

EPISODE 261

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:19] AVH: Hey, welcome to Paleo Magazine Radio. I'm your host Ashleigh VanHouten. AKA a person whose voice you can stand listening to for an hour a week. Thank you for that. Today, I'm speaking with Sandra Dorst, she's the founder of Shop AIP and she has a story that I think is both familiar and unique to this podcast.

She suffered from a very severe autoimmune disease and through a lot of learning and educating and trial and error, she's now managing this issue through a mix of medical assistance and lifestyle and nutrition changes. But, the story is unique first because her autoimmune disorder is a very rare one and I'll let her tell you about it in the interview. It came on very quickly and intensely leaving her with a drastically reduced quality of life and even life expectancy.

Second, although she's now dedicated herself to learning about and providing AIP compliant food and related products to the people who need them, she came to this job somewhat reluctantly and unlike me and probably many of you, she was somebody who before her autoimmune issues, she never cared much about food.

She didn't particularly enjoy the process of making it or cooking it or shopping or eating. Despite facing very dire consequences, she was really reluctant to undergo what she considered to be a very severe and extreme dietary change.

And it was in fact the last thing of many things to try to improve her health but her results were so undeniable and so immediate that she of course is a believer and spends her days offering this information and resource to others but I think it's a good learning experience for all of us and a good story about a very challenging health journey.

Because it's very real, it's not just, "I was sick and then I started eating super healthy and it was this incredibly positive, fun experience in my life and I love it now and everything about is great." There's more to it than that, especially for Sandra. I hope you follow along and get something

out of it, especially my lady listeners because one thing that I learned during the course of this chat is that autoimmune sufferers are overwhelmingly female.

Which is something I guess I kind of knew based on the fact that now that I look back, every single person I've spoken to about autoimmune has been a woman but I never really pieced it together. Women, this is especially interesting to you but of course men who know and love women, pretty sure that's all of you, that's going to be useful for you too.

That's that, but first, let me tell you about today's show sponsor.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

[00:02:49] AVH: It's Jones Dairy Farm, which is a family owned business based in Wisconsin, that is celebrating as of this year, 130 years in business. So they know their sausage. I don't know if that's their motto but it should be because they're best known for all natural sausage, dry-aged center cut bacon, naturally smoked ham and Canadian bacon and they never put binders, fillers, gluten, preservatives, MSG, any of that crap in their sausages.

They make them small batch, they use only fresh, never frozen, hormone free pork, chicken and turkey from local producers. Yeah, they're doing it the right way, they've been doing it the same way forever and it seems to be working for them.

You can find some of their products in the freezer section, you can find some of them in the refrigerated aisle but if you want to learn more about their company and what they offer, you can check out their fully paleo certified products at jonesdairyfarm.com/paleo. You can take one woman's word for it who loves her breakfast meats, AKA, moi and they're delicious, they sent me some and I ate them all promptly and they're good.

That's it and hope you enjoy my interview now with the founder of Shop AIP, Sandra Dorst.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:04:06.1] AVH: Alright Sandra, welcome to the podcast, thanks for being here.

[0:04:08.8] SD: Thanks for having me.

[0:04:11.5] AVH: Let's just dive right in and before we talk about your company and what you do, I would love for you to tell us a little bit about your background because you have a unique story even among our listeners who are very familiar with autoimmune issues and struggles with nutrition and health.

But I think you have a really unique story. I'd love for you to tell us.

[0:04:31.4] SD: Sure, about four and a half, coming up on five years ago in the fall of 2014, I started having very acute onset of symptoms, shortness of breath being the biggest one and most concerning.

At the time, I was 38 and my children were ages five, three and one. Obviously, not being able to breathe was kind of a big deal. I also had been struggling with joint pain which I self-diagnosed as carpal tunnel and was awaiting several different doctor's appointments that I was not feeling very compelled to be in a hurry about, I didn't think any of it was that big of a deal.

When I finally came down my stairs one day, walked across my living room and was literally taking breaths as if I had just finished a marathon, I started getting pretty scared and that's when I began going to urgent care. Over the course of what turned out to be a very short amount of time considering my diagnosis. I just kept going back and kept going back and because of that, I was pretty quickly diagnosed with a very rare autoimmune disease called antisynthetase syndrome.

It's a mouthful and so those of us that have it affectionately call it ASS for short.

[0:05:54.4] AVH: Great acronym.

[0:05:55.0] SD: That's right. You know, we try to laugh at ourselves as much as we can, under the rare syndrome of antisynthetase, comes a multitude of rare diseases, one is interstitial lung disease which is what I was diagnosed with. Also, myositis which is inflammation of the

muscles, the kind that I have is called dermatomyositis which is also of the skin and muscle. The joint pain which of course turned out not to be carpal tunnel was arthritis that had to do with this autoimmune disease as well as I had a skin condition, that they call mechanic's hands.

