

## How We Began

Gluten Free Lexington – a chapter of the Celiac Disease Foundation

[www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org)

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 Falwell and her husband lived in Arkansas, and Jan was already 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 of in the Lexington/Georgetown area who had either been diagnosed, or knew someone who had. She also knew parents of autistic children on the GFCF (gluten-free, casein-free) diet. As she watched her list grow to about 20 people, she realized a local support group was needed. 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 Michel's story...

**JUDY'S STORY** – Judy had never heard of celiac disease until she began dating Fred. Director of Lexington Clinic until his retirement in 2008, Dr. Fred Michel was diagnosed in 1998, and when she and Fred 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 over 600 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 with guest speakers, a lunch meeting at Outback Steakhouse and a teaching/cooking presentation at Dupree's Entrée vous catering service, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual November Holiday Potluck.

**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** – Our 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)

**Sept** – Library meeting with guest speaker

**Nov** – Holiday Potluck

### **2009 Events:**

**March** – Guiseppe's Italian Restaurant meeting

**May Celiac Awareness Month** – 2<sup>nd</sup> annual event, now called “Vendors on Parade” (158 present)

**July 4<sup>th</sup>** fundraiser and informational booth

**Sept.** – Library meeting with Drs. Menkus and Straub catered by Justix restaurant

**Nov.** – Holiday Potluck

## 2010 Events:

**March** – Carino’s Italian Restaurant – Dining To Donate Fundraiser

**May Celiac Awareness Month – 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Vendor’s on Parade** (Over 250 present)

**Early 2010: Jan’s Resignation** – Due to family commitments, March of 2010 brought about the resignation of Jan Falwell as President. However, the vacancy was expertly filled by webmaster Kevin Baker. The board has also been able to secure help from several additional dedicated members who have a deep desire to see GFL keep on growing, as it has done for the past 4 years.

**Looking to the Future** – The increasing knowledge of gluten related disorders – as well as the increasing numbers of people being affected - brings an even bigger responsibility to the local chapter. Five or six 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, educating restaurant and college cafeteria staff, and passing out brochures and samples at awareness booths during public events.

The **strength-in-numbers** of a strong and dedicated crew keeps the focus on spreading the word about gluten related disorders, in order to make restaurants, grocery and health food stores, and the general public aware of gluten, and the damage that its ingestion can bring 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! Visit our website often at [www.glutenfreelex.org](http://www.glutenfreelex.org), or email us at [info@glutenfreelex.org](mailto:info@glutenfreelex.org).

**Be free!**