

# The FELIX Letter

A COMMENTARY ON NUTRITION

No. 125

Autumn 2003

## OPRAH, READ THIS BOOK!

**F**elix Letter readers probably suspect this editor is not a cynic—rather, more of an unrealistic idealist. Maybe that's because she grew up with good folks and, long ago, discovered the best inoculations against cynicism (at what sometimes seems to be a bottomless reservoir of self-serving greedheads in this world!) prove to be the people of integrity in one's life.

I've just finished reading a towering book. *Back to the Mother Land Home Remedies* is by Chinyere Agbai, wife of biochemist Oji Agbai, ND, PhD. They've been in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for many years, and both are from the Igbo people of Nigerian West Africa. More later, about the book and Chinyere Agbai.

I first began writing about Dr. Agbai ten years ago. It was a nutritionist's dream: he was using natural foods and their derivatives to treat sickle cell anemia *safely*. Since 1986, he'd been researching *thiocyanate's* effects—both on *in vitro* red blood cells from individuals with a sickle cell gene from each parent ("homozygotes"), and on such individuals themselves. By now, he has compiled impressive studies, as have certain medical doctors ascribing to his concepts.

### On the Same Trail...

In an oddly parallel way, in 1976—my last undergraduate year at UC Berkeley—I'd done a report on certain "toxic" compounds in plant foods whose mysterious, protective roles in human health largely were being overlooked. One of my references was Robert G. Houston's brilliant paper in *American J. of Clinical Nutrition*, November 1973, in which he said such substances when ingested reduced the destructive distortion ("sickling") of red blood cells in homozygous sicklers, allowing these individuals—contrary to prevailing medical thought—to live normal lives, grow up, marry, and have children with the same genes.

### Nature's Not-So-Secret Weapons

He said potentially toxic cyanate-bearing molecules (beta-cyanogenetic glucosides) abundant in traditional foods of rural Africa [and other malaria-infested countries\*] were safely converted in the body to "thiocyanate," a normal presence

in mammalian fluids. Homozygous sicklers consuming such foods as African yam, cassava, millet, sorghum, flaxseed, broccoli, mustard greens, cauliflower, blackberries, raspberries, chickpeas, bamboo sprouts, etc. could maintain desirable plasma levels of thiocyanate.

Houston said these high thiocyanate levels protected them from 'classic' sickle-cell symptoms, e.g., *intractable anemia, chronic infections, poor development, bone and tissue destruction, crippling pain, strokes, and frequently early death.*

*To this day, these are the 'classic' symptoms still endured by many of the estimated 80,000 to 90,000 patients in the United States.*

### An Unmerciful Disease

They first show up usually in toddlers. Standard treatment employs routine (sometimes daily) antibiotics, periodic blood transfusion, and heavy duty painkillers; while more 'advanced' therapy may employ, e.g., hydroxyurea, bone marrow transplantation, and stem cell transplantation. The latter two are costly and hazardous, while hydroxyurea, a potent cancer drug, may induce a long list of side effects, including bone marrow depression.



GEORGE '15

"It all started when I found out my wife was cooking with margarine instead of butter."

### Cynicism? Not on Your Life!

Readers (especially longtime ones) are not surprised, I'm sure, that the diet-sickle cell connection has sunk like a lead balloon so far as the medical establishment's interest is concerned. So what, if there are tasty foods and supplements that alleviate suffering in children *safely and cheaply*? Twenty-two years of my reporting on similar 'oversights' have blunted any shock value, right?

But let's take heart from the timetables of two events. One is the current broad-based medical acceptance of the vitalness to mental and physical health of the *Omega-3 fatty acids*. This took about 25 years to fruition, starting from the era when substantial research first appeared—that of J. Dyerberg, Hugh Sinclair, Wm. E. Connor, Michael A. Crawford, Donald O. Rudin, and other greats, in the 1970s and early '80s.

Secondly, the axe is about to fall on *trans-fats*—at least so far as dietitian/doctor/consumer approval is concerned. That's another ~25-year-aborning victory; definitive research on trans-fat perils goes back to the 1970's, including Mary Enig's classic 1978 paper on trans-fats' connection to cancer.

Given the above time-lines, I say the *thiocyanate vs sickle cell disease* story is due now for broad medical and public consideration.

