

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

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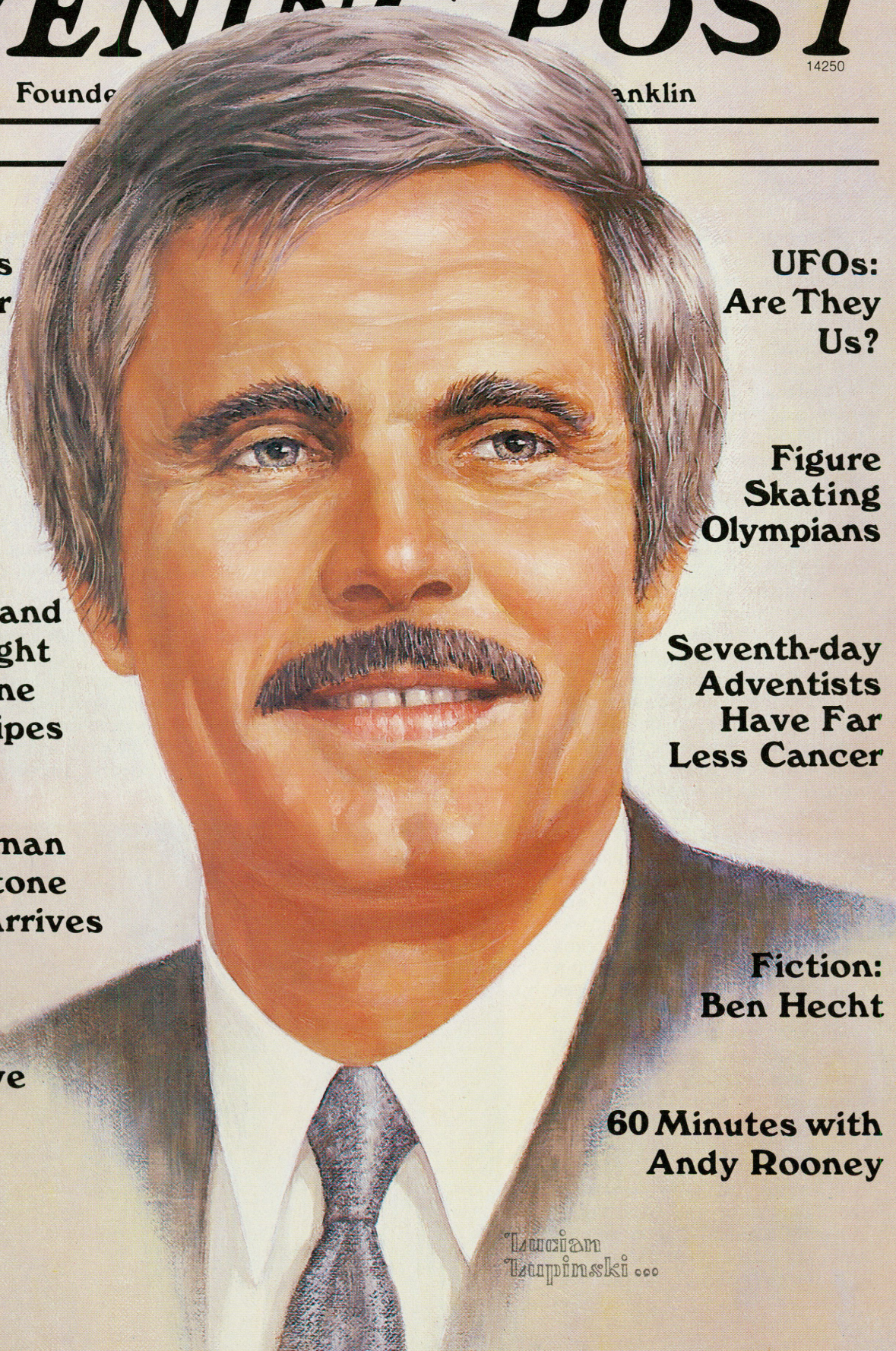
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A CHURCH WHOSE MEMBERS HAVE LESS CANCER

Seventh-day Adventists ate only low-fat, unrefined foods long before words like "cholesterol" and "polyunsaturated" hit the dictionaries. Recent studies prove conclusively that their diet habits lessen their cancer incidence and increase their longevity.

by John Cook

Probably no religious movement, ancient or modern, has put greater emphasis on diet and nutrition than the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It has done so almost from the beginning. Long before nutrition achieved the status of a full-fledged science, an extraordinary woman named Ellen G. White was instructing Seventh-day Adventists in the basic concepts of healthful living.

