



Q & A with Soso Whaley

CEI's Newest Adjunct Scholar Discusses her "Debunk the Junk" Project, Common Misconceptions about Nutrition, and the Ongoing Assault on Personal Responsibility



CEI recently interviewed Soso Whaley, who is now an adjunct fellow, about her "Debunk the Junk" project, which centers around a documentary film on the idea that the fast food industry is causing America's obesity crisis. Her film responds to Morgan Spurlock's Super Size Me: A Film of Epic Portions, in which the filmmaker gorges himself at McDonald's three times a day for a month to prove that the fast food industry is making America fat. However, conducting a similar experiment—eating at McDonald's three times a day, but consuming normal sized meals and exercising—Whaley lost 10 pounds. As owner of Literary Llama Productions and Zoomobile, she has devoted her life to teaching people of all ages about the necessity of developing a more educated and symbiotic relationship with animals.

CEI: Tell us a little more about the "Debunk the Junk" project. What prompted you to start it? How do you feel now compared to before the project?

Soso Whaley: I was disappointed, but not surprised, when I heard about the movie *Super Size Me* and its being lauded as some sort of serious scientific endeavor. This type of "documentary"—featuring fuzzy data and uncited statistics—has recently become all

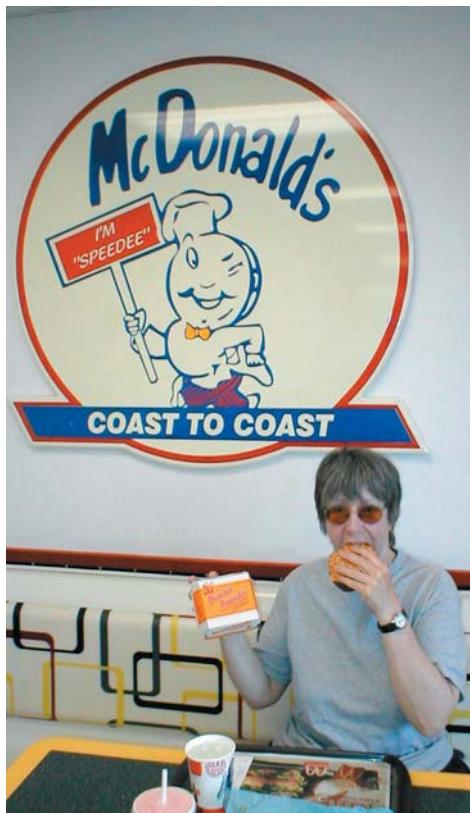
will deteriorate. He could have done that at any supermarket, the finest five-star restaurant, his mother's house, or even his vegan chef girlfriend's place of employment. This whole notion that one type of food is more responsible for our expanding waistlines than another is very naïve.

Though I try my best, generally my food choices leave a lot to be desired. I travel a lot and, to tell you the truth, I'd rather spend my time writing, reading, or working on my documentaries, so I'm not really big on cooking. I do enjoy a good meal though, and I often find the fare at so-called "fast food" restaurants to be satisfying. Having a very limited budget, it's often the only thing I can really afford; spending a lot of money on dinner generally entails going to Applebee's or [New England regional casual dining restaurant chain] The Ninety-Nine. Going to McDonald's for a whole month really wasn't such a hardship as they have a lot of choices most of which I had not tried before. The project was actually fun—I learned a lot about calorie counting and

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the rage with some factions. Note the success of Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*, a blatant attempt to pass off questionable facts and figures as "truth." The only thing that *Super Size Me*'s creator, Morgan Spurlock, demonstrated was that if you eat a lot of food and don't exercise much then you will gain weight and your health

balancing the types of food I eat during the day. Food control was so easy at McDonald's that I decided to return to the Golden Arches during the month of June while I complete my film to learn more about controlled portions and calorie counting. Overall, my health is good and I have lots of energy; I think that speaks for itself.



CEI: Which do you consider to be the most serious and prevalent misconceptions about nutrition today?

Whaley: A complete and total lack of knowledge or understanding of agricultural practices around the world and what is required to feed six billion people. This leads to a lot of myths about food production and distribution as well as food handling. This lack of education regarding such an important component of one's lifestyle, not any particular type of food, is the real problem. Whenever I hear people claim that "natural" or "organic" foods are necessarily the best or that a vegetarian diet is superior, I naturally question the motives of anyone who would recommend that we limit the types of food we should choose. From a sheer survival standpoint, limiting the types of food that one can eat does not seem a good strategy.

CEI: In your diary, you note that, "We are...far better off than our ancestors, who faced great threats from food-borne pathogens and parasites." Why do you believe facts such as this are so commonly ignored in contemporary discussions about food safety?

Whaley: It is not advantageous for organic and natural food advocates to acknowledge that today our food is safer to consume, regardless of whether you eat food produced through low- or high-tech methods. It would be particularly harmful to the organic movement if people realized that, despite claims to the contrary, food pathogens can be present not only in things like meat but also in more "natural" foods, such as sprouts. Ultimately it is the food selection, handling, and preparation that, if done right, can lead to a pleasant meal or, if done wrong, to illness and perhaps even death. Now that people have more access to different types of food I believe it is far more important to educate the public about providing safely prepared food to their families than trying to make them feel guilty about going out for a meal at a "fast food" restaurant.

CEI: Why do you think health scares gain so much public attention?

Whaley: Why do horror flicks do so well at the box office? Why would Morgan Spurlock's film garner so much attention and a nice chunk of change to boot? People love to be scared because

Whaley: The so-called "animal rights" movement has for far too long basked in the glow of political correctness. Fortunately, people are starting to realize that the movement is not about the welfare of animals or even about human enlightenment. Rather, it is a very strict regime which has no tolerance for the use of other species by humans. Fuzzy-wuzzy thinking about animals is the base of this belief system, which is completely dependent on a lack of knowledge when it comes to understanding other species and their care and use by humans. The mission statement of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is very clear: the complete abolition of the use of animals in any way by humans. Most people think that just means not eating meat, wearing fur, or using animals in the circus; but I can assure you that this goes much deeper than a few lifestyle choices. We are talking about a complete and total reversal in human development.

CEI: What do you want people to take away from your documentary?

Whaley: Hopefully the tools to learn how to evaluate the information they are bombarded with every day through the

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it makes them feel alive. Unfortunately, too many people do not evaluate the oftentimes confusing "evidence" presented in support of these health scares and this has led to a lot of medical myths and excessive fear of things like chemicals.

CEI: Also in your diary, you criticize the "animal rights" movement for trying to impose what they consider "correct" choices upon other people. What do you believe motivates them to do this? How serious a problem is this?

media and other sources. There are so many beliefs and ideologies that it's no surprise that we are terribly confused not only about what to eat but about how we humans comport ourselves as a species. We have far more serious problems to deal with, so just understand that in order to survive, an individual must take responsibility for his or her own actions. Let's stop pointing the finger at a hamburger and turn it right around at ourselves, take a deep breath and, repeat after me: "The buck stops here."