\* Sickle cell genes apparently provide protection against severe malaria, because the parasites transmitted by the mosquito can't complete their life cycle in sickled cells. Homozygote sicklers who eat enough traditional foods to help keep red blood cells from sickling would still have enough sickled cells to foil many of the malarial parasites. Sickling genes occur in malaria-troubled areas throughout the world, including India, Asia, Arab countries, Sicily, Greece, Egypt, Philippines, West Indies, Central & South America, and thus are found in every racial group—not just in Africans and their descendants, as the 17<sup>th</sup> ed of *The Merck Manual* (1999) persists in misstating!

Remarkably, the same protective foods (high in beta-cyanogenetic glucosides) do double duty by actually interfering with the parasite's development.

## Back to the Book Now

Even if you're not a skilled cook nor have a vested interest in sickle cell remedies, I promise you'll have a hard time putting Chinyere Agbai's book down. She transports you to her homeland, not just its foods, but its *ethos*, on every page.

From the Introduction: "In Igbo Land, the two chief foods are the African yams\*\* and cassava. It was not until my husband...discovered the importance of these two foods did I begin to know why the Igbo indigenes hold these two foods very highly. In fact, in my hometown, Edda in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, the African Yam is called 'The king of all foods.' There is a big celebration before the farmers would harvest the very first yam...'New Yam Festival.' ...Very early in the morning...a designated man would go and wake people up by beating a wooden instrument as loud as he could. This instrument is called 'ikoro,' which is always in the Market Square. Everyone would wake up and start singing, screaming and dancing [words in the Igbo language]. Then the youths, the ladies and the men would go to the farm and the man of the house would harvest some of the yams..."

"Before anyone could cook it in his or her house, the men would donate some that would be cooked in a large meal in the Market Square...Every household would bring their plates for their families' own share of the cooked yam. It is only after this general cooking and eating would individual families start cooking their own. This signifies community and unity of each section of the village.

"The men are in charge of planting and harvesting yams, while the ladies are in charge of planting and harvesting the cassava, which is 'Queen of Crops' and the second highly respected food at home. There is also a celebration of the cassava called 'Nmemme Egburu.'

"The yam is so important that in the olden days the man who has the largest number of yams can marry any beautiful girl in the village..."

## Tradition's Gift

Her husband's research alerted her to the significance of the village's ancient rituals: African yam and cassava, besides providing satisfying carbohydrate calories, are the biggest contributors among edible plants to the consumer's plasma level of *thiocyanate*. The African yam is native, while cassava was brought hundreds of years ago from the West Indies during the slave trade. Both are easily prepared in innumerable favorite concoctions, often mixed with herbs, spices, greens, and fish or meat.

Pickles/Brian Crane



When I first contacted her in Tulsa ten years ago, Chinyere Agbai who had trained as a medical technologist was rearing their young children and doing clinical labwork. Early on, I was impressed by the couple's deeply spiritual natures. Over the years, I've observed the resilience and lack of bitterness with which they've dealt with heavy setbacks that I've known about. Their faith is expressed often by their belief in "the Almighty's wisdom," for example, in providing African people with specific foods and herbs that will sustain them in good health.

She began formal religious studies, and this spring earned her Master of Divinity degree from Phillips Theological Graduate Seminary (in Tulsa). Currently, she is Rev. Chinyere Agbai, pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Claremore, Oklahoma.

You've never read a cookbook like this: where else can you find Igbo names for numerous African yam varieties and be told not to throw away the water used in cooking them in order to "preserve thiocyanate, the therapeutic nutrient, which is soluble in the water"? Comments spice up every page: "My grandmother loved to prepare ...grated cassava in many different ways...No wonder she died at the age of hundred, without cancer, stroke, heart attack or any other disease. Yet, she was working in the sun every day until she was not able to work due to old age. She never took any medication for any of the above mentioned health problems. She was a healthy, hardworking beautiful lady. She is now resting in perfect peace with the Lord."

Igbo-based recipes that look do-able and tasty form about one-half the book. After that there's her "Home Remedies" chapter, and one giving details on very moving sickle-cell and cancer cases.

\*\*African yam is in the *Dioscorea* genus, not related to the common American yam that's really a sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*).

