*A New Perspective*

At the end of 2011 I watched a documentary that changed my life. Titled *Forks Over Knives*, this film explored the effects of a ‘whole food plant based diet’. I found the concept of using food as medicine intriguing. Growing up in a more conventional home where we ate meat and drank milk at every meal, this concept seemed a bit extreme, but I believe challenge brings growth.

Before this experience I considered myself a healthy person, an average teenage girl in weight and height with no major health concerns. One day while I was perusing through Netflix trying to find something to ease my boredom, I came across *Forks Over Knives*. Although I was skeptical, I had nothing else better to do so I thought I’d give it a try. As the documentary began I was shocked by overall level of sickness in our country. I asked myself, “Are that many people, that sick?” Diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer are far too common in adults and even children. The beginning of the documentary focused on the relationship between diet and disease. I remember clearly the first moment of shock: real clinical results that animal protein activates the cells and causes cancer growth. That took a moment to sink into my mind. The doctor explained that only 1-2 percent of cancer is purely genetic and the rest is turned on by other factors, animal protein being a significant contributor. The story continued with testimonies of people who had not only survived cancer and other terminal illnesses, but lived on full, healthy lives. By this point my mind was churning, trying to wrap my head around this profound idea. The body is designed to heal itself; give it the right things and you can not only treat the symptoms, but CURE the disease. From lab tests, clinical studies, historical evidence, to even entire population studies, the science was there.

Already sitting at the edge of my seat, the next segment took my breath away. As pictures of the land consumed and destroyed by the meat industry and brain rattling statistics on the pollution and detriment caused by production rolled by, I knew I was sold. It felt wrong that food should have such big consequences. By choosing to not eat animal products I could more than just help myself, I could help take care of the planet too. As the thought settled over me I was excited to begin my new lifestyle.

The easiest argument people can make against this documentary, is that it is too radical. I was one of those people who made fun of vegans and criticized their diet, because I didn’t understand. Our whole lives we have been told that animal products are good for us; we need them to be healthy. Going against the flow of accepted social beliefs isn’t easy and trying to explain to your skeptical friends is even harder. In the beginning of my transition to this new way of life, it was very difficult. I didn’t realize how social eating is until my participation was severely limited. Getting pizza and ice cream with friends is more than just eating food, it’s a bonding experience. The first few times of sitting there empty handed while my friends chowed down was awkward, but now we have all accepted it and I am not above allowing myself a little treat every once in a while. As time passes things get easier. I have no desire to eat meat and my friends have gotten used to the amount of hummus that is always in my refrigerator. Some people still think I’m crazy, but to me it doesn’t seem radical, it seems simple.

After watching *Forks Over Knives* I catapulted myself into a self-improvement adventure, researching these and other ideas on my own. I found out what works for me and I know my life will never be the same. When I realized how much I reduced my carbon footprint by cutting out animal products from my diet, I wondered what else I could do to ease the burden I put on the planet. I have become increasingly more concerned about the environment since watching this film, and because of my curiosity in small changes that have big results, I have decided to pursue a degree in Environmental Earth Science with a co-major in Sustainability.

This film challenged me to let my body work the way it was designed to, and live a more natural life. I feel so powerful and in control of my health now. Cancer was such a frightening idea to me because of the loved ones I have lost, but now am free from that fear. “Forks Over Knives” did not just change my diet, but challenged me to take responsibility for my life. I am in charge of my body, my thoughts, my health, and my impact. Because of my new level of awareness, I want to do something in my lifetime that will make the world an even better place to live for everything inhabiting it. My goal is to see a healthy humanity living on a happy planet. “Forks Over Knives” pushed me to live consciously in all aspects of my life.