might wanna stay on this path?” And Ted and I have always felt that the ethical motivations for being vegan are almost what you would call medically indicated. If they're gonna keep you on a plant-based diet and keep you healthy, then the doctor ought to be recommending that you care about animals and you care about the environment. Just because everything points in the same direction.

You know, what's good for us is good for the animals and good for the planet! Yes, it's medically indicated. Everything indicates that we ought to do it, but we wait a little bit. We actually have a member of our team who used to say, “Well, you shouldn't talk about those things because patients will not trust you if they think that they are not front and center. They wanna know that you have only their interests at heart.”

And, you know, it's been a while. It took a while to persuade her, but even those things line up so beautifully. It just makes sense to present the ethical and environmental reasons at the same time, or at least close to the same time.

Ted: If I could just say that again. So what Carol was saying basically is that talking about the ethics, as far as caring for the animals and caring for the

planet, it is actually medically indicated because it helps people stay on the path, which is kind of amazing when you think about it.

Jasmin: I want to go back to lifestyle medicine as a whole because I have been, I have seen Dr. Friedman. She has been my doctor. I am curious for you to explain to our listeners what lifestyle medicine is because I explain it to people, but you're the pros.

And is it always vegan? Is lifestyle medicine always vegan?

Ted: Okay. How about if I start with the last question first? Sounds good. We'll get that one outta the way. So there are six official pillars of lifestyle medicine put out by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. We've added three of our own, which I'll tell you about in a minute.

But the first one is a plant predominant diet. Okay? So that is not vegan. However, when we go to conferences and actually have conversations with people, the actual diet that almost everybody recommends is vegan. Basically, we've pretty much all settled on the same whole food, plant-based diet idea.

It's very rare to hear anybody talk about something that's not actually whole plant-based, which by definition is gonna be vegan. However, that is not the official pillar. The official pillar is plant predominant diet, and I've worked really hard to make sure that it has been vegan.

When I joined ACLM back in 2010 at the insistence of Dr. Michael Gregor, who we've known for a long time since he was in medical school, actually. He asked me to join, and we had 130 members then. We now have over 9,000 members. And it's growing exponentially, and so people get it. I'll tell you about the other pillars now, and then I'm gonna tell you about why lifestyle medicine is so important.

The six official pillars, and Carol's gonna stop me if I get them wrong. The first one is a plant predominant diet. The second one is physical activity, very important. The third one is avoiding toxins, so alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, all those things. Avoid those.

The fourth one is social connection. Cultivating social connections and friendships and family. And actually, for a lot of people, that is the most important one and the one that we're failing most at in our culture. Then another one is stress management, and then finally, there's sleep. Most people in this culture are not doing very well with sleep.

You can probably acknowledge that yourself, right? There are so many reasons to not go to bed.

Carol: Well, I was just going to say, one of the reasons that we have to focus on food and on diet in Rochester Lifestyle Medicine is that if you think about it, those other five pillars, the other five of the six, are not controversial.

Nobody's gonna say you shouldn't get sleep or that you need more stress, or...I mean, everybody agrees on this. They may disagree on, like, it's simple but not easy, or it's how do you get there? But people agree on the goal, but diet is all over the place. I mean, people say the most crazy things! Unbelievable things.

We had a lady tell us a story about how she was a Jumpstart grad who went to a convention, and she had sat down to dinner with somebody who was on a carnivore diet. And just the description was horrifying, and people delude themselves that these things are healthy. So there are different schools of thought in the area of diet that you just don't find it with the other five pillars.

So that's why we have to work so hard on that. Plus, our heart is there, and we know most about it, and there you are.

Jasmin: But yeah, that's so true that the other ones aren't controversial.

I wanna say something on a personal note for a moment just because I feel like this might resonate with some of our listeners. And I have a memoir, so people can have access to my story anyway, and I know a lot of our listeners have read it, so this isn't really a surprise. My background, like so many other women, involved disordered eating. It involved a really terrible relationship with food and with my body growing up. And, you know, that is something that I've worked through in my adulthood, but because of the trauma that I went through, especially as a kid who was very, very bullied, I don't want to have weight be a driving force in anything I do.

I moved to Rochester in June 2021, and the first week I was here, I went to Rochester Lifestyle Medicine. And I went in, and I said, "I don't wanna be weighed; I don't wanna talk about weight." And they were like, "Okay. Cool. What do you want?" I was like, "I wanna feel better physically. I hurt all the time..." You know, all of the things. I am 43 now, so I was like in my early forties, and those were my goals. And if I happen to lose weight as a result of what happens, then fine. And it worked.

