

My Magnetic Personality:

Genesis of the Jelly Bean Lady

Taking on quacks at their own game



Loretta Marron, after training in science and a career in business, has branched out into showbiz under the persona of Jelly Bean Lady.

I'm lying on a luxuriously soft bed wearing a see-through apron. The lights are on, the camera is rolling. It seems that I have prepared for this moment all my life. I'm going to be a film star. I can see them handing me an Oscar. Nicole Kidman, eat your heart out.

Well that's one way to start this story. Here's another.

I'm sitting at a table nerves stretched, my mouth dry, my lips stuck together, counting jelly beans; red ones right, blue ones left, other colours in the middle. On my forehead is a band of pink ribbon with a black jellybean wired into the centre. A pink jellybean earring dangles, swings and dangles energetically from each ear and I'm wearing a jellybean patterned plastic toddlers apron.

A large corkboard rests on the table beside me covered with a piece of lace café curtain —

www.healthinformation.com.au stands out in bold letters at the top. From left to right across the bottom are pinned three A4 jellybean patterned sheets each of which advertises a new line of Placebo Products; Jellybean Acupressure Bracelets; Jellybean Pain Management Jewel-

lery and Jellybean Detoxification Pads, each showing a sample of the products complete with ribbon and gauze with a single centred wired-in jellybean. At the far right of the table is a glass Irish coffee mug with jellybeans stabbed on the end of kebab sticks marked 'Herbal Tea'. Beside me is a large open jar of jellybeans with a label

PLACEBO PILLS proven to be over 30% effective in curing EVERY disease & health condition by thousands of Double Blind Clinical Trials all over the world.

Last but not least, a liberal sprinkling of loose jellybeans spread around the table completes the scene.

The young man holding the Channel 9 camera tells me to keep moving the jellybeans around 'as though they were pills'. As I do so I know my set-up looks good. All those money grabbing manipulative girly party plan presentations I've begrudgingly suffered over the years, in the name of friendship, are actually paying off. While the display looks great, I don't need to ask myself why as a well-educated, professional woman I should be telling the world I am the

Magnetic Personality

Jelly Bean Lady. I know the answer is easy. I'm an Aussie scientist and proud of it. I seek the medical and scientific evidence. I have a mission, a passion, a soapbox — I have something to say and have had for some time — I'll do whatever it takes. And as I push the little coloured lollies around I know I've been given the opportunity of a lifetime and I'm loving it.

In the beginning

The story doesn't start there though; it goes back about 2 years. A friend of mine, an electrician, told me he had bought a magnetic underlay; it hadn't worked so he returned it. I made my usual sensitive, concerned and compassionate statement, as I do when being told something that I consider pseudoscientific. "You've got to be joking — how can a piddling little fridge magnet effect pain transmission". "You have a closed mind" was his response. Perhaps he was right, I thought and so started my quest for the holy magnetic grail.

Somewhere in my past, long before my computing career, I was a young woman who was mad about science. I am not one to walk away from a challenge, but my Physics degree was completed well into the previous century and I knew I had a lot to learn. With the help of the internet, it wasn't long before rusty cogs and creaking wheels started to move inside my brain and as I started to understand the wonders of pure physics I was soon hooked. Sitting at my keyboard, I once again became the 17-year-old who used to strut around the campus arguing the mathematical equations of Einstein's theories, solving simultaneous multi-dimensional equations while pondering the secrets of the cosmos. In reality I was back in grade 8 trying to find out how a simple static magnet worked, but it was all the same to me. Why had I wasted all those years making money as a computer professional

when I could have been a happy, starving and broke scientist? I had to make up for this lost time in my life, wasted on capitalism and financial ambition.

As I surfed the internet, my scientific creative juices started to flow and I soon had folders of articles and reports of facts and figures; energy and electricity; research and ramblings. A few days later I made the decision and had defined my project. I would do a topographical profile of the magnetic field of an underlay. However, I had a small problem — no magnets and no ways to measure them. I did find mathematical formulas and some basic data and driven by unbridled optimism and blind faith my experimenting began.



The Universal Cure-all

Tooling up

As it was impossible for me to borrow a Gauss meter to measure magnetism, I thought I would buy one. Surely it couldn't cost much more than an Amp meter? One phone call later I found I was not smiling. A direct current (DC) Gauss meter would cost \$5000 with a four-month wait for it to arrive from the UK. Plan A — Rest in Peace.

