

MARCH 2022
VOLUME 14



itsjustyou

newsletter

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Big. Deep. Breaths. I feel a bit of sweat building up in my palms as I start to write, anticipating the story that I'm going to share with you in my March Newsletter. It's not a nervousness or fear, it's almost like some deep-seated trauma from experiences I've had. If you follow me on Instagram, I've shared in my stories over the last couple of weeks about a new Nutrition-Focused Group that I'm going to be starting, participating in, and leading. My group will start on March 28th and will go for 4-weeks helping you to discover food sensitivities or blocks. Now, I'm **not** going to spend the duration of this newsletter selling you on a nutrition program because also - I get that this isn't for everyone and that's not why we're here. I really have enjoyed coming to my newsletter to vent, share, cry, get a little vulnerable, and connect with those of you who are interested. Instagram is fun, but I love having this platform which allows me to go a bit deeper.

What I do want to do is share my story with you, my food story - my gut story. You see, for me, my issues with eating started a couple decades ago. I can look back and see red flags in my life that I wish I would have noticed or realized in that moment. I often think *-if I knew what I know now back then-* so much would be different in my life today.

Would I be living with a permanent ileostomy?

Would I have struggled with eating disorders for what felt like most of my adult life thus far?

Would I have lived with an, almost obsession, when it comes to food?

Would I have used food to cope through the ups & downs that life brought?

ON the flip-side:

Would I even be in the business I'm in now had I not had those experiences?

Would my life look like it does now - all the beautiful and amazing things, tools and lessons - had I avoided that phase of my life and all the lessons they allowed me to learn?

I just want to share it all in hopes that you see yourself in one of the versions of me I share here.

THE BEGINNING

I'll start with my childhood. Isn't that where it *all* starts? To be honest, not a lot pops up here. I don't have memories of my mom restricting my food or shaming my habits, I don't remember even thinking about my weight or appearance other than some members of my church always calling me a "bean pole" - whatever that meant. What I do remember, the word that pops up, is scarcity. Lack. I grew up in small-town Missouri and because my parents divorced when I was young, I was constantly between homes witnessing the habits that came with each. At my dad's house, we had a garden, grew our food, raised chickens and cows - ate, said chickens & cows - and we went to the small grocery store every once in a while for random things. My dad cooked all of the meals and "finish your plate" was a statement I heard on the daily. I have a random memory that popped up just now, I was probably 11 years old. My stepmom made a lasagna or something like that and I thought it was disgusting. I was the last one at the table as I struggled to finish my plate, choking down this flavorless mush (haha). I kept getting up to grab extra napkins so I could take a bite, chew it while dad was looking, then spit it into the napkin as he turned his back. See, as an 11-year old, I didn't plan this out and after 15 trips to the trash can to "throw napkins away" my dad caught on and I was grounded that week. I'm not sure what impact that had on me, if any, but that was the food-vibe at my dad's house.

When I moved in with my mom at 15 years old, things shifted. My mom was always busy, I remember her being home at times but the majority of her days/evenings were spent at the Pet Store she opened and ran for years in our small town. She'd make big meals like Pork Fried Rice or giant slabs of meat that would smoke all day long, I can remember the incredible smell to this day. Since she was so busy, my little brother and I would eat on leftovers as long as they lasted with two kids, and once it



was gone, it was gone. We always had bread so my breakfast would typically be 5-6 slices of toast with butter on them and I'd sprinkle cinnamon & sugar on top, the best slices were those that became nearly soggy because of the sugar/butter combo. This was most likely my breakfast of choice. Once I got a job as a waitress at the local restaurant and started earning some money, I made it a focus to stop by the grocery store on my way home so I could get a few boxes of cereal to munch on for meals. Cereal (the sugary good kind) became a staple in my diet along with whole milk. I'd always get so pissed at my brother for sneaking in and stealing my cereal. This was the beginning of the scarcity mindset I had with food. To be honest, it's hard to type this because I'm nervous my mom will read it and feel guilt/sadness - MOM - DO NOT FEEL SAD. I know they did the very best they could with where we all were in life and her hard work was a huge lesson in how to show up in my life.

