

## How We Began – [www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org) – Gluten-Free Lexington, KY – a Celiac Disease Foundation chapter

Getting a support group started sounds like a hard thing to do. But for Judy Michel and Jan Falwell, it was pure fate.

**JAN'S STORY** – Celiac Jan and her husband lived in Arkansas at the time and she was a member of a celiac support group in Little Rock. In 2004, they bought a house near their kids/grandkids in Georgetown (near Lexington.) When diagnosed in early 2005 after 40 years of CD (celiac disease) damage, Jan began her quest to get well and help others. Her daughters, husband, and several other family members had problems too. (Most are now much better – free of gluten, milk, and many other things.) In the meantime, she began making a list of people she knew or heard about who had already been diagnosed, or knew someone who had. She also knew parents of autistic children on the GFCF (gluten-free, casein-free) diet. From the Georgetown/Lexington area, she had about 20 people on her list, and a local support group was needed since Louisville and Cincinnati were both over an hour's drive away. In March of 2006, she sent out letters to 25 of the local GI doctors, telling of her plans for a meeting and asking them to contact their CD patients. She also called the local health food stores, posting flyers announcing an upcoming meeting in late March.

[Enter Judy's Story]

**JUDY'S STORY** – Judy had never heard of Celiac Disease until she began dating Fred. He had been diagnosed in 1998, and when they married in 2004, Judy moved to Lexington and became more involved in educating their friends and favorite restaurants about CD, gluten-free meals and “cross contamination.” In late 2005, Judy, a licensed clinical social worker, realized that only a group effort would effectively get the attention of medical and restaurant providers in the community. Fred was a member of the Celiac Disease foundation, so she contacted Deborah Ceizler at CDF and in January of 2006, became the Lexington facilitator of the CDF Connections Support Group. She contacted insurance and medical providers and planned the first meeting in March at a local health foods store. At the same time, a doctor at Lexington Clinic gave her a letter that he had received from someone named Jan who was starting a gluten-free support group! SYNCHRONICITY! Judy called Jan's contact number and the collaborations began.

**And The Rest is History**....but the group just seems to keep on making history. Beginning as a ***CDF Connections*** group in March of 2006, they have now become a non-profit ***CDF Chapter*** with nearly 300 on the email list, including their own webmaster and website – [www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org)

**2006** - Monthly meetings and a lunch meeting at Carrabba's Italian Grill were held, including the first of many Annual November Holiday Potluck Dinners hosted by the group's dietary advisor at Central Baptist Hospital.

**2007** - Monthly meetings, a lunch meeting at Outback Steakhouse and a teaching/cooking presentation at Dupree's Entrée vous,

**Early 2008 - Judy's Resignation** - The board received the sad but happy news of the Michel's plans for retirement from their work, from GFL, and a move to Rhode Island. The Board all agreed that GFL would never have achieved its status without their hard work and dedication for those 2 years.

**2008 Events** -

**March** – 1<sup>st</sup> Fundraiser at Johnny Carino's Italian Grill (68 in attendance)

**May Celiac Awareness Month** - 2<sup>nd</sup> fundraiser -“Breads, Meds, & Icing on the Cake Workshop (136 present)

**July 4<sup>th</sup>** - 3<sup>rd</sup> fundraiser and informational booth – complete with lots of gf samples (1000's of visitors)

**Looking to the Future** – Increasing awareness of gluten/food allergy issues brings an even bigger responsibility to the local chapter. Eight to ten meetings/activities per year serve as opportunities for attendees to **share their unique stories** of living with CD and other food allergies, to **sample gf foods** and to **hear the latest research updates and news** from the medical field. **New memberships to CDF** help support the local and national groups, and they receive information packets which include tips on getting started on a gf diet, education on shopping, reading labels, dangers of cross contamination, lots of gf samples and a quarterly newsletter. [www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org) includes resources for **people of all ages**, medical updates, news items, recipes, and much more. GFL local work includes such things as delivering brochures to medical offices/physicians to educating restaurant and college cafeteria staff to passing out brochures and samples at booths to just word of mouth information on where to go to get help.

You can now see there can be **strength in numbers** with a strong and dedicated crew keeping the focus on spreading the “gluten/food intolerances” words in order to get restaurants, grocery and health food stores, and the public familiar with not only gluten but what its ingestion can encompass when it comes to an individual's physical/mental/neurological well-being. So, from Gluten-Free Lexington - It's time to GET healthy & STAY healthy by EATING healthy! And visit our website often at [www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org) or email us at [info@glutenfreelex.org](mailto:info@glutenfreelex.org)