They call it that because that's literally your hands look like you've been a mechanic for about 15 years. Even though I thought my symptoms came on very acutely, I actually had the skin, mechanics hands issues that had gone on for a little while but I blamed it on washing my hands too much, not using enough lotion, things of that nature.

It never would have occurred to me that a skin condition was directly related to a lung disease. I was pretty immediately put on - at the time, I was actually also diagnosed with pulmonary hypertension which is an artery that goes from your lungs to your heart, gets overworked and that can lead to heart failure.

As you can imagine, I was facing some pretty brutal information in a very short amount of time, from the time I went to urgent care, to the time of diagnosis was about three weeks. It seemed like everything was taking forever but three weeks is nearly a record in for those of us that have this kind of rare disease and I just lucked out with the doctor that had been recently in school and was being able to sort of at least test for it.

He was astounded that I had it and had never met anybody with it but he did at least think enough to test for it. I was soon sent off to MAYO clinic where even there I was a rarity, they had their photographer come out, they had their interns come out. You know you're in trouble when MAYO clinic also takes note of you.

[0:08:07.2] AVH: Kind of celebrity status you are, right?

[0:08:09.3] SD: Exactly. It's like I every doctor kept saying yes, I'll take her. And it's like, well in one hand, I'm glad I'm getting seen quickly but on the other, I knew exactly what that meant and it meant that they were very scared with the lung disease, it can be incredibly progressive, if it goes unchecked or untreated or if the treatment plan does not work, you can potentially be looking at two to six years, prognosis.

At the time I was diagnosed, the minority of people really made it to 10 years from what I could tell from the few articles that were out there and it was hard-pressed to find somebody that had made it 15 years.

[0:08:54.8] AVH: You were decent or you know, you were healthy before the you didn't have a history of -

[0:09:00.8] SD: Right, I mean, I didn't always have the healthiest habits throughout my life but my weight had been the same since high school, I was never overweight, I had never needed to diet, I didn't exercise like at a gym but I was naturally a very active person, I was just a nonstop kind of person in my past.

I had trekked in the Himalayas and you know, done all kinds of things that you know, just a very active and I was looking for it, we had just moved to the Tahoe area and I was very much looking forward to you know, learning to ski and all the hiking and you know, Lake Tahoe, all the things that sort of comes with living in a very outdoorsy type place.

And you know, I was active mom with three young kids and was chasing them around and never had any issues with that, I had never had to take a bunch of antibiotics, I mean, even to the point where I don't even get the neural virus, you know? That my kids – stomach bug and I would never get it, you know?

Yeah, I considered myself very healthy and even throughout the beginning process, we had had a Disney World trip that was planned just a few weeks, you know, after this whole process and I kept asking the doctors, you know. "But can I still go to Disney World?" You know, I just kept thinking okay, "Just give me whatever I'm supposed to take for this so that I can get on with life, that's what I thought."

Until finally, one doctor basically looked at me and said, "This is very progressive, this is very dangerous and you're in trouble and you need help immediately." That's why I was sent to Mayo Clinic. I was actually fully diagnosed but the local pulmonologist felt like I needed so many specialist to agree on a treatment plan that I should go ahead and go because they could come up with something in a week that would take them weeks or months to handle here locally.

[0:11:00.8] AVH: I have another question about the diagnosis before we get even further into this because one of the things that you mentioned that you were fortunate that you had a doctor who fought to test for something that was super rare and you were able to get diagnosed relatively quickly.

And one of the things that I hear over and over again when I'm talking to people who are dealing with autoimmune issues is how long sometimes it takes them to be diagnosed because some of the symptoms can be so varied and so complex and there's just so many kind of moving parts and it sounds like it's very similar situation with your issue too, you had a bunch of different things that you were dealing with that didn't necessarily seem like they were connected or wouldn't seem like they were connected unless you knew.

What do you think, besides just lucking upon a great doctor, what do you think helped that diagnosis come along, was it because you didn't have any other health issues because it was this interesting mix of conditions that seem to kind of just make sense to this doctor? Why do you think that you were able to be diagnosed so relatively quickly?

[0:12:00.2] SD: Sure, I think there's a few things that were working in my favor. One was that I was healthy, I had not had any health issues before, I was 38, I was very active. Just in my normal day to day. In that case, and my shortness of breath was so acute that what happens to many people in my position is it easily gets pointed to, "Your aging, you're out of shape, you need to lose weight. This is just what it's like to get old." Their symptoms, if they come on a little bit more gradually but for me, it was kind of overnight. Which is a whole other story of why I think that happened.

I think because the shortness of breath came on so acutely and even the joint pain got from me just thinking it was carpal tunnel to me not being able to use a pepper mill or pickup my cast iron or in the worst case, I could not button my child's button on her pants. Just normal day to day, things all of a sudden became impossible to me.