Once I graduated high school, I moved out of my mom's house and got a rental home with 3 girlfriends as I enrolled in college. I got a job at Applebee's, waiting tables, and fell in love with serving. That job taught me so many things about *people* that I feel benefit me to this day. This is about the time when social media got *hot* for me in my life and for the first time I found myself with insecurities about my body, men, and appearance. *In the city, everyone was beautiful*, I thought. FAST FORWARDING - I met a boy, *fell in love*, got pregnant, then had a baby. During my pregnancy, I took the phrase "eating for two" very, very seriously. I remember vividly, watching all of the soon-to-be-mom reality tv shows on cable while

downing 3 hotdogs in buns with a 1/2 brick of cheddar cheese and pile of chips on the plate. *This* almost makes me wanna vomit thinking about it hahah! After I gave birth to Mckenzie, the insecurities became overwhelming, and my eating disorders started. It wasn't just being a mom and seeing extra skin or rolls that maybe weren't there a year ago, but it mores became a way to cope with stress in other areas of my life. My (now ex) was in the beginning of his drug/alcohol/sex addictions that cause all kinds of *-well what is wrong with me?!* -thought processes. Anorexia took over my life

as I had this warped mindset telling me to get *skinny*. Then I'd be lovable. It was all that mattered and it consumed me. I'd skip breakfast and head to my call-center job with a black coffee in hand, sipping it to curb my appetite or hunger. Eventually the hunger got overwhelming and I learned that keeping a box of plain cheerios in my desk drawer would be key. If I could stay strong as long as possible, fighting the urge to eat, popping a handful of cheerios when the pain became unbearable, I'd be fine. I'd get off work, pick up McKenzie, then drive home dreading the idea that I had to make dinner. Quick, easy, mindless, and inexpensive - that's what I looked for when it came to meals so Hamburger Helper became a staple. I had another baby, Bella

was born just 19 months after her sister. After baby #2, I got skinnier. I remember stepping on the scale at 105 and thinking *almost there...*

The next phase I remember led to bingeing/bulimia. I had quit my call-center job - literally just went in one day and quit because I couldn't stand it - and started babysitting. *But listen*, I don't enjoy children. Please don't be offended by that -

haha! I love my own, but do you agree, it takes a **special** type of person to do childcare daily, full time, for a living. I am not that special person. I hated this job but we needed the money as paycheck to paycheck was our lifestyle. Randomly, I shared this with one of the moms and instead of hitting me and pulling her son from my care, she giggled and said - "well you should do what I do, I could teach you!" She was a Phlebotomist working for a life insurance company, traveling to peoples homes to draw their blood and take urine samples to send in for life insurance applications. I spent that following week sitting in her car with her after she picked up her son and she taught me how to draw blood in the front seat of her car. Within a couple of months, I had a job with her at the company she worked with and I fell in

love with the process and surprisingly, was really good at it. We moved to Kansas City not long after that and I was able to transfer with the same company and secure a job there. Most of this is useless in regards to my nutrition but I'm getting to the story — about a year later, I applied at a Children's Hospital, lab position, to be a phlebotomist and was hired based on my *work experience*. Secretly, I was just in shock because I *learned in a freaking car, how to draw blood*. I loved this job and progressed pretty quickly. At the same time, my relationship with my (now ex) was declining and his drug use was increasing. Drugs were one thing but when I started to meet women randomly that he was having an affair with, things got dark quickly. Food became my

method of healing, my escape. I remember coming home from work to my two girls who were now toddlers, they also became my outlet. We'd wave good-bye to daddy as he left the house to head out with friends and my stomach would be in knots knowing that whatever he was off to do - wasn't good or benefiting our family. I'd set the girls up with their dolls or crayons with tears rolling down