And I wanna say that to our listeners because I know that there's a lot of tension out there around the topic of weight. And I'm sure I'm offending people because you can't have this discussion without offending people. There was not even a second thought by my doctor. "Fine, you don't wanna talk about weight, we won't talk about weight. We don't have to weigh you. No problem."

It never came up. And I was shamed by doctors! You know, like the medical institution as a whole has a lot of...there's a lot of, you know, problems within the way that a lot of doctors approach weight with their patients, and I think that that's something that lifestyle medicine can address, even though it is so much built on these pillars that you're talking about.

One of which, for a lot of people, will result in weight loss. It's almost, to me, a non-issue. Or you could do all of this and succeed without ever having a conversation about weight. So that was my little rant.

Carol: Weight loss is a pleasant byproduct. It's not the...it's like happiness, right?

You don't go straight at happiness. It's a byproduct of the other things you do in your life. Weight loss is the same way. If you go at it head-on, you're probably not gonna succeed anyway. But that's not why. You do what you're supposed to do, which is be healthy. And weight loss is peripheral or something.

But I'm curious; it's just so interesting, Jasmin, but was it harder for you when your story was out there? Did it make it a little harder for you that you had told the story?

Jasmin: No, you know what, just having a memoir, in general, is a complicated thing because, for people who pick it up, it's a moment that's frozen in time.

I started writing it 10 years ago. My life was very different then, and people still read it, which I'm very, very grateful for. But they're reading like me a long time ago, and it doesn't necessarily represent who I am now. And I was interviewed many times in many capacities, including on the Dr. Oz show, big, big platforms about, pretty much, weight loss. And then I gained a lot of weight when I was in a really hard time in my life, and it's not like I'm in the public eye, but within my little world, I am. And that was difficult for me.

Ted: How are you feeling now?

Jasmin: I feel great. I love the way I eat. It's just like when I went vegan nearly 20 years ago; it was like a world of abundance, not deprivation. And now there's nothing I feel I can't have.

It all feels very balanced, and yeah. Like I said, I'm 43, and I know that I feel much more youthful than I did a few years ago just because of the lifestyle changes I've made. I do think lifestyle medicine was a big part of that. And it's, like I said, music to my ears to hear you talking about the ethics because, number one, you don't frequently find doctors who support veganism, although I would say more now than ever.

And number two. When you do, ethics don't come up. Dr. Furhman, for example, isn't totally vegan. It's complicated because he would never get into issues of ethics. Never. And that is the driving force for a lot of us. So I love that you go there. I really do.

Ted: Well, thank you. That's really sweet.

Carol: We do, too.

You know, Jasmin, what you were talking about with your experience is all about acceptance. And I just wanna say one of the most beautiful things for all of us is that during a Jumpstart session, people are bathed with acceptance. It goes in every direction. So it's so wonderful to see that once we have an open discussion, the way that the Jumpstart participants support each other.

So they'll say things like, you know, somebody's halting in what they say, or they...then somebody else will pick up and say, "That was such a good contribution that so-and-so made, and I had the same experience." And you can feel the support going back and forth among the participants and people supporting us. And vice versa.

And that's the milieu or the medium in which health can grow and all good things. So that you just don't focus on something that's negative. But then again, it's almost like a paradox. People are able to talk about the bad things that have happened to them if they wanna share, they don't have to, but they can talk about bad health news that they got or health challenges, and they feel trusted, or they feel that they can trust, or both.

And it's really magical. It's very healing for people. And it's also healing for people to know that they can go at their own pace. They can enjoy all the benefits, and just being there bearing witness is participation. And sometimes

the people who we think are most skeptical and giving us a hard time, and isn't this true of veganism anyway?

They're giving us the most hard time. They're the people who are on board, and they wanna give a testimonial and be at the next session. Just like in life generally, where Ted always says, don't you, Ted, that the person who comes in and looks at your lunchbox and scrutinizes and teases, the next thing you know, that person is asking for advice on how to become vegan.

Jasmin: That makes a lot of sense. You just never know. I mean, that is a good reminder also for people who advocate veganism who are listening to this. That you might feel like you're not getting anywhere. And then the next thing you know, you get an email like, "Hey, that conversation we had three months ago, that really stuck with me. And since then I..."