There was that, there was a sense of urgency just because it went from I'm completely fine to what is happening, this is not normal. The other thing is that that physician had told me right

from the beginning that trying to diagnose an autoimmune can be like putting together a huge puzzle and except you're picking up the puzzle pieces from all over the house so sometimes you might pick up a piece and you're looking at it and it turns out later, it doesn't even go to that puzzle, you know? It goes to other puzzle.

He really just impressed upon me how important it was to just give him every piece of any puzzle that I have. I feel like the time that he took with me which was about an hour and a half initial visit. I was also very thorough in all of my symptoms. Even from the skin, you know, had you not said that, I probably wouldn't have mentioned the skin part because I would have never connected it up.

The other thing that I benefitted from that other people do not is antisynthetase syndrome actually has antibodies associated with them. The one that I have is the most common antibody. He sent me away with 15 different lab tests, one of them happened to be the antibody for antisynthetase syndrome. I can tell you from when I spoke to him, he was floored that that is what came back positive, you know?

I think he was just kind of throwing it out there to cover all bases. Where is if I had lupus for instance, that's more something that you rule everything else out and then, when you don't have any of those other things, they say, "Okay, you have lupus," right? Because there's that antibody, I had the antibody and I had all but one of the symptoms that come under antisynthetase syndrome. It was a pretty classic clear case.

[0:15:13.8] AVH: Is it — this is a more rare condition but you were in, you were talking about how often it can be kind of — well, symptoms like that can be described as you know, you're just getting old and I love that you mentioned that because I think that that's a big part of what we try to talk about on the podcast is that, yeah, you can't expect to maybe feel or perform exactly the same way when you're 60 or 70 as you did when you were 20 or 30.

But, that doesn't mean that you should expect as a natural part of aging to have a significantly decreased quality of life and increased pain and decreased movement and mobility and all of those things. Those things aren't, they aren't inherent with getting older. You can get older and still be able to move and function and have a great quality of life. I love that that's something

that you kind of highlight there. Was it normal to get this disease at your age or is it something that usually comes up later in life?

[0:16:08.9] SD: I think I was a pretty prime age in general for autoimmune being 38. You know, it seems like anywhere between 30 and 50 and obviously being a woman certainly increases your opportunity for autoimmune, why that is – quite pinpoint why more women get autoimmune disease. But I think it's – I'm not a researcher but I think it's something like 80% women, something in that range, anyone listening, feel free to let us know if I'm exaggerating that but I think it's about 80% women that get autoimmune.

Whether that has to do with our hormones or you know, having children or having the ability, they haven't really - they don't know that much about really autoimmune.

[0:16:53.7] AVH: That's really — I guess, now that you mentioned it, it actually seems very obvious because pretty much everyone I've spoken to about autoimmune issues has been a woman. But I strangely never connected that before and sadly, you got to wonder if maybe the reasons we don't know is because it does mostly affect women and the research medical establishment is not mostly women.

I don't know, we don't need to go down that rabbit hole, I guess. That is interesting though, in ever really kind of pinpointed to that autoimmune is it hits people in sort of their 30s or 40s. Because those are kind of the decades that you sort of think like okay, well, all of the issues just to deal with when you're young and growing and going through puberty and all that scary stuff is done and I'm not at the point where I'm dealing maybe with like menopause or the things that come with aging yet.

This is like a nice, I could take a breather in here, I don't have to worry about anything. That's of course when autoimmune issues hit.

[0:17:46.8] SD: Yeah, absolutely. I also just want to put out there, another theory I have about why we don't have as much research on autoimmune and I think it's because there's no autoimmune, autoimmune is not in the name of any autoimmune disease. Whereas you have

breast cancer and colon cancer and ovarian cancer and every kind of cancer you say cancer, right?

Everybody knows that they know somebody that has cancer but it's called antisynthetase syndrome or Hashimoto's or you know, lupus. None of them have the word autoimmune in them. You know, most people don't realize that all of these things are connected and could really benefit for one giant research.

Because they're actually affecting, you know, 50 million people and not just me with my rare autoimmune over here. I would benefit greatly from anyone studying any of the other hundred autoimmune diseases. I think I wish we could just rename them all or at least add autoimmune to the end or AI or some defining thing so that everyone can start realizing that everybody knows someone with an autoimmune.

[0:19:01.5] AVH: Yeah, that's true. I mean, some kind of cohesiveness so that people can kind of come together around it, that makes sense. Okay, I distracted you when you were at the point of your story, you were at the Mayo Clinic and you were being tested and you were looking at possible ways to treat your –

[0:19:17.9] SD: Yeah, at the time, I was already on 60 milligrams of prednisone and every time they try to move me down to 40, I couldn't breathe again and I was also put on supplemental oxygen, it turned out that my oxygen levels were dropping below 80, I was given zero hope whatsoever of ever getting off of supplemental oxygen and basically was told things like it's good that you're relatively, you know, young and otherwise healthy and I was like, "Great." "So that you can maybe have a lung transplant later on in life." Which is not great and lung transplants are actually not a great transplant to need to have.