Plan B was soon developed. I would email, write and phone to see if anyone would help. All I had to do was to find other knowledgeable people who were mad about magnet-

ism and find them I did. They were wonderful, interesting and interested. Counting the jellybeans as the camera rolled, I thought about the journey that had led me to this day and I was once again lifted by the generosity and spirit of some great people from around the world who eagerly and enthusiastically shared their knowledge and stories with me.

To my great luck and delight there was Dan Bartman. He lives with his wife and young daughter in a log cabin in the mountainous wilderness of Colorado, USA, his home powered by wind generators. Frequently moose and deer pass by his front porch and sometimes he gets snowed in for weeks at a time. His home is his escape from the rat-race. He

finances this way of life by selling all sizes, shapes and strength magnets on the internet and freely offers advice to anyone who emails him. His clientele includes a wide scope of weird and wonderful people who range from those who are intent on trying to make perpetual motion and anti-gravity machines, UFO and crop circle true believers, budding ghost busters, water purifiers, DIY magnetic health product manufacturers and people like himself who want to generate electricity. I asked Dan to measure magnetic fields for me for a range of magnets and distances from them and he willingly emailed me back the informa-

tion. I sent photos back to his daughter of the platypus, koalas and wallabies that live near my home. It was all I could do to thank him and he reported back that his daughter loved them. I had found the correct tender for these knowledge based transaction and I was paid well for it.

With the information I was given, I completed my mathematical calculations and went out to buy five small rubber balls of a particular size (smaller than a tennis ball). I then cut them in two and wrapped them in aluminium foil. These, when

placed on a cotton underlay, represented my magnetic fields over the magnets. I had never been up close to a genuine magnetic underlay so I did not know the spacings. A quick trip to my local pharmacy was very productive. They let me unwrap the underlay and I measured the distance between the magnets. From the flea market, an amazing source of all things great and small, I found a very shapely clothing dummy that I dressed in a Ken Done bathing costume that, since retiring, no longer seemed to fit me. She had no head, legs or arms but she was all I needed to show that pain centres were not on the body surface, but may be several centimetres inside the joint. That was the theory anyway.

Demonstrating the result

My first demonstration was a complete failure. No one understood my silver balls. The women were more interested in the artwork on my Ken Done bathers and the men wanted to have their photos taken with the dummy. She was given the name Esther and she soon developed a fan club. She even received several Christmas cards. She now hangs on my verandah wall with quite a few mud wasps nests attached to her — retired and discarded before her life really began. My friends had made me realise that I had to do better.

As happens in life, luck was on my side. Dan came to my rescue. He had developed a portable DC Gauss meter and found one in his collection that he said was scratched and dented and which he sold me for half price, and it was soon heading my way.



Jelly Bean Lady displays here wares

The following week I declared to yet another long-suffering friend, tormented by me because he refused to accept he was a magnetic therapy victim, that electric train transformers had more magnetism than his underlay. He responded that he didn't want to sleep next to the transformer. Having made the statement about the railway transformer I realised that this could be true. Another part of the holy magnetic grail puzzle had presented itself to be solved.

In my search for yet another piece of magnetic trivia I had the pleasure of talking to George, whose surname I can't remember. I contacted the railways and they put me through to George. I asked him if there were any reports on the magnetic fields around railway transformers. He

was ecstatic. When he had completed his Engineering degree, his thesis was on the Magnetic Flux around a suburban railway station. He had waited over 30 years for someone to ask him about it. We talked for over an hour, sharing magnetic stories, AC versus DC; pulsing versus static; round versus square — nothing to do with my magnetic underlays but riveting stuff for a fellow magnet enthusiast like myself. However, he did confirm that the magnetic field near a transformer was in fact far greater than the magnetic field over the underlays.

After two incredibly long weeks, my Gauss meter arrived. I spent most of that day playing with my magnets but I knew I still had no authentic underlay magnets. A

few emails later to some of the magnetic underlay manufacturers and for the cost of \$20, I was rewarded with 10 barium ferrite 1050 gauss (surface reading) magnets. I was on a roll.

