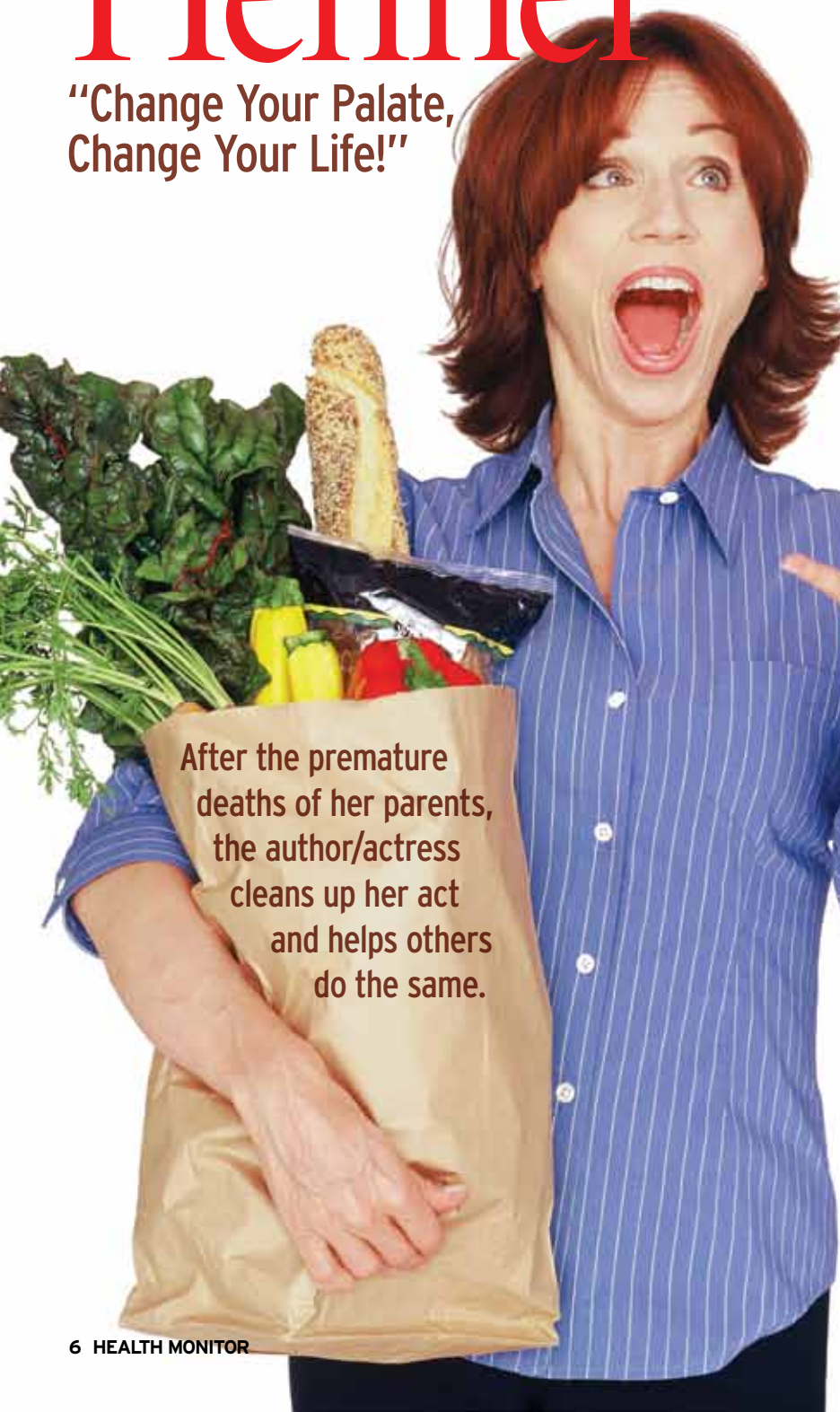


# Marilu Henner

"Change Your Palate, Change Your Life!"



After the premature deaths of her parents, the author/actress cleans up her act and helps others do the same.

**G**rowing up in Chicago as the third of six kids, actress Marilu Henner's childhood home was always bustling. "My father, who was in the automobile business, built a dance school for my mother in our backyard garage," recalls Marilu, who is also a businesswoman, author, and, in 2008, a contestant on NBC's *Celebrity Apprentice*.

When her mother, Loretta, wasn't teaching dance, she was styling hair in the family's kitchen beauty shop. "We had a hair-dryer chair where the refrigerator should have been," Marilu fondly recalls.

Despite her pretty face and confident manner, Marilu was a self-conscious child. "I struggled with my weight and was a yo-yo dieter as a teenager," she admits. When her father, Joseph, died suddenly at age 52, Marilu, then 17, was shattered. "He had a massive heart attack during a Christmas party at our house," she says, "and died in less than five minutes."

Reeling from her father's death, Marilu sought comfort from food. Her weight climbed, eventually reaching 174 pounds—far too much for her height of 5 feet 7 inches. Fad

diets didn't help, and Marilu's weight continually seesawed. "I had such unhealthy eating habits," she admits.