I came home from that, they were putting me on immunosuppressants as well and I was steroids bearing drugs so that eventually, hopefully I would be able to get off of prednisone. I was at home and my husband, I always call him like my stoic optimist, every time he would bring up something about my disease, I wondered if he was googling something slash rainbows and unicorns.

I couldn't understand why all the information he seemed so positive where everything I was looking at, you know, looked terrifying. I sat him down and I just said, you know, I want you to make sure you understand this prognosis and understand what we're up against, you know? I can't just take drugs and think that everything's going to be fine, you know? I mean, at that point, it was going to be three to six months before we even knew if those drugs worked, right?

To get anything under control and so I told him all the information I gave you earlier and he took a breath and then he looked straight at me and he said, "Well Sandra, I expect 30 more years out of you." I said, "Well you know what? That's a plan I can get on board with but it's not going to be handed to me. We're going to have to work really hard to get those 30 years out of me," you know?

A lot of people, they might just be handed that extra 30 but I knew I was going to have to work for it. At that time, I really promised myself that I would leave no stone unturned that I would try to do anything and everything that I could to improve my chances with this disease. When I first started, that meant a lot of exercise which was not something I had a love for but I figured out just with trial and error that if I got up and I walked and I walked and I walked, even when I felt like I should just be lying in bed, I actually stayed out of bed more often than I stayed in it.

I think one of the issues people have when they're in a really bad state of autoimmune is they're afraid if, "I overdo it, if I overdo it, you know, then I'm going to be in bed," and for me it was like, "Well, I'm already in that so if I go and overdo it, nothing's changed." Do something and it affects a positive change then that will be great, you know?

If that affects the negative change, it's not going to change my life that much because I'm just sitting here or laying here and sort of incapable and completely debilitated from my life. Because of such thing and such a debilitated state, that made me – my motto was if it wasn't going to progress my disease then it wasn't going to kill me, then I would try it.

[0:22:43.4] AVH: Amazing, I think everyone should have a stoic optimist in their life personally, I have one as well and they're very good people to have in your corner. That's pretty cool.

When you were dealing with the doctors, was there any conversation with them about exercise and nutrition and lifestyle factors or was that kind of left up to you to research?

[0:23:01.5] SD: It was really left up to me and I will tell you. I just knew when I got home, all sorts of people were just going to say, "Just stop eating gluten and you'll be better," or you know, whatever. I just was never a health person, I was never a dieter, you know?

I actually went to the Mayo Clinic nutritionist so that they could tell me whether or not there was something I could do as far as diet was concerned so that if I came back and people were just throwing all these random ideas at me, I'd have some knowledge to throw back at them and that Mayo Clinic nutritionist told me there was no diet for autoimmune disease. Suggested that well balanced diet. That's what I was told.

Which was great for my ears because I didn't want to diet. I am somebody that just doesn't – I don't really like to think about food, I don't like to plan food, I don't like to make food, I don't really even enjoy eating food like all the time. Definitely don't like cleaning up food or shopping for it. You know, just everything about food is like a chore to me. Somebody in an authoritative position to tell me, "You don't have to do anything different." was music to my ears.

But very soon, because I'm a well-researched type of person, very soon, I learned about the autoimmune protocol. It took me two and a half years before I finally embarked upon it. A lot of that was because it was so cumbersome, you know? Looking at it and not - I mean any diet looked cumbersome to me and this one is you know, particularly rigid when you start out rightly so.

To me, it was just overwhelming and so it's why it took me two and a half years because I basically did everything else I could possibly do for my health that I could think of. I had actually gotten off of the oxygen, I like to say I exercised my way out of the oxygen tank which was just unheard of, others – I've only heard of maybe one or two other people in my case that was on oxygen and had such a severe case of interstitial lung disease that was able to get off of the oxygen.

I'm still short of breath all the time but my oxygen levels don't drop. So you might still hear me doing sort of big breaths but that's my oxygen levels are still fine. I was still left after all that I had gotten off of the high doses of prednisone, I had gotten off of oxygen, I was able now to take care of my children and take care of my house and I spent less time in bed than I had before and I could do more things.

Most people out in town probably thought I was fine because I didn't go out when I didn't seem fine. In reality, I was still left with chronic pain, debilitating fatigue and brain fog that I was 100% sure was due to hypoxia from not getting enough oxygen to my brain prior to being treated and I thought I will never ever think as clearly or as quickly as I had once thought. I thought, that was permanent damage.

When I got to that point, that's when I said, "Okay, now it's time for me to give the AIP diet a try.

[0:26:41.4] AVH: The rest is history. No, it's great. It's really, I really think the story you're telling is going to resonate with a lot of people because even if they haven't dealt with the exact same issues as you and I understand it too but diet and nutrition is crucial to health, it is, period.