## Message to Her People

While Rev. Agbai's passionate focus on the need for faith and caring in human relations illuminates every page, in the latter chapters of this 77-page book she specifically challenges *African-Americans*: to think and act with pride, not "to give up and let others continue to teach us how to think, what to think about, and continue to make our decision(s) for us...the learned inferiority complex that we all live with every day should be burnt, buried, be mourned for, and be forgotten so that we would start loving what we have and make it the best in the world."

She wants African-Americans to know and honor their own heroes, such as the 11 great inventors whose contributions she describes, all of African descent.

Most of all, *African-Americans must rescue their young*. "...without developing good relationship with our young people, they will all perish, so would our future. What I mean by perishing is that they could be dead, mentally deficient or insane."

Describing the real-life case of "Joe," a youngster who often skipped doing his homework because he never knew whether he'd have a place to sleep at night, she evokes the ethos of her homeland: "...if this was in Africa... Joe [would] definitely be living with a relative of either of his parents. Whether this relative has much or little, he or she would make sure that Joe knows where his sleeping place is. "They may not have cars, good houses, but they will make sure that they take care of this youth. As a result... Joe would do his best in school by doing his homework, because Joe wants to help someone else when Joe grows up. Africans have heart for their young. They will never want anyone that is related to them to go hungry...This is the kind of life that we want to share with all the people of African descent. It is this kind of care that sustained our ancestors here in America ...They understood that God is love, and that love can only be made genuine when we share it with one another..."



### Kicking Butt!

Rev. Agbai tells a delicious story about taking her little daughter years ago (soon after the family had moved to a new city) to begin kindergarten in an unfamiliar school, only to be called three days later by the (white) school psychologist. It seems this woman had determined in that fleeting interim that the child was learning disabled, and needed to be removed to a learning disabled class!

It's worth 25 bucks just to read how Chinyere Agbai mopped the floor, figuratively, with that lady and her "inaccurate and racist's diagnoses."

Suffice it to say, shortly afterwards the school decided this very bright but initially shy little girl (who was bilingual in the Igbo language and English) needed to jump from kindergarten to the second grade! That daughter eventually graduated from high school with a top grade point average that's earned her entry to a prestigious university and a substantial scholarship.

The all too common despair and family breakdown in African-American life are partly a heritage from slavery and its aftermath. Whatever turmoil and wars may afflict Nigeria, Chinyere Agbai and her fellow-villagers were not slaves, but citizens of their own country, strengthened by family and village ties and traditions, including a diet that helped to protect them from sickle-cell anemia, malaria, high blood pressure, and cancer. (Note: This diet works for *all* races.) Like her fellow-countryman and future husband, the young Chinyere was encouraged to become educated so that she could, in turn, help her people and community. That's what she's doing. Chinyere means "God's gift" in the Igbo language.



**Back to the Mother Land Home Remedies: For Prevention & Control of Cancer, Sickle Cell Anemia, & other diseases** can be ordered for \$25 from Rev. Chinyere Agbai, Natural Health Research Institute, P.O. Box 8355, Tulsa, OK 74101. Or at Chinyereag@hotmail.com

### At a Major African Summit

I've never met the Agbai's in person, but recently saw a video showing a youthful, sweet-faced man addressing a group. Oji Agbai was at the Leon Sullivan African Summit on July 14 in Abuja, Nigeria, talking about sickle cell anemia, about the native foods that will ameliorate it, and Dioscovite, the thiocyanate-based supplement which he patented. (Dioscovite is registered in Nigeria as a dietary supplement for sickle cell anemia control. It's available here as well.\*\*\*)

In the front row, asking knowledgeable questions, was a tall, confident older man who looked vaguely familiar to me. Turns out he was the Honorable Andrew Young, former mayor of Atlanta, former ambassador to the United Nations, chairperson for the Summit, and the key sponsor for Oji Agbai's participation! To me, this looks like progress. □

\*\*\*Dr. Oji Agbai can be contacted re Dioscovite, as well as his book, *Sickle Cell Anemia: A Solution At Last*, at his Natural Health Research Institute, 6390 E. 31<sup>st</sup> St., Suite E, Tulsa, OK 74135. FAX: (918) 627-5906.

*Felix Letter* issues on thiocyanate-yielding foods, early medical uses, significance in sickle cell disease, hypertension, cancer, etc. are too numerous to list, but for a \$10 request to *The Felix Letter* you'll have a comprehensive selection. Please write "For thiocyanate issues" on your request or check.