Still battling diet demons the following year, Marilu began her freshman year at the University of Chicago. While a student there, she originated the role of Marty in the pre-Broadway production of the musical *Grease*. Two years later, in 1972, she left school to join the national *Grease* touring company alongside John Travolta, with whom she had a much-publicized romance. In 1974, she made her Broadway debut in the musical production *Over There!* She then launched her film career, debuting in the sleeper hit *Between the Lines* in 1977. Marilu's star was rising quickly; that same year, she was cast as the sassy single mom, Elaine Nardo, on the ABC hit sitcom "Taxi."

As Marilu's star climbed, Loretta, once president of the National Association of Dance and Affiliated Arts, began to deteriorate. She had rheumatoid arthritis that was spinning out of control. Watching "a spirited woman and great dance teacher" fade away was agonizing.

Things quickly spiraled downward. Marilu says her mother "was teaching dance in December 1977, developed the flu in January 1978, and was hospitalized in February." Then, Loretta developed a serious infection that required her leg to be amputated. With her health continuing to deteriorate, Loretta Henner died in May 1978 at age 58.

### Becoming a 'student' of health

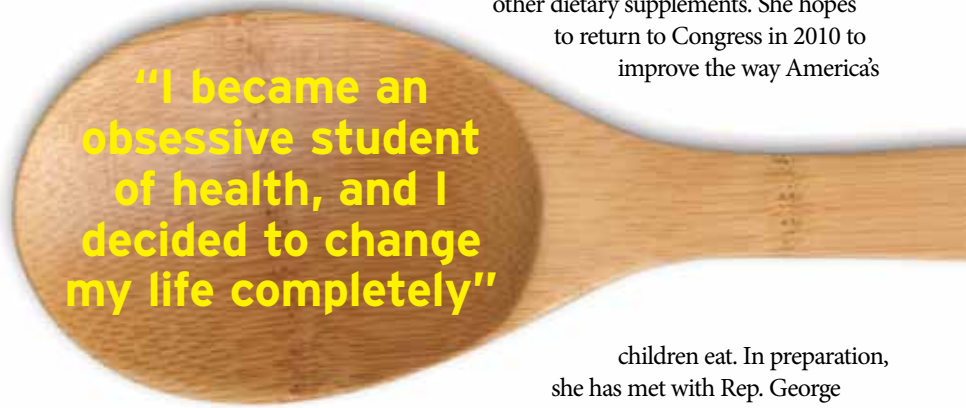
The untimely death of her mother sent Marilu in a new direction. "I became an obsessive student of health, and I decided to change my life completely," she says. In the process, she also determined to do whatever she could to prevent her siblings from following in their parents' unhealthful footsteps. In 1979, she went home to Chicago for Thanksgiving with an organic turkey tucked under her arm. "My siblings thought, *Yeah, whatever,*" she jokes.

But Marilu was completely serious.

Her quest took her to medical libraries, nutritionists, health-food stores, doctors offices, and even to a human anatomy class. "I read about 400 books," she says. It has also led her to pen eight diet, fitness, and nutrition books, including her most recent, *Wear Your Life Well: Use What You Have to Get What You Want* (Harper Paperbacks, 2009).

It took eight years for Marilu to perfect a lifestyle that helped her shed 54 pounds—which she's kept off for more than 30 years—and to shave more than 100 points off her total cholesterol. "I learned the importance of exercise, stress management, and healthful eating," she says.

More than three decades later, Marilu is still improving the diets of



friends, extended family members, and the students who attend her online courses at [www.marilu.com](http://www.marilu.com). She has also helped her husband, Michael Brown, and sons, Nick, 15, and Joey, 14, discover healthful foods that, as she puts it, "love them back." Her mantra: *Change your palate, change your life.*

Eating properly, she believes, even helped her husband overcome cancer. "While we were dating, he was diagnosed with early-stage bladder and lung cancer," says Marilu. In addition to undergoing surgery, Michael "totally changed his diet," and has enjoyed a clean bill of health for six years.

Marilu follows a vegan diet, but she does prepare healthful non-vegan food when cooking for others. "I

make a healthier version of my mom's Thanksgiving meal for my kids, using organic turkey, rice milk, and stuffing made with whole-wheat or squaw bread, instead of white. I also use turkey sausage instead of pork," she explains. Marilu seasons her food with fresh herbs and sea or Celtic salt, and she uses olive oil in place of butter.

In addition to eating well, Marilu exercises regularly, walking two miles a day on a treadmill or around her neighborhood. She also does a 13-minute Pilates routine daily.

### Taking her mission public

Recently, Marilu began taking her quest for health public. In 2005, she testified before Congress on the benefits of omega-3 fish oils, antioxidants, and other dietary supplements. She hopes to return to Congress in 2010 to improve the way America's

children eat. In preparation, she has met with Rep. George Miller (D, Calif.) to discuss the Child Nutrition Act, a major piece of federal legislation that helps to determine the nation's school food programs and is reauthorized every five years. Marilu hopes to help persuade lawmakers to enact tougher guidelines for school lunch programs, thereby improving children's health.

Marilu's passion for changing the lives of future generations stems from her own and her family's experiences. In a way, she says, she is trying to make up for the past. Despite all her personal and professional accomplishments, she regrets that she couldn't save her parents. "If I knew then what I know now," she says, "I could have made their lives so much happier and healthier."

—Gina Roberts-Grey