Maybe they don't go vegan, maybe they go mostly vegan or something. You know, we'll take the wins that we can take, even though our whole goal is to change the whole world. Mwahaha! *Ted and Jasmin laugh*

So tell me about RAVS, Rochester Area Vegan Society, because I know you've been running it for a while. You didn't found it, though, is that right?

Ted: That's right. It got started in 1989, and it was founded by the revolutionaries Stan and Rhoda Sapon. And they came to us in 1994, roughly, because they didn't think they could keep running it. And so they turned it over to us. So I refer to them as the revolutionaries who started it, and we're the bureaucrats who've kept it going. *all laugh*

Jasmin: That's awesome.

Ted: And, honestly, it seemed like a really old organization when we took it over because it was six years old. But we've been running it now for almost 30 years.

Jasmin: That's a lot of time. I mean, that was a very different world back then.

Ted: Yeah. So, it's an educational organization.

We tell people, you don't have to be vegetarian or vegan to come to one of our meetings. You just have to eat like a vegan while you're there, which is pretty...

Carol: If you wanna be here, we want you here. It's sort of a self selection.

Jasmin: Because while the Institute focuses exclusively on health issues, it appears that RAVS brings together people who care about all the issues.

Is that right?

Ted: Yes, it is. It's really interesting. We get a lot of people who come to RAVS who also are interested in health, right? But they're also obviously interested in the animals, and it tends to be a bit of a younger crowd. I take issue with that... because a lot of people who come to RLMI, the Institute, really care about the ethics. They really do. And maybe that isn't exactly why they showed up that day, but they're definitely behind it for that reason.

Is it true that we scare some people off? Yeah. Maybe. But who cares? Right? We're never gonna appeal to everybody anyway. We might as well appeal to the people that we wanna be around. *Ted laughs*

Jasmin: Well, listen, I get it. I'm like an atheist, vegan, lesbian. I understand what it means to scare people off, and I don't really care. *Jasmin & Ted laugh*

Ted: Yeah. And, I don't mean to say we don't care, but we know that we're gonna scare off somebody.

Carol: You know, Jasmin, another big part of our evolution was starting to go to Vegetarian Summerfest. Which we did for the first time in 1995. It was the same year that we took over, and we've gone there every year since, up until Covid interrupted that as well.

And that was huge. You know, I was thinking about this the other day. Isn't there a line from the TS Elliot poem, "You measure out your life in coffee spoons."

We measure out our life in (Summerfests). I mean, really, our kids were babies when we first started going, and now they're adults, and we have trouble getting them to go with us even though they're all still vegan. We met everyone at Vegetarian Summerfest. We know all the luminaries just because of our own persistence in being there, and it's like a big family. We learned so much there.

I think Ted really gained the confidence, you know, he was always confident as a physician, but I think the confidence as a plant-based expert to jump in with Rochester Lifestyle Medicine. And, you know, another interesting thing that happened that we didn't talk about is that while we were the coordinators of the Rochester Area Vegan Society, but before we formed Rochester Lifestyle

Medicine, we had this idea that we wanted to teach people about plant-based nutrition.

So in 2012, we started teaching this two hours a week for six weeks in person, plant-based diet course. And Ted did the lectures, and I did the course materials and the recipes, and the food. And we gave that course 20 times. Until Covid hit. And then we haven't done it since then, but the course has gone online.

I figured out that every time we did one of those classes it was like catering dinner for 25 people. We had about 50 or sometimes 75 people. But I took enough food to give samples at the beginning and in the middle. So I figured at the end of all that, I'd done it 120 times. That's a lot of times. *Carol laughs*

Jasmin: That's amazing.

Carol: I know, I know. But it was fun. People were, people were so nice.

Ted: 900 people took that course.

Carol: The way to a person's vegan heart is through their stomach. We gave them good vegan food and good vegan recipes, and Ted gave them an entertaining PowerPoint, which now can be viewed online.

You can take the course on our website. Take the course! Plant-based eating for happiness and health.

Jasmin: Ted, every time you give a talk, do you say, "This is my TED talk"?

Ted: I should do that! Why didn't I think of that? *laughs* I don't.

Jasmin: I've been waiting like half an hour to make that joke, just so you know. *laughs*

Ted: Well, but one more thing about that course is that, when we first started giving it, we gave it as a civilian course, but within a couple of years, we had it accredited by the University of Rochester for CMEs. So it was worth 12 CMEs because it was 12 hours.

Carol: So, continuing medical education credit.

Ted: Right. So over a hundred people in the Rochester area have taken that course for credit. I think it's like 150 actually have taken it for credit.