### CORRECTION & APOLOGY

In FL#124, I listed an incorrect phone number for Dr. Whitaker's worthy newsletter *HEALTH & HEALING*. The correct one is 800-539-8219. I would gladly throttle my inept proofreader, but she's also the bookkeeper, mailer, cleaning lady, and editor, and she works cheap.

### GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY!

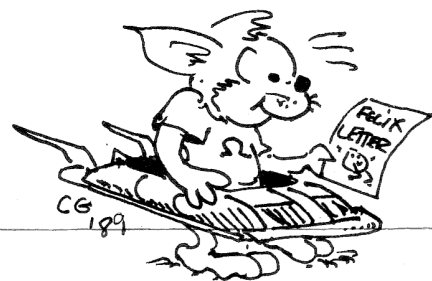
**All About Omega-3 Oils**, my little book which I love because of its accuracy, usefulness, and readability (~90 half-pages), was dropped (foolishly, I say!) by the publisher, so I bought up their supply. Local health food stores tell me they're selling well, and I still have copies for my readers. Cost including shipping is \$3, or 2 books for \$5. (Cash or checks only, please.) □

### FELLOW-FELINE FACTS

My daughter Elissa and son-in-law Bob derive much joy and comfort from their three cats—as I do when kitty-sitting for them in rural Aptos while the kids dash off—yet again!—to Kaua'i. But it's Elissa especially who has the patience to keep feline instincts challenged regularly with all manner of chasing/hiding games. She manipulates tissue paper, peacock feathers, wheat stalks, etc. in tantalizing ways, demonstrating them to me (hopefully) in the few days before she and Bob leave for snorkeling and hiking on their favorite island.

Kiki, the young Siamese female, is always ripe for romping. Upstairs in the master bedroom where the toys are kept, her current favorite game involves leaping and dashing after a plastic "thingy" resembling a feathery sea anemone. It bounces seductively at the end of a long, flexible wire attached to a yard-long wooden rod, which Elissa keeps swinging with enviable endurance.

However, once on kitty-sitting vacation time, aside from overfeeding all three on demand (a strict no-no) and sharing my bed with whichever of the three is (are) so inclined, my preferred role as kitty-grandma involves mainly reading mysteries or napping on the living room couch while some or all of the cats curl up next to me or nearby, and do what cats also do well: nap.



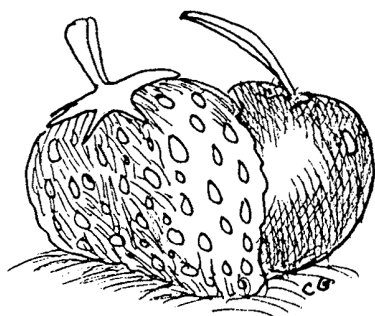
So, all our vacations end and Elissa is home alone in the kitchen after a scrambling day of college teaching, faculty meetings, etc. (I'm long gone. This is told to me via telephone.) She's feeling guilty because, although she's fed all three, she hasn't gone upstairs to the bedroom for the usual kitty fun & games—but it's been a long day, designated-chef Bob had to work late, and she's fixing dinner.

Their lofty cathedral-ceilinged house has a long, open staircase from the kitchen-dining room-entry level up a flight to the living room landing. From there, more stairs angle up to the bedroom level. Although she thinks she hears weird thumpings from on high, then increasingly

louder bump-bump-bumps, Elissa finishes her chore at the sink before turning around to look up.

On the top stairs leading down to the living room landing, Kiki, the feathery 'thingy' clamped in her jaws, is tugging hard, maneuvering her treasure and its unwieldy wire attachment down the uncarpeted wooden stairs. The wooden rod bangs loudly behind on every tread. Elissa watches in awe as the small cat doggedly\* hauls the clumsy contraption down every step of the last, long staircase, releases it at Elissa's feet, and meows.

"Doggedly" is appropriate: in an obvious ploy, dogs will drop a leash, ball, etc. at their guardians' feet. This isn't typical of cats, but my three furry grandkids, like my unfurry one, are above-average. □



### YOU'LL SEE MORE RAINBOWS

Someday in the future, we'll realize this century ushered in an era in which nutritional medicine won critical rounds in the contest with the pharmaceutically dominated kind. Even now, Omega-3 fatty acids are receiving deserved homage in pediatric, cardiology, and psychiatric circles. And on the vitamin C front, Matthias Rath, who was handed the torch by the late great Linus Pauling, shows how the integrity and resilience of heart and blood vessels depend on enough vitamin C, lysine, and proline, to allow tissue-reinforcing collagen to be renewed every day.