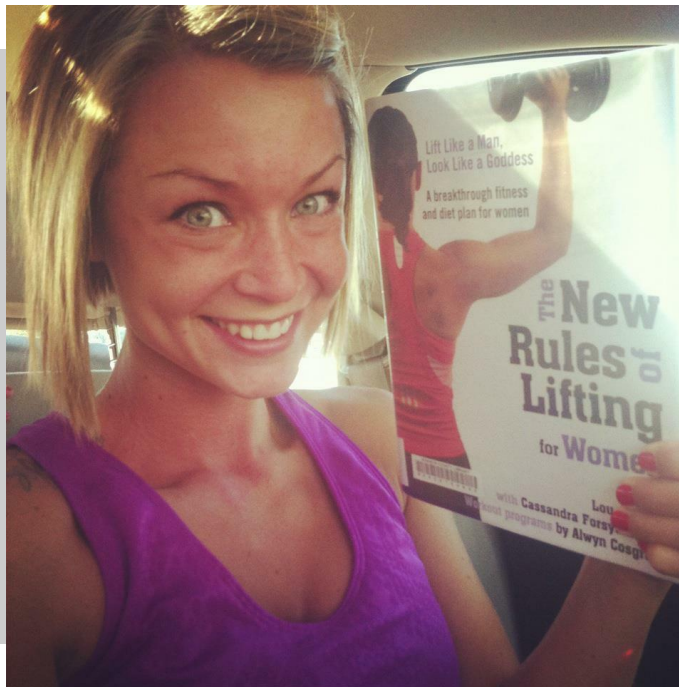
my face in frustration, sadness, why me thoughts, anger, and overwhelm. I'd put them down to bed and wander to the kitchen to find the big plastic mixing bowls I kept strategically next to the pantry. I'd pour cereal to the top and add milk until it almost overflowed. As I looked out the window, anticipating his return home, I'd stuff my face as fast as I could, trying to "get it all in" before he came home. I mean, it'd be hours but for some reason I'd just wait and eat. The next morning, I'd carry so much guilt about how I ate the night before and I would be feeling the effects of it. I would stash a several diuretics in my pocket and down them with my black coffee when I was about 20 mins from work. I had worked the timing out perfectly so I could get to work right as they kicked in and spend the next 15 mins in the bathroom ridding my body of all the

toxicity. RINSE AND REPEAT. Looking back: I started to get hives constantly, big red blotches all over my body, unsure of what was going on.

In 2012, I woke up. I had my own life insurance physical done because that's what adults do (haha) and the feedback I got hit me hard. My labs weren't great and that should have been the pivotal moment for me but in reality, it was a simple number on a scale that told me my worth in that moment. I broke into tears and had an almost out of body experience looking at the damage I had done to myself. I. WAS. MISERABLE. I was wearing layers on layers to any event that called me to leave my home. I hid my body and did anything I could to avoid attention. I could see it all in my minds-eye like a movie. The

next week, I took my girls and we walked across the street to Lifetime Fitness to sign up, mostly because they had childcare. I signed up for as many classes as I could each week and fell in love with Body Pump. I stayed in the back of the class and stumbled over the step, lifted mindlessly and probably *incorrectly* but I showed up, every day, every week. I would take the girls to the library every weekend and I'd check out books that would teach me more about working out & eating right. A book: New Rules of Lifting for Women

was one of the first I rented and I just remember being hooked on the drive to get to where those women were in the book - healthy and happy. At one point while I was working at the hospital I attempted to go back to college to get a nursing degree and would show up a bit early, leaving the kids in daycare, so I could go to classes at the college gym for free. I joined MyFitnessPal and started to bring more awareness to the food I ate. I'd have my setting on 1200 calories/day and obsess over tracking every little bit. Looking back, yes, this was a very unhealthy obsession but the alternative was binging and shitting my *brains* out. I don't really remember details of how *this* part played out but I eventually convinced my "rededicated Christian" husband to let



me stay home full time with the kids. I think I even put together a pro/con list to convince him because after gas/groceries/daycare, I was making close to nothing each paycheck. Quickly, I became a stay at home mom to my two toddlers. I kept my consistency with tracking my food and going to the gym now with a bit more flexibility and enjoyment. Looking back: I was living daily with mouth sores and during this year, had my tonsils removed because monthly, I was getting strep throat.

In 2013, I was mindlessly scrolling MFP after the gym one day and saw someone talking about Shakeology. I had never heard of it but they spoke of it like it was magic - I wanted magic. I wanted *more* of anything that was going to make me feel good. After making a comment on that post, someone referred me to

Facebook where I met a woman who presented me with an opportunity that shifted everything. I reached out asking her for samples of this magic shake and while I'm still waiting on those samples (9 years later), she gave me even more. Two weeks later I had signed up as a Beachbody Coach and put all of it on a credit card that I was made to feel so guilty about. We in fact, did not have the money, but I insisted, begged, and pleaded, knowing that this was something *healthy* that I could go all in on. I had no

idea, really, what coaching was but it didn't matter. I wanted the lifestyle, habits, and income that my *coach* had. I knew I had debt, she didn't. I knew I had eating issues, she had healed. What I didn't realize was how much I needed the structure, guidance, and support. I jumped all into my first workout program: P90X and followed the nutrition plan that came with it. I surrendered - the habits, the thoughts, the feelings, the fight - and I just followed a plan. After 90 days, my body and my mindset had completely transformed. I mean, I had ABS for the first time in my entire life and I thought - THAT is what "fit" is: abs.