It wasn't merely that she denounced the use of alcohol and addictive drugs. Or that she wrote, more than 70 years ago, that tobacco is a "slow, insidious, but most malignant poison." Many other people suspected as much. More remarkable were her insistence on a well-balanced diet, before the phrase was even invented; her emphasis on natural foods in season whenever possible, long before anyone was aware of the destructive effects of preservation; her denunciation of meat, especially animal fat, a century before "cholesterol" and "polyunsaturated" found their way into dictionaries; and her rejection of refined foods, particularly flour and sugar, before scientists even suspected there were such things as "vitamins" that could be destroyed in the refining process.

She was, in short, what people would call a natural-food enthusiast. And the good effects of her tireless evangelism have spread throughout the world.

In a sense, Ellen G. White was not the founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But in another sense she most assuredly was.

In the early part of the 19th cen-



The church's health-food companies supply high-fiber and protein products for its supermarket shelves. (Below) The neonatal ward is part of the 140-bed Silvestre Adventist Hospital in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

tury many parts of the Christian world, and especially America, underwent a rather sudden awareness of the ancient prophecies about the Second Coming of Christ.

These believers in the imminent Second Advent of Christ were called Adventists. One of them, William Miller, concluded after a careful study of biblical prophecy that Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844. Despite the disappointment when the appointed day came and went, many of the "Millerites" remained faithful and continued to meet in small groups to study the Bible and to pray.

Among them was Ellen G. Harmon, born in Gorham, Maine, 17 years earlier. In December of 1844, during a small gathering of Adventists in the home of a member in South Portland, Maine, Ellen Harmon had her first vision. It convinced her and others present that the work was true and must be carried on. The vision was the first of the



innumerable prophetic visions through which Ellen Harmon—who became Mrs. James White—guided the organization and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

While Ellen Harmon was in the third grade, someone threw a rock and gashed her head. She almost bled to death, and for days her family feared for her survival. She never went back to public school, and her health was precarious during much of her life. But by the time she died, in 1915 at the age of 88 in St. Helena, California, she had written 53 full-length books on every subject that could conceivably concern the church, more than 5,000 articles and reams of letters of encouragement and instruction to individuals.

In the archives at church headquarters in Washington, D.C., are 100,000 handwritten pages of her counsels, her visions and her prophecies—roughly 25 million words.

And her books have sold in the tens of millions, making her one of the best-selling and most prolific authors of all time. Just one book, *Steps to Christ*, has sold more than 10 million copies and has been translated into 80 languages.

She inspired and directed the beginning of a vast network of missions, schools and colleges, hospitals, clinics and dispensaries in all parts of medicine at Loma Linda University, 60 miles east of Los Angeles. And she ceaselessly exhorted the church to emphasize health and diet reform.

In 1863, Ellen White saw the vision that still forms the core of Adventist diet and health. The event is often referred to as the "Otsego vision" because it came in the home of some Adventists whom she was visiting in Otsego, Michigan.

Mrs. White disclosed details of the vision over a period of years, while emphasizing that health reform had to be a gradual thing. Often when presenting a principle of diet and health, she would preface or intersperse her instructions with "I have been shown..."

And many of her pronouncements have an almost eerily contemporary ring to them:

It is wrong to eat merely to gratify the appetite, but no indifference should be manifested regarding the quality of the food, or the manner of its preparation. If the food eaten is

not relished, the body will not be so well nourished. The food should be carefully chosen and prepared with intelligence and skill.

Here is a suggestion for all whose work is sedentary or chiefly mental; let those who have sufficient moral courage and self-control try it: At each meal take only two or three kinds of simple food, and eat no more than is required to satisfy hunger. Take active exercise every day, and see if you do not receive benefit.