Jasmin: So I mentioned earlier, and then I kind of, you know, just kept talking. But I wanna go back to this. I mentioned earlier that it is, Still a little unusual to have doctors endorse veganism.

I mean, am I right, or has that changed?

Ted: Oh, you're absolutely right, but it's changed enough. So there are enough of us now out there so we can have conversations with each other. And, uh, so we actually started something I'm really proud of. It's called Lifestyle Medicine Grand Rounds, and it meets once a month, and it's something we never would've thought of before the pandemic, but now you can do things on Zoom, right? So it's worldwide, and what we do is we have somebody present the case, an interesting and or challenging case of an actual patient, to an expert panel. And the expert panel consists of two regulars who are usually these two doctors from Michigan that we have a partnership with.

And then we bring in a guest panelist who's usually somebody who's kind of famous. So we've had Neil Barnard be the guest panelist twice. Michael Gregor's been the guest panelist, John McDougal's been the guest panelist. Carol, who else? Well, George Guthrie, who's the former president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine.

Milton Mills is...

Carol: Michael Klaper, did you say?

Ted: Oh, Michael Klaper. Of course. He was the first one, right? Michael Kapper. Milton Mills is gonna be our guest panelist next month. Or actually, it's this month because it's March already. And Dr. Gregor. Yeah. So, that's doctors talking to each other about how to use plant-based diets to actually help patients.

And we've kind of gone...to me, it's the next level because I've been going to plant-based conferences now since, I don't know, 2014 when the plant conference first started and then American College of Lifestyle Medicine started. And then Neil Barnard does his thing with PCRM, the International Conference on Nutrition and Medicine. That's every year.

And then also PIPA meets at least once or twice a year. And those are the four big plant-based nutrition conferences. You know, in the last couple of years, I've kind of joked with Carol when I'm out the door to go catch my plane to

wherever it is, like, “Hey, what do you think they're gonna say? That plants are good for you?” *all laugh*

How many times are we gonna have to say that? Right? But, what we've done now is we've moved into the real world, which is that, okay, you have a real patient here. They live with a real family, right? Their spouse is not supportive. They work at a job where they can't get healthy food, right?

All these things, right? How do you deal with that? And I'm amazed these expert panelists, without dropping a beat, have great ideas. And so we've actually made progress in terms of managing actual patients based on the conversations that the presenter will have. Now, the challenge is getting the presenters, but so far, knock on wood, we've been able to get people to present as well.

This last month we had a second-year family medicine resident from Rhode Island present a case to Dr. Will Bulsiewicz. You know him, right?

Jasmin: I know the name. Yeah. I don't know any more than the name, but now I'm writing it down because I wanna look him up.

Carol: I wonder if there are some vegan doctors who don't talk about it as much. They're vegan motivations. I'm not sure. I guess probably we would know because we would know what they say in public and what we know of them in some cases.

But I don't know, I think it's becoming more seamless. People are kind of owning up or seeing it as one of the tools like Ted was saying earlier, that it's medically indicated to share with people the other reasons to do it. So it just becomes another tool in the toolbox. What is it they say Abraham Lincoln said? “Animal rights are like human rights. It's the way of a civilized human being,” or something like that. I mean, it's all part of the value system of a human being and shouldn't be so compartmentalized.

Jasmin: I have two personal questions. For now, I might ask you more during the bonus segment, which we will get to shortly. Did I hear you correctly, Carol? Did you say that Dr. Veggie is a musician? *laughs*

Carol: Yes. I didn't say that, did I?

Jasmin: Tell me more, Carol.

Ted: See my piano back then.

Carol: Shouldn't he speak for himself?

Jasmin: He should, but I wanna hear it from you! I wanna hear what you think about Dr. Veggie's music! *chuckles* and then yes, of course, Ted, I want to hear from you.

Carol: Well, he's a saxophonist, and he's a good piano player.

Ted: I'm a very average piano player, but I'm a decent sax player.

Carol: Okay. He sings pretty well, does a mean Gilbert & Sullivan. And so I think his greatest, oh, I don't...this might be short-changing him. Well, he loves playing saxophone. Well, he loves playing the recorder and flute and piano, but I think his greatest contribution is to have steered us towards being a family for whom music was so important.

It was just a foregone conclusion that our kids would take piano. And then they added on strings and voice, and they all are musical...and theater and their music. They perform and love all those areas now. I'm not sure we would've done that if it had just been me, but...That would've been a different world.