In 2014, I had gotten so confident and comfortable with the body I had *created* that I decided the next step for me would be competitions. My old babysitter, believe it

or not, had gotten into fitness competitions and watched me sort of melt as she followed along on Facebook. She reached out and planted the seed and I eagerly said **yes** to letting her train/guide me. I was told to stop my shakes & home workouts because they weren't intense enough and I was put on Anavar, a steroid that was supposed to help my body get competition ready. I have triggering memories of eating cold tilapia and broccoli from Tupperware containers with zero feelings. It's like the process and ways I began to fuel my body drained every ounce of *life* from me. I felt like a fit-zombie and it began to affect more than just my mental health as I avoided family outings, dinners, or anything else that would cause me to "stumble" on

this journey. It lasted about a year and a half, making it to national levels, before I had a mental breakdown on a Beachbody trip to Cancun, that led me to make the decision there, to stop competing. As soon as I said it out loud - from the pool as all my friends were sipping on margaritas and strawberry daiquiris - it felt like a weight off my shoulders. A friend handed me a drink and I'm pretty sure I got disgustingly drunk that night.

In 2015, I battled the repercussions of just stopping cold turkey without reverse dieting. I realized I have an all or nothing mindset because I did not stop eating. If

someone invited us out to eat, I went. If no one invited me, I went anyways. I'd go through the drive-thru while I went out shopping and I'd stop on the way home to provide a quick & easy dinner for the family. I drank, I ate, and I did it with desperation - was I afraid it'd be my last meal?! That's how it looked and felt in the moment. The weight piled on and I could feel the effects of how I was eating. Before I knew it I was at about 30% body fat from about 10% and my body was screaming at me. During this time in my life I kept telling myself that it was normal to be going to the bathroom so much, normal to be feeling the way I was, normal to have the brain fog, the fatigue, and everything else that



came with it while I knew in the back of my head that something was *off*.

By the time 2016 rolled around, I was a health & fitness coach with digestive/gut issues that I just wanted to hide. I decided to go to the doctor to check on food sensitivities and see if I could get to the bottom of what was going on and after seeing several doctors that just wanted to give me some medication, I found one that listened. We scheduled a colonoscopy and I was diagnosed with mild Ulcerative Colitis. I was given a medication prescription & was told that diet had little to do with it, and I believed them - I mean, it was a doctor. After starting the medication I had this *gut* feeling that I needed to take my health into my own hands. I **hated**

medication, the thought of having to pop a pill for the rest of my life as I watch my spouse struggle with his addictions just didn't align. I ordered a nutrition program called The Ultimate Reset & I made an appointment with a naturopathic doctor to get some more answers. We did labs and set up a plan of action that included starting an elimination diet. Lucky, the Reset aligned and I finished the 21 day program with her guidance and lost 17 pounds. Not only did I lose that weight which was the tipping point for me to go all in with this mindset around food, but I also went into remission with my Ulcerative Colitis, allowing

me to stop my medications.

In October 2016, shit, quite literally, hit the fan. In the middle of the night, I woke up to my (now ex) scrambling through a backpack for pills. My heart - in that moment - shattered and I felt this emptiness that I can't really even describe. I knew in that moment that after battling *his* addiction for the last decade, I was done. Within that month, I had filed for divorce, moved my ex out of our home, created a financial plan as a single mom and started the most stressful phase of my life to date. The stress of this hit me hard and I spun head first into another flare with my UC, this time, my gut was pissed. Can **you** pinpoint times in your life where you physically felt a shift? This was it for me.