Whether we like it or not, it is. That depends like you know, it depends on what your issues are, it depends on what your goals are, it depends on how much your background is and all kinds of different things. We don't all have to be struggling with autoimmune issues but bottom line, the food that we put in our body makes a massive difference in how our bodies function and most people, at least most of the people listening to this podcast know that and yet we still armed with all the knowledge that we have often wait until we both last, we go down kicking and screaming before we take out the foods that are comfortable to us.

And familiar to us before we make changes, before we undergo a diet that we can serve restrictive or a lot of work. There is something really just life altering to change the way you eat and even exercise. A lot of people when they are told they have to exercise more people don't always like it but you go out and you go for a walk it is not the end of the world but if someone tells you to completely change up your diet that can be really, really hard for people to get their heads around.

I think that this is a story that people can understand but what was the light bulb moment for you that you were like, "Okay well this is it. This is the last chance that I have." And how did you when you researched the AIP diet how did you start incorporating that into the way you ate? How did you eat first and then what were the changes that you started making?

[0:28:14.6] SD: Right, so the light bulb for me was throughout the two and a half years, admittedly, I had a lot of ups and down with health and the first nine months was withdrawing from prednisone and basically that took me out one to three days every single week with withdrawals and then it was basically getting myself back up ready to do it again the following week and so, I mean I had various other health things that sort of went on.

So I felt like the food thing because it is as big and radical as you just described, I wanted to make sure that if it did and did not do something that I could connect the dots easily. That I didn't want to go through all of that effort and have the outcome be ambiguous. So I think that is when why it was so easy I had gone about a six month period where everything else was stable. You know my symptoms were my symptoms, I knew them.

I knew what would bring them up, what would bring them down. I understood them at a level that I couldn't have been able to the first year or two because they weren't as stable, at that point. And so I just felt like you know, if I try it right now then it would be obvious whether or not it makes any difference and I can tell you, I hoped beyond all hope that the diet did nothing. I mean that's how naïve I was. I just thought, "I just want to get through this, turn that stone over. But I want to be able to tell everyone yeah, I have tried it all and it didn't work and pass the pizza."

That is what in my own narrow naïve mind that's what I was thinking but for me the results were so crazy fast. So I basically treated it like a science experiment. That is how I got through the absolute full elimination of seeing how it worked with zero cheats whatsoever because I thought if I cheat and then I have symptoms then I have to start over.

And that is just going to prolong this agony, right? I just thought I am just going to do this thing. I am going to do it as purely as I possibly can and see what happens and that way I will be able

to know what the next step was and quite honestly, I had started at the end of January 2017 and by mid-February it had turned my life completely around already.

My brain fog was lifted, my fatigue was completely gone and my joint pain was completely gone. It was unbelievable to me that this could happen that I was dragged kicking and screaming into this diet that I didn't want any part of and it turned my whole life around and so at that point, what my biggest frustration was that it was hard and I was exasperated like, "Why hasn't somebody made a store for this! This is hard."

And that is when my husband said, "Well why don't you make a store?" And yeah that is how Shop AIP happened –

[0:31:35.3] AVH: It's doing –

[0:31:37.8] SD: You know I was frustrated. I wanted a store and there wasn't one.

[0:31:41.1] AVH: No matter how many times I hear a story like that it still amazes me how people can suffer so much with such chronic debilitating issues that are reversed so quickly by changing what you eat. So can again, just before we get into the company that you started can you tell us what is a typical day in your eating life before and then what were you doing with the strict science experiment project.

[0:32:11.3] SD: So my eating life before was probably a little more hit or miss. I mean first of all it was definitely like just grab some cereal. So a bunch of sugary grains and dairy in the morning, lunch maybe I'd eat it, maybe I wouldn't. Admittedly my husband is the chef in the house but he really likes — makes the best mashed potatoes in the world and lots of thick gravies and it is not like I ate horribly. It wasn't frequently fast food. I didn't normally drink sodas.

So that is the thing, I wasn't even coming from a hugely unhealthy diet and this is the lesson between eat a balance diet. I probably did eat a balanced diet. We have berries in the house, it wasn't like I just ate Doritos all day but I did like my sugar. I liked my sweets. I definitely would have plenty of milk and cereal and so it was like a standard American healthy-ish diet. That is what I would think of it in my head but after it looked completely different.

Because after I started AIP my mornings look more like bacon and when I have time I will add spinach or I will have a soup and I will eat soup for breakfast or I will eat leftover dinner for breakfast. Really just finding that for me protein in the morning really makes a difference and then throughout the day just really getting the vegetables in and I will be honest with you, one thing that I had trouble with when I first started AIP is getting enough calories.

So I actually used my fitness pal to look at what I was choosing to get the most bang for my buck. Because what would happen is I do this recipes - lettuce wrap, okay that is 350 calories. Oh shoot I only ate half of it that is only 175 but I am full.