Jasmin: So, anything to add, Ted, about your musical inclinations?

Ted: Sure. So Carol's a very good singer, actually. I'm an average piano player. I'm a reasonably good saxophone player. My best instrument is actually sitting on the piano behind me. It's that wooden...it's a tenor recorder.

But as a result of having taught our kids music from an early age, we actually have a Grammy.

Jasmin: What?!

Ted: Yeah, Nathaniel, our son. Our youngest, Nathan. Nate Barnett. Nathaniel is part of a professional choir in Philadelphia called The Crossing. They've gotten three Grammys over the years, and their last album got the Grammy this year for Best Performance.

And he was part of the choir at that time. In fact, we just saw him last night at Ithaca College. He doesn't have a whole Grammy, he has 1/24th of a Grammy because...

Jasmin: That's fun! I'll take like one, 1000000000th of a Grammy. That's so fun.

So do you know Dr. Barnard is also quite the musician? You should jam together at Summerfest.

That would be awesome.

Ted: That would be awesome. Yeah.

Jasmin: Yeah. I would go see that.

Carol: There's quite a bit of music at Summerfest.

Ted: There is great music. Our kids have been sort of leaders in the music there.

Jasmin: I was just about to ask you about them. So are they vegan since birth?

Ted: Nathaniel is vegan since before birth.

Carol: Yeah. He actually...we kind of made the transition when our oldest was a toddler, so we like to say they've been vegan. Well, I mean...I wouldn't...

Ted: They're lifelong vegans.

Carol: They've been vegan their whole lives, but if you wanna get strictly speaking about it...

Ted: Because they nursed a long time, so they were getting most of their calories from...

Carol: I'm also a big fan of breastfeeding. So, yeah.

Jasmin: And so, how old are they?

Carol: They are 35, 33, and 30.

Jasmin: Okay. Wow. Interesting.

Ted: We made the transition in 1991. January 1st, 1991. The official date. They're vegangelists. *laughs*

Jasmin: That's so cool. I need to close up this interview because I feel like I will just keep talking to you forever, which I might, but I do want you to stay on for the bonus segment.

Ted: Sure.

Jasmin: If you don't mind. But before we go, just let's end on this question that I like to ask people sometimes. I'd love both of your answers. You know, there's a lot going on in the world. You are not at all unaware of the horrors that are on the news every day. The catastrophe that's going on with the climate and just the absolute horror show that is happening to animals behind closed doors.

What gives you hope?

Carol: Well, I think what gives me hope is that theoretically, if everyone became vegan overnight, all the world's problems would be solved. And actually, it's not impossible because there's no lead time that's needed. There's no big investment, there's no permission, there's no legislation.

People just need to decide to do it. And you might say, well, what's gonna happen to make people wake up and become vegan? And the thing is that it's not impossible. I mean, we live in a world of instant communication, in this global village where people have information at their disposal and at their fingertips, literally at their fingertips and, you know, their eyeballs.

And, so, even though we're all impatient for it to happen now...yesterday, it's possible. I mean, it seems like there's this quantum leap that's waiting to happen. And I guess what gives me hope is that I know that what we're working on is the most important thing because it includes everything.

It solves everything. And they may seem grandiose, but it's not. It's just true. A vegan world. Where we have reverence for all life. That's the solution to everything. And it's not impossible, theoretically is possible, and everything we do in reality to bring it closer is the best way we can possibly spend our time.

Jasmin: Oh my God. I'm just gonna play that on a loop. That was so beautiful. So well said. Ted, how do you follow that?

Ted: Sure. Well, lemme just elaborate a little bit on what you just said, and then I'll give you my own view, which is that Carol's right, you know, there's so many of these other sorts of solutions that people try to work toward that require a long lead time.

Like everybody driving an electric car, for example, it just can't happen overnight, right? Or everybody's switching to renewable energy. It can't happen overnight. But it is true that people could change the way they eat basically overnight. Now, if everyone did it all at once, we'd obviously run out of certain food, and it would take farmers, you know, it would take a little bit of time to catch up.

But actually, not that much because we're growing all this food to feed the farm animals. Humans can eat an awful lot of that food. So it wouldn't take, it wouldn't be that hard. So, Carol, you know, I think she's absolutely right. I think it really does give us hope, it really, it's why I get up in the morning, right?

I know I'm gonna be able to help people move in that direction. But I'd like to quote my favorite farmer poet, you know, are you familiar with Wendell Barry?

Jasmin: No.