By February 2017, I was hospitalized because my body was shutting down. I had lost about 20 lbs and was fading quickly, unable to hold onto any food, barely able to make it to the bathroom most days, and I had zero energy because the fatigue hit me so hard. You know, I just to roll my eyes when I'd hear people talk about fatigue until I experienced it myself - and I was immobile. I was put on all kinds of medications including steroids, injections, and biologics via IV. In May of 2017, I had my first surgery to remove my large intestine because the disease had spread so much. After a week in the hospital I went home with a temporary ileostomy and lived the next couple of months with part of my small intestine sticking out of my abdomen. I was amazing

and I marveled at what I saw daily and even mores, felt incredible. I had energy again even though I had to be on TPN, IV nutrition. I had hope, even though my physical body didn't look like it used to. July came around and I was back in the hospital for a scheduled surgery to get a J-Pouch - internal bag - placed and for 8 months, I battled to make this work only to end up back on medication and running to the bathroom again 30x/day. I had my breaking point when I couldn't get off the acupuncture table quick enough and I had an accident right there laying on the table. It was one of the lowest, most

humiliating, most humbling, most embarrassing moments of my life. I called my ex from the parking lot and he came to pick me up, driving me to the hospital & within 3 days, I had a permanent ileostomy because my J-Pouch had failed.

I saw this as a clean slate - a major reset. I had a chance to see, right in front of me, how my food affected my body. Google an ileostomy, it's insane, but more-so, when you have one, you really do get this VIP insight as you literally watch your food exit your body from your stomach. I would eat things like cilantro or mushrooms and see it exit my body in the same shape it entered, noted. I would eat a vegetable medley then be in the hospital because my

body couldn't digest it properly, whoa, noted. I would eat a doughnut and it would exit my body within minutes while I would eat grilled chicken & rice and notice it sticking to me a bit longer, noted. I felt like an *uber-awareness* super hero that had this secret power to know what foods did what. I found my guide and pulled the knowledge I had gained from the last time I went into remission, focusing on whole foods and working thru a new elimination diet to figure out what worked *now*.

And well, here we are today. 2022 - I've been living with my Ostomy since 2018 - that still feels unreal. Though some days it's as if I've had my bag forever, some days it feels so new. My life shifted here, in 2018 as I healed I

felt like I'd gotten my life back. I could EAT again without fear. I could travel and adventure with energy again and so I did. I'm sure some of you reading watched every adventure I went on during that time and it's even when my tattoos started.

Now - WHY do I feel the need to share this entire story with you? Sure, some details are irrelevant to gut health but big picture, I believe that my eating habits **and** stress both played a role in my UC journey. I know that many of you don't have UC and so you're not at that place yet but I share it to hopefully inspire you to get ahead of it.



Do a *gut* check - do you have symptoms now that you are questioning? Are you feeling off? Do you have habits that you know aren't good for you long term? Do you eat foods even though you know you'll feel like shit after?

1. STRESS CHECK - where are you at in your life on a scale of 1-10?

I swear, I know this played such a big role in the outcome of the last decade, but you see - it started in 2006. It started with my eating habits and ignoring the red flags like hives or mouth sores. I brushed them off as just, life, while continuing to change *nothing*. This is why you'll now see me on Instagram, knee deep into a book, journaling my feelings out, and moving my

body as tools to relieve stress and manage my health. This is why I preach *the slow down* so much, almost in an annoying way, on my feed - I believe it's crucial to our gut health

2. **GUT CHECK** - how would you rate your nutritional habits now on a scale of 1-10? Can you be brutally honest with yourself? You don't have to share your number with me but answer that, what would you rate it? What are the things you're doing/eating/consuming now that you know you should be cutting out? Have you taken the time to slow yourself down and become intentional with the foods you eat? I created my Intentional Eating Course to teach people my mindset around the slow down during meals - notice what you're eating, notice how you feel, notice what your body does/says afterwards, and notice what shifts. I think ultimate awareness around what foods worked and what foods caused harm, changed everything for me. How is your mood?
How is your energy?
How are your sleep habits?
Do you bloat easily?
Struggle with gas?
Experience inflammation?
Do you deal with chronic breakouts or skin irritations?