I am not a big eater so I needed things like, "Oh no, so if I add that avocado in then that does better." Maybe I need less lettuce and more soup type situations. Where I can get a lot more nutrients in a smaller portion instead of a bigger portion that just doesn't have the calories that I need.

[0:34:50.5] AVH: Nutrient dense foods, yeah. I mean you and I are pretty much on opposite ends of the spectrum here because I am somebody who is literally never not finished a meal or I have never struggled with not getting enough calories. I am the exact opposite and I love to eat. I am not much of a chef myself but eating is my favorite thing in life. We don't necessarily see eye to eye on that part but I understand — I mean look, you are telling me breakfast is bacon when you go AIP.

That doesn't sound like a terrible change to me, right? I mean there are worst things you could be putting into your diet.

[0:35:27.2] SD: My entire family is benefiting from that.

[0:35:30.8] AVH: Yeah, it is funny. Okay so now we get to you starting Shop AIP, which I have to say it seems like all the entrepreneurs and business owners and people who have started amazing companies that I get to interview, so many of them that are successful is because they developed something that they needed.

So they were looking for something, they couldn't find it and so they created it themselves and it seems like that is exactly what you did, right?

[0:35:57.4] SD: Exactly.

[0:35:58.6] AVH: Yeah, so tell us about it, tell us about Shop AIP. It is so funny that you are running a food business, somebody who just described how little you like dealing with food but now it is your job.

[0:36:10.0] SD: It is quite ironic because the big plate was I had to sit there and read all of these labels and then of course when I started to go down the road of potentially opening Shop AIP, that is literary all I did for months on end was read labels –

[0:36:28.2] AVH: But you have to sample stuff too, right?

[0:36:30.7] SD: What's that?

[0:36:31.5] AVH: You must have to sample stuff too, right? Like sampling the things that you are offering.

[0:36:36.5] SD: Well, you don't have to sample it that much because the nice thing with AIP is it is either compliant or it is not. I don't have to make up what that is and honestly, so many people love products that I am not a big fan of those products. And I am not going to name names but I learned pretty quickly that I can't just stock the store with my taste buds.

For instance I will just say in life, my taste buds do like bananas, for instance. Clearly bananas taste like something else to everyone else than what they taste like to me otherwise no one would be eating them. So that doesn't mean I don't stock things that have banana in them, right? Because lots of people love banana.

So the sampling I didn't really have to do as much as the searching and the searching and the searching because you couldn't find a brand that has 30 things but only one or two of them are AIP compliant. So it was a lot of researching.

There are way more food companies out there than you can imagine and really just seeking what brands are out there and what foods are out there and what unique items can I bring to the table that maybe not everybody knows about. I really have been trying to strive to have everything that people need to cook.

If they want to cook fresh everything on their own then they have everything except for the vegetables and the meat. Snack foods, the pre-made stuff to make life easier and it is a lot of work to come up with those things and I actually have a box here of five products that are brand new that still need to get on the site.

So it is a never ending process looking for and adding new products.

[0:38:30.4] AVH: This is another place that we are respectfully different because you are like, “No I don’t have to try all of the products,” because you know, whatever, “Ooh I get to try all of these products. Give me all these free products I am going to try them.” My favorite thing.

[0:38:42.8] SD: Definitely I do appreciate it, I mean people do send me samples but they didn’t at the time. I mean they do now because I am now Sandra, the founder of Shop AIP. But before, I was just some random chick that had nothing, you know?

Nobody knew who I was. It wasn’t like I was somebody in the community that decided to do this. I was a completely unknown. So nobody was just randomly sending me products then. They randomly send them to me now but not pre-launch. Nobody was sending me stuff then.

[0:39:18.4] AVH: So Shop AIP is an online store and you curated this offering of products like you said that range from sort of condiments or snacks or treats or sweets, different kinds of foods, prepared foods that are AIP compliant, right?

So what do you think are the biggest challenges for people who before this Shop AIP was an option, what are the biggest issues for people trying to buy AIP compliant groceries? Do you think it is not knowing what’s AIP friendly in the first place or do you think it is sometimes misleading in labelling?

Because you said things are either compliant or they are not, so what do you think are the biggest challenges for people who are trying to get AIP compliant groceries?

[0:40:02.8] SD: Sure, there is a number of things that I was trying to solve that I found an issue and I am sure other people find the same. Number one is that it is time consuming. To look at products, to turn them over, to figure out where are the label on that particular product to read it to then understand all of what it was saying, it is very time consuming.

And sometimes you are still trying to look things up is that compliant, is that not compliant. Things sound compliant that aren't, things don't sound compliant that are compliant. So understanding what things are derived from. So there is a huge knowledge base that you really need to have if you are really trying to stay compliant. And there is - I would end up with spinach wraps that I could have sworn I read the label and it looks super healthy on the front side and then I get them home and, oh shoot, there is like six ingredients that I am not supposed to have you know?