Ted: Ah, Wendell Barry. So he's got a lot of great quotes. One of my favorites is, "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts."

So if you look that one up, that's...whether it's from the *Mad Farmer*, I forget what it's from. One of his long poems, but he also has some other really great quotes, like, "People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health, and treated by the health industry, which pays no attention to food."

So, yeah. You know, some great quotes there, but, you know, we're working on some other things, which I'll reveal to you over the next few months, perhaps.

Jasmin: Please do. I wanna know everything.

Ted: Yeah. We'll definitely come to you. We have some really great ideas. And actually, we're working on a whole new website. I'd be happy to share with you in the future.

Jasmin: Yes, please do. I would love that. Do you have anything to add about the hope?

Ted: Why am I hopeful? Well, I'm hopeful partly because of that quote from Wendell Barry, which is "be joyful though..." I mean, I get up every morning, and I go outdoors as much as I can and go for a run.

I'm a big birder. The seasons seem to keep happening even though they are changing in ways that are a bit discouraging. But, you know, the birds keep coming back. They're singing, they're starting to sing now, you know, and I think things are starting to come together in a lot of ways.

How it's gonna happen, nobody can really predict. But I think we as a species are continuing to evolve in a better direction. But we've got a few bumps in the road ahead of us. We just have to be prepared for that.

Jasmin: Yeah. Well, I feel a lot better about the bumps in the road, knowing that you two are out there changing the world.

And so, before you go, can you please tell our listeners how they can follow you online and support your efforts?

Ted: Absolutely. So please visit rochesterlifestylemedicine.org. Just Google, Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute. You'll find us. We have a Facebook page. We are on Twitter, we're on LinkedIn, and we're on Instagram.

I'd love it if people would go to our Instagram page. We have a new technology director who, in addition to helping us run our technology, is also helping with our social media and getting interesting stuff out there. So that's really helpful. And anyway that people can share the word is really helpful because if you have, if the people listening to this podcast are mostly vegan and kind of already on board, what we really need to do is reach a lot more people.

Our 15-day Whole food Plant-based Jumpstart has been designed to be incredibly scalable, and we can scale up very quickly, not overnight, but right now, we're seeing maybe about 50 or 60 people a month.

We could easily be seeing 300 a month very quickly. And once you hit 300 a month, then we can move to thousands a month because we've got lots of people out there, like in this audience, who are willing to help. Who could help us be facilitators for our programs, there's some training involved, but we love to have people help us out.

Carol: Did you give contact info for the Rochester Area Vegan Society?

Ted: I did not.

Carol: It's rochesterveg.org. And also RochesterVeg@Gmail. It isn't really just a local organization. I was gonna tell you that one of the things that happened

with Covid...before Covid, we were trying to have, you know, eight or 10 great programs a year, and we would balance some of them, health programs, some ethics, some environment, you know, the whole gamut.

And because we knew so many people, we would try to bring in people from out of town, leading lights of the plant-based movement. Really knocked ourselves out trying to do that because we wanted to do that for our members. Well, then Covid hit, and everything went on Zoom, and so then it happened that Rochester Lifestyle Medicine was bringing all these great health programs as Zoom webinars, and the vegan society was able to partake of that.

You know, they could just join the Zoom meetings, but I think it's gonna go in both directions. And when you said, "well, how do you keep people going? How do you support people?" I think now that we're in that stage where we have so many people who have taken Jumpstart, but they wanna stick with it, and they wanna know more about the other reasons to be vegan.

They can join the programs of the Rochester Area Vegan Society because now that Rochester Lifestyle Medicine kind of has the health part kind of covered, the Rochester Area Vegan Society, when we do have our programs, and we carry them on Zoom, they're more likely to be on ethical aspects. In fact, coming up, we have the executive director of the Farm Animal Rights Movement coming to talk to us, and we have Serena Farb, who's on her vegan van tour coming in May, and she's got like six speaking engagements in the Rochester area.

But we'll be Zoom broadcasting her talk to us. So we hope to make it so that people can join the Rochester Area Vegan Society's programs from afar as well.

Jasmin: Amazing. Wonderful. And we will link to all of this in the show notes. Thank you so much for the incredible work you're doing and for spending all of this time with me tonight.

It was very illuminating, and I can't wait for all of our listeners to listen to this as well.

Carol: Thank you for giving us a chance to know you a little bit better. It's been so much fun.

Ted: Yeah, thank you. You're actually a nice person. We had a good time.

Jasmin: Ah, I have my moments! *all laugh*