For use in bread making, the superfine flour is not the best. Its use is neither healthful nor economical. Fine-flour bread is lacking nutritive elements to be found in bread made from the whole wheat. It is a frequent cause of constipation and other unhealthful conditions.

Those who eat flesh are but eating grains and vegetables at second hand; for the animal receives from these things the nutrition that produces growth. The life that was in the grains and vegetables passes into the eater. We receive it by eating the flesh of the animal. How much better to get it direct, by eating the food that God provided for our use!

In the same year of 1863 the headquarters of the church were established in Battle Creek, Michigan. The first Adventist medical institution was established there. At first it was called the Western Health Reform Institute, and then simply the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

Basically, the Adventists follow the instructions in Leviticus concerning clean and unclean food. Pork is forbidden, as are shellfish and the flesh of predators. Adventists also abstain from alcohol, tobacco and harmful drugs, including the drugs in coffee and tea. And many of the members do not eat meat. Most of those who eat meat, eat it only sparingly.

Mrs. White's position was that God established man's diet when He put him in the Garden of Eden. There was no death there, no killing and therefore no meat. There were just wholesome fruits and vegetables, nuts and berries and grains. After her vision in 1863 she became deeply suspicious of rich, spicy foods, heavy desserts and the over-use of butter and cheese.

She also became suspicious of the widespread and careless use of poisonous drugs by many doctors of the day, and at the Battle Creek Sanitarium the "true remedies" were pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, pure water and faith in the healing power of God. By 1903, when church headquarters moved to Washington, D.C., the sanitarium was the largest and best-equipped health institution in the world.

Its medical superintendent was Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. He and his brother, W. K. Kellogg, gave the world cornflakes—the latter man starting the breakfast-cereal industry.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long been in the health-food industry. Today this industry includes 15 companies operating under the auspices of the church, including Loma Linda Foods, Arlington, California.

So insistent was Ellen G. White on the subject of health reform that instruction on diet and the preparation of health foods became common features of Adventist missionary work. Special health-food features began to appear within the evangelistic program for the edification of the prospective convert. Wherever the missionaries went there was emphasis on health and healing, so that today the Adventist Church operates 345 hospitals, sanitariums, clinics and dispensaries in various parts of the world, and many local churches hold nutrition classes open to the public.

In 1905, when she was 78, Mrs. White chose the site of Loma Linda University. This university, which for years was called the College of Medical Evangelists, includes one of the world's leading medical schools. It also features schools of dentistry, nursing, health and allied health professions.

The university is the heart of the city of Loma Linda, a pleasant community of about 10,000 people between San Bernardino and Redlands. It is approximately 65 percent Seventh-day Adventist.

An interesting adjunct owned and operated by the university is the supermarket. It's just a large market with a parking lot amid the cluster of university and "downtown" buildings—a pleasant, busy place, except that it has between 5,000 and 6,000



Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda, California, serves as the educational heart of Seventh-day Adventist health care worldwide. The Luzeiro 14, docked in Manaus, Brazil, is one of 15 launches that provide medical care along 1,000 miles of the Amazon River.

Seventh-day Adventists: Food for Thought

Although many Christian denominations are eager to tell people who they are, Seventh-day Adventists start out by explaining who they are not. They are not Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Baptists or Davidian Seventh-day Adventists—or any of the other denominations with which they have often been confused.

They are, however—and the rumor to the effect is correct—the healthiest group of people in the country: a direct result, they believe, of their doctrine, which is “first to give attention to the physical needs of men and then to provide spiritual aid, believing that body, mind and spirit are inextricably knit together.”

Adventist doctrine bans smoking, drinking and eating pork. Although the church does not require members to become vegetarians, it does recommend they do, and 50 percent of members are practicing vegetarians. The result is that Adventists have supplied the world with some rather impressive medical statistics: Male Seventh-day Adventists aged 35 to 40 have a 6.2-year longer life expectancy on the average than the general population, says Dr. John Scharffenberg, professor of nutrition at the Seventh-day Adventist-founded Loma Linda University. Female members have a 3.1-year greater life expectancy.