And so that is a big issue. So it is time consuming, it is a huge knowledge base and you got to remember a lot of people are coming, at least in the start of it, in their worst possible moments. Their brain fog, fatigue, they are in pain and then they are supposed to study up and learn this entirely new language and apply it to their shopping, when it is difficult to even shop in that shape to begin with, okay? So that is a problem.

Labelling can be a problem even doing searches online. Even now, I'll go to various places and search AIP products and I can't tell you every time there is non-compliant products that come up. So you can't just trust any search for AIP. Also the issue is that you are going to a bunch of different places all the time or even if you try to just shop on Amazon.

First of all Amazon's prices are not always the best prices. Now I love Amazon, so I am not trying to throw them under the bus I use them all the time. But I found that their prices weren't the best and often times when you are buying online, you have to buy in multiples you know? They want you to buy two bottles or a case or three of those and my thing was how was I supposed to know if I like that bison bar, you know? I never had bison before, maybe I'll hate it.

Let me try a little bit of everything and so that is the other thing that I try to do is to make sure that each individual product you can purchase it. If you just want one small thing just try that one small thing because a lot of times even though that came in variety packs, half of the things in a variety pack are not going to be compliant.

So you can't even take advantage of pre-made variety packs because only two of those things are compliant and the other eight or whatever are not. So the whole process to me seemed disjointed, time consuming and I can't tell you how many people come up to me and say, "Oh my favorite! You should carry this product, it is my favorite AIP compliant product." And it is not compliant, over and over that happens.

So yeah, I just find the whole thing really difficult and I wanted to make it much easier.

[0:43:24.5] AVH: Yeah it is still a very complicated issue and I guessed you touched on a really good point too that not only when a lot of us are grocery shopping we're in a rush or we're tired and we got our kids running around or whatever but if you are already going into it feeling sick and depleted and with brain fog, you don't want to do any extra work. You want the work to be done for you or at least made clear, so that is a really good point.

What are some of your bestsellers online right now? What are some of the products that people are really into?

[0:43:52.2] SD: Sure, some of the bestsellers would definitely be KC Natural. They do all the AIP compliant sauces. So there is replacement sauces for pasta and ketchup and some salad dressings and mustard and all these things that just seem almost impossible to make without night shades and somehow he has been able to do it.

Also NUCO Coconut Crunch Cereal is a big seller because people love cereal. I mean that was one of the first things I said I used to eat is cereal. And this is one that is made with coconut products versus grains and sugars and things like that.

For the snack foods definitely Artisan Tropic, Cassava chips are probably one of the number one sellers but there is many others. Also some of the meat products by Wild Zora and they've got a lot of new products that just came out that are soups and beef stew, which have already taken off.

So yeah, there is quite a number of things that sell on a pretty good pace. Tiger Nut Butter is another treat and of course for a real treat it's Sweet Apricity. I love them, they have an AIP Caramel and Marshmallow that we sell, which is just amazing that they have been able to come up with something so delicious that can still be compliant.

So if you really just need to stave on the craving, you can do it without completely sabotaging yourself.

[0:45:24.1] AVH: Yeah, how often are you adding new products?

[0:45:27.8] SD: Oh my gosh, all the time. I feel like I am adding new products all the time. We just asked our customers to please send in their recommendations. So I am in the process like I said I have about four or five products sitting on my desk that is about to get ordered. I have probably two other brands that are on their way as well that will be added. I try to find things all the time. This is going to be a big push of new products because I ask people and they answered.

And anything that people ask for that I can get I do get and that is one of the best ways to add products, is to hear what people are looking for and what they have decided they like and have seen elsewhere.

[0:46:10.7] AVH: Absolutely. Do you have any other kind of expansion plans? I believe you currently ship all over the US and Canada, is that right?

[0:46:19.0] SD: Yes US and Canada and I actually have a customer in Australia as well. So by request, we opened up shipping to Australia and we ship there on a regular basis as well.

[0:46:31.6] AVH: So is that something you are trying to expand on I guess shipping is always going to be a limitation but –

[0:46:37.6] SD: Shipping overseas is very expensive. There is nothing I can do about that personally at this point. We still do offer a subsidized shipping fee so they are not still even paying exactly what we are being charged.

I open that up if there is any customer that thinks they are willing to pay that shipping fee I will do the work to open up any country and ship there if we are able and certainly, there is a lot of expansion plans. Definitely looking at broadening our health and beauty sections.

And there is a few things in the works after the summer right now we are working on a dynamic filtering system so that people can go in and say, “Okay I want an elimination phase AIP. But I want everything to be organic and also coconut free.”

And put those into our filtering system and only have the things come up that fit the bill. So we are working diligently right now on getting all of products labeled with a multitude of attributes that I am hoping that our customers find very helpful in determining which products are the right ones for them.

