

Here's one businessman who's far from uptight



Joel Feldman

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Joel Feldman feels good about his body. He feels good about his mind. For a businessman, he's remarkably relaxed, warm.

"I have to have a good time every day," says the bushy-bearded vegetarian.

To prove it, he'll jump up in his chair and do a headstand. Then, peering out from under his legs, he'll ask you if you're ready to take his picture now.

Not your typical high-blood-pressured, shirt-and-tie type. In fact, Feldman's more likely to wear denims held up by suspenders around the office.

But his BMW, twin-engine Cessna airplane and three popular Kitchen Barn stores are material proofs of his success.

Feldman's idea of fun is to throw a tent and a 10-speed bicycle in the back of his plane and take off on a cross-country tour.

Yet life hasn't always been a bowl of cherries. Eight years ago, Feldman was an overweight salesman with little time for anything but work.

What changed him? The typical identity crisis that most of us go through changing from child to adult.

"I got out of bed one day and leaned over to tie my shoes and realized I was out of breath," says Feldman. "Then I started asking myself, 'Why the hell am I here?'"

Feldman didn't go on a diet. "Diets are temporary," he says. What he did was stop eating foods that didn't benefit him. That meant giving up red meat, white meat, white bread, white sugar, etc.

As he turned to more nutritious fare, it opened up "a whole new avenue of delicious foods that tasted better." Feldman also discovered "a whole new life of cooking."

It is not only important how food is prepared and in what atmosphere it is served, Feldman realized, it is important, in what type of utensil it is cooked.

That's when he decided to open up his first Kitchen Barn, a store devoted entirely to quality kitchenware.

It was the first store of its type in Tidewater and it was an immediate success.

"There are a lot of military families in this area who have been exposed to many different types of cooking because of their travels. They were thrilled that we were here," says Feldman. "It meant that they didn't have to mail-order utensils that stores normally don't stock."

Feldman has become an expert on nutrition and kitchenware. He can caress a frying pan and not look unusual. Copper-bottomed pans, he will tell you, are still the best heat conductors. But, because copper conducts heat so rapidly, a layer of aluminum with a stainless steel interior, makes for the most perfect pan.

But aluminum in itself is a no-no. You won't find an aluminum-bottomed or aluminum interior pot or pan in any of his stores.

"It's cheap, and therefore popular, but aluminum comes off in foods and robs the body of nutrients," he says.

Teflon-coated pots and pans are also harmful, Feldman believes, because they chip.

Also, he says, food cooked in aluminum or teflon utensils don't taste as good as food cooked in stainless steel utensils.

Feldman regularly gives cooking tips, food preparation demonstrations and advice on nutrition to school home economics teachers and to area clubs and organizations. It's a source of pleasure to him, he says, in that he's always invited back.

Feldman also gives a weekly cooking demonstration on WTAR television's "3 in the Morning" show.

Meals at Feldman's house are "a pretty pleasurable thing," he says. He and his wife Phyllis both enjoy cooking and their kitchen, while not the most organized in the world, has "all the equipment you could want."

At a recent family meal, Mrs. Feldman cooked lasagna with brown pasta. Feldman made an original recipe of cauliflower with a mustard sauce.

"You can know the taste that you like and take it from there," he says.

The two Feldman boys, Eric, 9, and Brandt, 6, help at mealtimes, either setting the table, clearing plates or sweeping the floor.

Eric, says Feldman, will sometimes eat meat, if dining out. Brandt was brought up as a vegetarian and will not touch meat or fish. The Feldmans made and canned his baby food when he was younger.

Meals should be pleasurable affairs, says Feldman, both in preparing them and eating them.

"A lot of families hash out the day's events at dinner. Who wants to talk over Johnny's D at school? It's stressful and it doesn't aid digestion."

People who say they don't enjoy cooking, says Feldman, usually don't enjoy it because they don't have the proper utensils to prepare the food and to make it taste good.

"People spend so much more money keeping up their automobiles, for instance, than they do in preparing their food, which is much more important," says Feldman. "A man will go out and pay a lot of money for a golf club, but raises the roof if his wife tells him she spent \$40 for a pot."

Americans are spoiled by quick foods and quick service, says Feldman. "The average housewife doesn't realize her responsibility to provide nutritious meals."

Feldman says he's not motivated totally by the dollar bill, although he likes material things. But people have to realize, he says, that they get what they pay for. A \$1 apple corer, as opposed to a \$6 apple corer, is not going to go through a bushel of apples at a rapid clip, he says. However, if a person just wants to core a few apples, the \$1 model will do just fine.

"I'm interested in being an influence," Feldman says. "I care about showing people how to get the maximum amount of nutrients out of their food."

Feldman admits that he views his vegetarianism as a religious thing. "I don't want to eat any other animal. I have a compassion for cows."

However, Feldman doesn't think people should look themselves in to ways of life they may not be able to uphold.

"So many people set themselves up for failure," he says. "I never said to anyone I would never eat white bread or fish again. You have to do what feels comfortable for you. I'm not a very structured person. I do things that aren't the greatest in the world. But moderation is something that is important. If you do something bad for yourself, you don't have to have terrible guilt feelings over it. One of my favorite sayings is that everyone has a built-in alarm clock. When it goes off, you know you are doing something that is not good for you. Nobody can say that they didn't know something was bad."

Feldman enjoys coffee, but limits himself because he knows it is not good for him. He sweetens it with honey and uses milk or half and half to lighten it. Three weeks ago, he started smoking cigarettes again for the first time in eight years. But he doesn't smoke much.

"I go through phases like everyone else, but I try to do as much good for myself as I possibly can. I'm a realistic person. I don't know what perfection would be. Maybe a cabin in the mountains where you could grow and can your own vegetables."

Feldman says he has more peace and contentment today than ever before. "I feel better than I did when I was 20. I can run faster and do more than I ever did then. My doctor says I look younger every time I come in." Feldman is 36 years old.

He was born "right here in the briar patch," meaning Virginia Beach. He says he was a renegade in high school and had a beard back then. A principal tried to make him shave it off, but Feldman refused, although he later shaved to get a job.

Former teachers who run into him nowadays, he says, tell him that they always knew he'd amount to something.

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