I'm visualizing a future in which routine consumption by an informed populace of the above nutrients, along with Omega-3s, vitamin E, and other food-based supporters of systemic function, will make atherosclerotic heart disease obsolete! After all, as Dr. Rath writes, cholesterol-filled deposits on arterial walls are just a "plaster cast for an artery wall weakened by vitamin deficiency." [See FL#122.]

The Rath Health Alliance's supplement sales support its conferences, literature, public seminars, and its pioneering laboratory and clinical studies. They're getting the word out to hundreds of thousands of people here and in Europe. Alliance membership is free. Tel: 1-800-624-2442. [www.drrathhealthalliance.com](http://www.drrathhealthalliance.com).

### A Book Can Change the World

Another related development: The book **Vitamin C, Infectious Diseases, & Toxins** by Thomas E. Levy, MD, JD, came out in 2002. In April of 2003, Tom Levy spoke to a rapt audience at a Smart Life Forum meeting in Los Altos, a few miles from Stanford University, giving us the best news in 21<sup>st</sup> century medicine, as described in *FLs* 123 & 124.

In reviewing the book I omitted an overview of what he and other scientists say is just one of the reasons vitamin C is able to quell an astonishing range of infectious diseases and deadly toxins.

This aspect has to do with *flow of electrons*. As you may or may not remember, all matter has varying proportions of positively charged "protons," negatively charged "electrons," and neutral particles cleverly called "neutrons."

"All of the body's functions are directed, controlled, and regulated by this physiological flow of electricity. Furthermore, this flow...also establishes and maintains the subtle magnetic fields in the body that appear to be involved with good health."

Levy says a great 20<sup>th</sup> century scientist, Szent-Gyorgi, said exchange of energy can only occur in the body "when there is an imbalance of electrons between and among molecules. This imbalance of electrons causes the natural flow of electrons, a biological form of electricity, throughout the body."

*"Health exists when electrons flow fully and freely, illness exists when this flow is significantly impaired, and death occurs when this flow stops...Vitamin C... appears to be a most important stimulus to this flow of electricity."* [My emphasis. CF]

### I Knew It: Magnets Do Work!

In his April talk, Dr. Levy further endeared himself to me by saying electron flow appears to be intimately involved in the physical and biological effects of *magnetism*. Exposing the body to a North pole magnetic field can decrease inflammation and pain and suppress microbial growth, while a South pole magnetic field exposure has opposite biological effects. "One possible explanation is that a North pole magnetic field facilitates delivery of electrons into exposed tissue...Regardless, the proper use of the North pole of a strong biomagnet closely mimics the effects of vitamin C delivered systemically."

In future newsletters, I'll share my 15-year experience in applying the North pole of magnets to sundry aching and/or inflamed Felix parts, okay?

Meanwhile, stay on the inside track of 21<sup>st</sup> century, C-liberated medicine, and buy Tom Levy's book. Xlibris Corp. (publisher): 888-795-4274. Web site orders: [www.TomLevyMD.com](http://www.TomLevyMD.com)

Smart Life Forum has a nifty website which even Luddite Clara accessed, with patient telephone help from SLForum president Phil Jacklin, who is even more excited than I—if that's possible—about worldwide implications of Levy's work: [www.smartlifeforum.org](http://www.smartlifeforum.org)

On it, I readily found the "MEGA-C" site, and learned I could access, for example, the full text of Dr. Robert Cathcart's great pioneering guide on titrating vitamin C to bowel tolerance. Then another miracle: *Felix Letters* appeared with just a click of the mouse on *that* site. Thank you, SLF! □



Illustrations are by the late Clay Geerdes & other artists as noted.

THE FELIX LETTER, P.O. Box 7094, Berkeley CA 94707, has been published independently by Clara Felix since 1981, supported by subscriptions. She now publishes it quarterly.

Descriptive list of issues & sample: \$1  
Subscriptions USA, Canada (US funds):  
6 issues (1-1/2 yrs): \$12  
12 issues (3 years): \$22

No. 125 - Autumn 2003

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