[0:47:46.3] AVH: Cool that is very exciting. I like the beauty stuff too because what you are putting on your body, whether it is skin care or whatever you are using in your shower, your shampoo and soap and makeup and all of those things, those things matter too especially if you are sensitive. I mean they should matter to everybody. You want to put healthy ingredients on your skin but those can really matter to super sensitive people.

So I am not going to keep you too much longer. I really appreciate you taking the time. I think again as I said earlier, I think is a really unique take on a story that probably our listeners have heard before and I love that. I honestly really love that you are somebody who came to this reluctantly, you know? Because to be honest, we have a lot of people on the show who are whether they are AIP or strict paleo or they're something different, it is great to be positive about making these choices for yourself.

And it is great to be, “I just love eating vegetables all day long and I never want to eat a cookie ever.” But to hear a story from somebody who this isn’t the most exciting thing in the world for you to switch off your diet and have to do all of these intense stuff but you did it anyway and you did the research and you empowered yourself and now you are helping other people and I think that is a really big deal and it is commendable and I think that people are going to get a lot from that story. So I appreciate that.

[0:49:07.1] SD: Thank you so much.

[0:49:08.7] AVH: Can you tell me just before I let you go how at this point — because this is a relatively recent story for you. This wasn’t 15, 20 years ago, how recovered would you say you are right now. Is it still a constant work in progress? Are there still things that you are dealing with on a daily basis? How are feeling health wise generally?

[0:49:26.2] SD: So I do say that I still have to deal with my autoimmune every single day. I have permanent, what I think is permanent, I thought that before and it wasn’t but I am still short of breath in everything that I do. So I have to be very careful if I don’t want to be out of breath of breathing in a specific way, so that I don’t get out of breath.

Maybe sometimes choosing the elevator instead of the stairs. Picking up heavy things is always difficult. So those that know me well it is not that I don’t do them but I do them very deliberately and people that are around me on a regular basis just get used to hearing me huff and puff. I do still have to do things for my muscles. The inflammation of the muscles is still a problem. I am far weaker than I should be and so I do try to continue to incorporate things that are physical, so that I can make sure I am keeping up with my muscles and things of that nature.

As for the brain fog, the fatigue and the joint pain and all of that, I mean as long as I eat correctly I have no issues, whatsoever. I mean that part is completely lifted and not a part of my life at all. I do not take naps, I do not lay down in the bed. I go from the moment I wake up to the moment I go to bed. I am full on non-stop, like I said I have three kids who are now nine, seven and five but I manage that with Shop AIP and a chronic illness and so it is pretty full, on every single day.

And for that I am grateful but it is not that I am completely symptom free but some of the things are likely permanent damage that was done. So I just learn to live around those things.

[0:51:12.0] AVH: Right and again, it is pretty incredible how you've managed to work on your health and reverse so many things considering the severity of what you are dealing with and the prognosis that you were given. So it is pretty amazing.

All right, well I am going to let you get back to your busy life but where can folks learn more about Shop AIP and you and your story and do their own research?

[0:51:34.8] SD: Sure, definitely check out shopaip.com. On there, there is a link to my story. It says Sandra's Story. If you really want to go back and read in detail of my story I actually started a private blog just a few months after diagnosis at relativelyunscathed.me and there is even a section where you can read it chronologically. So you can really follow along from the time I was diagnosed to the time I started Shop AIP and originally it was supposed to be for my family.

So it is definitely a personal look into my world and where I came from and the steps that I took to get to where I am today.

[0:52:17.3] AVH: Awesome, all right Sandra, thank you again for your time. Thank you for doing this work for people who need it and I might go check out the website because I fortunately do not have autoimmune disease but I do like the sound of some cassava chips so I might check that out.

[0:52:32.9] SD: Yeah, I always say the thing about Shop AIP is we may not eat all kind of things that you do eat but that just means that everything at the store you are free to eat as well and it is still all delicious.

[0:52:46.2] AVH: Yeah, it is for everybody.

[0:52:48.2] SD: Thank you so much, have a great day.

[0:52:50.0] AVH: Cool, awesome thanks Sandra. I appreciate your time.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:52:57.4] AVH: All right that's it for me. As always thank you for listening and please share this podcast with someone you think could learn from it. If you know anyone struggling with their health, struggling to make nutrition changes, has any autoimmune issues this podcast and actually a lot of other podcasts I have done would be valuable but this one, why not? Send it along, share it, share it on social media. Tag me @themusclemaven, tag us @paleomagazine and spread the love.

Thanks again to our show sponsor, if you want some delish breakfast meats to go with your eggs in the morning, try their paleo friendly no sugar bacon. They are naturally smoked ham and preservative filler free breakfast sausages, head to jonesdairyfarm.com/paleo to learn more and that's it.

Say hi to us on social media as always, tell me what is on your mind and I hope you have a great week. I hope you join me again next week for the next episode and have a great day.

[OUTRO]

[0:53:47.8] AV: The intro music for Paleo Magazine Radio is a song called Stronger performed by Alter Ego and I hope you love it.

[END]