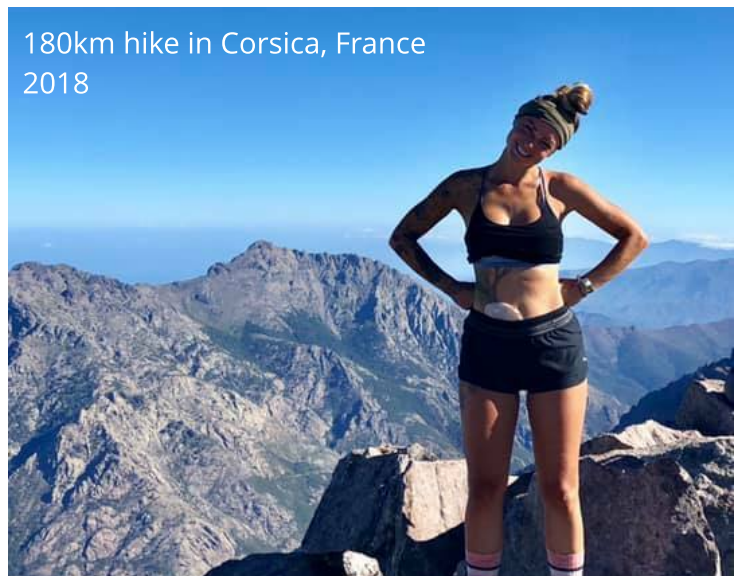
I tell my team all the time, the more you know, the better you'll do. Awareness is key in so many aspects of our life, why do we ignore this when it comes to the food we put inside our bodies? Just like a plant,

we need fuel. Just like an animal, just like a vehicle. We can not run on empty, or on shit. It's almost this head space of **-I know too much** and when you know too much, you do better. You shift, you change, you mold, you morph, and you let go of habits & beliefs that no longer align.

So - I'd love to help you KNOW MORE about how your body is doing, more awareness, more intention. I shared on my IG but I'll tell you here that I will make this shift with you - I'm going to start talking more about my gut health & nutrition habits because they *are* important and a major part of who I am and how I was shaped. Feel free to follow along and do not hesitate to ask questions if you have them - as you can tell from the stories I shared, I'm an open book.

In addition, I'd love to walk you through a program similar to what I did that helped me get my life back. Stop telling yourself that the reactions you're having are normal, they're not.

180km hike in Corsica, France
2018



THE NOW

MUST READ.

HEAL YOURSELF.
RECLAIM YOUR VOICE.
STAND IN YOUR POWER.
F*CK LIKE A GODDESS.
ALEXANDRA ROXO

Truth: I saw this book when we were in Encinitas and I took a picture of it on the shelf because I didn't wanna carry it around with me all day while we were out. When I got home, I ordered it online and had it to the house within 2 days. The title really is what got me but the second I got into Chapter 1 - I was hooked and inspired as hell. At first I was nervous to share this book because of the title, hah! It's not a how-to sex book but instead a how-to get your spiritual shit aligned with your human shit so you can step into your power and live from a place of alignment. This book gave me permission to radiate my light, to speak my truth, and to live without shame, embarrassment, or fear around where I've been and where I'm going. The author, Alexandra Roxo feels like a soul sister and I've never met her (though I do recommend following her on instagram). If you feel like you're lacking direction, struggling in your healing journey, or fearful to use your voice - this book is 10/10 recommended for **you**.

WORK WITH ME.

THE 4 WEEK
GUT PROTOCOL™



And now, we're live! The 4-Week Gut Protocol has launched and if you've been having symptoms of an unhealthy gut or food sensitivities - this program is for you. I will be taking myself through this program for the next couple of weeks so I can get a jump start on the program flow & necessary modifications for myself. From there, I'll be organizing a group through our app for anyone wanting to join me on this 4-week journey. Think of it as an elimination diet of sorts, paying insane close attention to what you eat and why. Then noticing: mood shifts, energy slumps or jolts, gas or bloating, discomfort or inflammation - I'm going to help you become overly aware of what foods are making you feel certain ways. With this, my goal is education & overall *feel better*. That's not to say I feel bad but I do know there's always room for improvement and increased awareness. I always tell my team, the more you know, the more you know. Awareness brings peace.

Within my small group, we will move our bodies while intentionally eating. I will be going live a few times/week to share my updates & modifications and to answer questions you may have. This gut journey is **not** easy and to do it solo can be discouraging. So, be my accountability buddy. All you have to do is click below. xx Raina

OKAY I'M READY FOR THIS.