“About half of this is due to the fact that they do not smoke,” says

Dr. Scharffenberg. “The other half is primarily related to diet.

“This increase in life expectancy is considerable,” he says, “since, for that age group as a whole, there hasn't been that much of an increase since 1900.”

Although these statistics come from a group only half of whom are vegetarians, Dr. Scharffenberg speculates the life expectancy would shoot up to nine or ten years above the norm were all Adventists in the survey to give up meat and other high-cholesterol foods.

Male subjects 55 and over who eat meat six times a week or more are twice as likely to die of heart attacks as are vegetarian men, as shown by surveys. Such findings, Dr. Scharffenberg says, have led some Loma Linda University faculty members

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different items on its shelves, and not one of them contains meat—with the sole exception of canned pet food. There is no liquor or beer, no coffee or tea or cola drinks, no tobacco. There are no products made with animal shortening and refined sugar, such as cookies and cakes. All such products are made with liquid vegetable shortening, mostly corn oil. There is no bread made with bleached flour.

But what the market does have is equally interesting—a seemingly endless variety of fruits and vegetables and nuts, huge bags of all kinds of whole grains, dried fruits and beans and legumes. There are shelves and shelves of meat-substitute canned goods with unfamiliar labels, produced at Adventist plants such as the one at Arlington, and other non-Adventist firms now producing such products.

An unusual kind of market, perhaps, but it grosses more than \$3 million a year, and its customers come from all over Southern California, and as far away as Arizona, to “stock up.”

Other such customers patronize similar markets in other Adventist centers throughout the world.

And it seems they are healthier for doing so. ❧

Adventists opened their first hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1866. Dr. J.H. Kellogg was an early superintendent.



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who are not Seventh-day Adventists to become vegetarians.

Not only do Seventh-day Adventists have fewer heart attacks, they also have less cancer—50 percent less than the general population—and it's not all to do with their stand against cigarettes and liquor. Adventists are better educated as a whole than the general population, says Dr. Scharffenberg, and better-educated people have a decreased rate of cancer in general. But even in comparison to a highly educated population surveyed by the American Cancer Society, Adventists still have a cancer rate only 60 percent of the expected rate. Their rate of lung cancer is only 21 percent of the expected rate and their colon-rectal cancer is 60 percent of expected.

"The reason for this," Dr. Scharffenberg says, "may be because Adventists eat more vegetables, seeds, beans and get more vitamin A and C, which probably has a protective effect." There

is also more fiber in Adventists' diets—they use only unrefined, whole-grain flour.

Adventists also have a reduced risk of prostatic cancer, which shows no significant relationship to meat eating; but when consumption of all animal products is considered, it's been found that heavy meat, egg, milk and cheese consumers have three times the risk of prostatic cancer.

To ensure that Adventists and others are supplied with proper nutrition, the church operates 47 health-food factories throughout the world that supply whole-grain breakfast cereals, fruit beverages, soy milk, seasonings and other foods. The church maintains 166 hospitals and sanitariums as well as many clinics and dispensaries around the world.

Education—medical as well as general—receives strong support from Adventists. Three times as many members have completed college compared to the general population. The church operates ten liberal arts colleges and two

universities in the United States, including dental and medical schools at Loma Linda University in California. And health education—in particular the "Five-day Plan to Stop Smoking"—is propagated wherever Adventists go.

Adventists prefer constructive entertainment, the kind they believe will benefit their physical and mental health most, such as walking, swimming, nature study, golfing, tennis and boating.

In conjunction, they advocate improving personal appearance by natural means, by smiling more and using less make-up. Perhaps their pragmatic approach to better life is best summed up in their attitude toward jewelry: "To spend money on nonessentials such as jewelry when there are millions in the earth who lack even the bare essentials of life," they contend, "is poor stewardship of the funds which God has entrusted in man." That same logic is applied to health. Adventists believe that a Christian is obligated to maintain physical health to serve God acceptably.

**If Seventh-day Adventists
enjoy healthier and
happier lives, so can you.
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