I soon developed a new presentation where I let people read the magnetism above several types of underlays that I had purchased from the flea market. I no longer had to convince them, they could see the readings for themselves. I took every opportunity with friends, family and even the occasional stranger, to somehow manipulate the conversation to bring up the topic of magnetic underlays and out would come my magnets, my piece of old car seat cover sheepskin and meter. Occasionally some people wanted to hear

Magnetic Personality

what I had to say. It was great. In the area 10 cm above a magnetic underlay only a few percent of the volume had magnetism greater than a fridge magnet and I could prove it. Magnetic underlay pain relief was all a giant lie. As with the tobacco industry knowing about nicotine addition, the magnetic therapy people had their own gauss meters and must have known the diminished magnetism over their underlays.

Using the media

I wrote to *60 Minutes*, I wrote to seniors magazines and newspapers, I wrote to pharmacists. I left messages, emails and faxes but no one called or wrote back. No one seemed to care. Placebo was fine. What did it matter if the pensioners with chronic pain starved themselves to save the money for an underlay? What did it matter if these same people would never have the strength or life skills to return the product? What did it matter if they believed that their pharmacists had the interests of their elderly customers, and not their pockets, at heart when they sold these unproven pain relief items, encouraged by the high profile television stars and their persistent and intense advertising, that daily targeted their vulnerability in seniors magazines, on the television and radio. If placebo helped people, leave them alone. Some people even became angry with me. One elderly gentleman was even worried that his pain would return. As I seemed to have only one topic of conversation, I was losing friends rapidly.

Diagnosis and after

Then came my diagnosis of cancer. As the months passed I slowly returned to the land of the living. To take my mind off my treatment I wrote health booklets and developed the web site. On the positive side of this diagnosis, I met new people, surgeons, oncologists, general practitioners, pharmacists and other cancer patients and they were wonderful. I told them about my magnetic passion and my demonstration and offered to show it to them, but had

no takers. The dust settled on my beloved Gauss meter and as my web site gained popularity, I moved on.

The most amazing person I met in this phase of my magnetic journey was Brisbane pharmacist and fellow Skeptic Geraldine Moses. The locals know her as 'that woman on the radio' because she had a radio program that gave great advice to listeners for 13 years. Nowadays, she somehow balances a life where she mans the Adverse Events Hotline, runs CAM education, frequently appears on TV, has just finished a Doctorate of Clinical Pharmacy while supporting and assisting cancer patients, has a husband and two year old to look after and still found the time to re-write part of my health booklet, answer my emails, and encourage me on my own journey. During our numerous phone calls and emails, I told Geraldine about my passion for measuring magnetic underlays and of all the people in Australia she was the one to tell, because when *Brisbane Extra* asked for her advice in this matter she knew exactly what to do.

'Every dog has his day' they say and, when the phone call came through from Geraldine that Channel 9 wanted an anti-magnetic underlay enthusiast to appear on a Magnetic Therapy segment, I was going to have mine.

When the day arrived for the filming, as the floodlight beamed and the camera rolled I knew that this was a dream of mine come true and, no matter how silly I looked with my jellybean earrings bobbing around, no matter how close the camera came to my timeworn and expressive face and no matter what people would call me in the future, I was going to give it everything I had. As the film crew left after a two-hour interview, which incidently included a few minutes sitting on the bed comparing and revealing the jellybean and magnetic underlays, I knew I had done the best I could.

Two days, many phone calls and at least 50 emails later, (those emails informing friends, fellow sceptics, seniors newspapers and

websites and the Arthritis Association, of the content and time I was to be televised), the segment was aired. I had become the Jelly Bean Lady, a cancer survivor; the Physics and Maths graduate who championed the cause against placebo products for seniors, cancer and the financially challenged chronically ill patients. I was portrayed as a Don Quixote who was taking on, with humour, intelligence and science, the 5 billion dollar magnetic underlay industry. Fortunately for me, my video tape recorder was going, because at the end of the segment I remembered nothing except the bobbing earrings and the camera angle that seemed to look up my magnified nose. While I sat stunned, the champagne corks flew and my friends were cheering.

The next morning, I rewound the tape to watch it quietly on my own. With great relief and appreciation for a balanced presentation, I emailed Channel 9 thanking them for giving me the opportunity to appear on their show.

I never did and never will complete my 'topographical profile of a magnetic field of a magnetic underlay'; there just isn't enough magnetism emitted for me to measure. So now my life has settled back into its usual haphazard routine and I remain truly thankful to those champions that, over the last two years, have helped me paddle my own magnetic canoe. Now, with my jellybeans safely tucked away in a sealed jar, I'm asking myself whether this is the end of my new career or the beginning? Let me hope that in years to come I can say 'the rest is history'. That, dear reader, may well be up to you.

