

# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)



**Background:** As a corporate Wellcoach, I'm always looking for creative ways to get people involved in healthy activities. In early 2007, I decided to begin a hike training series of three progressively harder day hikes with some California clients. Our final hike in May scaled the historic Yosemite Falls to the summit observation deck. The first hike in April was a short jaunt on Mt. Pinos north of Los Angeles. This was not a long hike, only four miles, but had a finishing elevation of over 8,800 feet—plus we did it in snow. My first meeting with Bea Flores was at the base of the Mt. Pinos climb...the rest is a truly amazing story...possibly one of the most powerful health journeys I have personally experienced at a Wellcoach.



**On the trail with Bea Flores & Ron Jones**

1998 was truly a low point for Bea Flores—she was bed ridden with disabling lupus and fibromyalgia. The doctor told her and husband David to get ready for changes—bad ones. Her doctor said she would no longer be able to work and take care of the home. He recommended that she prepare for permanent disability. Years of chronic pain, numerous medications with all their interactions including tremors, and multiple cortisone injections for joint pain had come down to this...before even turning 40 years old, she was headed for disability. Bea's reaction to the prognosis? **NO WAY!** Fast forward to August 2007. From chronic pain and disability to hiking the high Sierras for a week topping out at over 11,500 feet...simply amazing. Some of Bea's friends with lupus died in their forties, yet Bea went from the low elevation of bedridden to an 11,500 foot Sierra summit. This is her story of illness to health through wholesome foods and the healing hikes of nature.

*From medicine to deep motivation...* Despite the increasing problems that peaked in 1998-1999, Bea had been a seasonal snow skier and intermittent gym user for

# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

*(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)*

years...and had wanted to be a hiker for even longer. By 1998, normal function was out of the question. In addition to the progressing lupus, the fibromyalgia made her feel like she had a chronic flu along its constant aching; she was totally exhausted...almost. The lupus was not yet invading her internal organs, but Bea knew that in order to improve, and even survive, she had to make drastic changes. When the doctor told her to prepare for permanent disability, she became so angry that she immediately went home and threw away all of her medications (and with them went all the drug interactions). She reached deep for motivation...she did not want to go into retirement bedridden. She found strength in her grandmother who had crippling arthritis. Despite the arthritis, her grandmother remained active by constant gardening and home chores. While Bea learned to find her own way, her grandmother proved to be an early inspiration to making the best out of a difficult situation. She made a firm decision and declared to husband David, "Come with me as I improve my health or get left behind because I'm not going to end my life this way!" Together they began the long journey to the summit—actually "many" summits.

*The healing begins...*after throwing away all the medications, Bea began a long journey to find and use "healing food" that would not cause the inflammatory responses found in less healthy choices. This period of searching and experimentation lasted several years. Beyond husband David, she had a small army of friends that began supporting her by sending page after page of web research on healing nutrition. There were many ups and downs during these years, but her support group kept pushing her to never quit. After a few years, she finally began to get traction—to feel the healing in her body from so many years of pain and substandard health. About the time she was feeling long-awaited health improvements in 2003, she had a serious case of asthma that literally took part of her voice away for years. Despite loss of full voice and what was still compromised health, she refused to give up, continued eating healthy, and did what she could to exercise.

Along with eating healthy foods that decreased inflammation in her body, Bea also attacked her illness with exercise; however, like her nutritional changes, this was not a quick fix or easy to design. As with food, she did a lot of experimenting. Going to the gym seemed like a good idea, but it actually made her worse. After gym workouts, she found herself at home in bed with severe chills, and she never experienced the "high" or elation that so many people talk about after a good gym workout.

Bea had wanted to learn about hiking for many years. Ironically, many years before my training hike series in the spring of 2007, Bea had actually purchased a hiking backpack. It was hidden away in the closet with her dreams of hiking—out of view, but definitely not out of heart. When I announced my hiking series, she was elated and responded immediately. She was hoping that hiking would prove to not only fulfill her dream of experiencing the wilderness, but that this

# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

*(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)*

could also be a healing activity that her body could tolerate better than other forms of physical activity she had attempted.



## ***Bea's First Hike @ Mt. Pinos...Lungs Burning But NOT Stopping!***

When I met Bea in person in spring of 2007 at the base of the mountain, I did not realize the depth of Bea's journey and her incredible struggles. What seemed like a simple orientation meeting in the cold blustery winds that morning was actually a huge triumph in her human spirit and determination to take charge of her own health—and her own healing from the inside out.

As I got to know Bea better in the following months, I learned that despite the delays to realize her hiking dreams, she never got discouraged and remained intent on getting out onto the trails. Even more amazing was that her big hiking dream was to hike Yosemite Falls in California—exactly where our final destination was set to be in May of 2007. April's four-mile hike was a *long way* from Yosemite Falls. Bea's completion of the initial four-mile hike was a major accomplishment for her considering the struggles with lupus, fibromyalgia, a severe asthma attack that damaged her voice, and so many difficulties with previous forms of exercise that she could not seem to maintain.

Because of Bea's many physical issues, she had to find her own pace and rhythm with the hiking series and eventually with her numerous independent hikes. I have worked nationally on mental skills training and performance psychology. I was immediately impressed with Bea's concentrated focus on the task and her own internal sense of pace even in difficulty. On our second hike, Bea struggled greatly. This was a seven-hour hike in fairly hot weather. Her pack was a bit heavy for the severe inclines and trail conditions. Despite her struggle, she refused several attempts by our hike group members to help her

# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

*(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)*

carry the pack. She did not make the summit that day...close...but not quite to the top. We were one week out from Yosemite Falls. The Yosemite hike was steeper but not as long. I was hopeful Bea could make the summit observation deck at Yosemite Falls...but not absolutely sure. I did know this—she was one of the toughest women I have ever trained with. She had a fortitude and determination that is rare in most women half her age. At age 48, one thing was certain...she was aiming for the Yosemite Falls Summit the following weekend...with her own pace and rhythm...one step at a time.



***Bea's 1<sup>st</sup> Hike Summit @ Mt. Pinos, Elevation 8,800 Feet!!!***

The morning of our Yosemite hike, Bea made a smart tactical move and lightened her backpack load. Of course, this probably made husband David carry extra supplies, but she was determined to get to the top no matter what had to be done! I was with the lead group. Bea and David immediately faded to the back so she could find her own pace. We had a very tight schedule. We only had five hours to make the round trip because of the bus return schedule. The lead group and middle group spent their 30-60 minutes on the summit—holding a little longer in hopes that Bea would make the summit. Time pressed on, so we started to head down—without Bea and David. Sadly, I was thinking that Bea was not able to make it when she appeared at the crest with a huge smile on her face. She quickly pressed on to the observation deck with David and another group member to realize her view and destination dream as I headed down with the main group. A few months went by after Yosemite. Later Bea confided in me that on the way up to Yosemite Falls, her hike became quite emotional. It all seemed to overwhelm her...the fact that she was there hiking her way up to one of the most picturesque natural views in the world—her actual big dream. Tears formed—next to beads of hard-earned sweat as she pressed onward. When she returned to her office the following Monday, her co-workers stood and cheered. Mission accomplished; dream realized.



# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

*(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)*

As Bea's Wellcoach, I was overjoyed with her Yosemite Fall Summit! I thought that was the end of the road in terms of big hikes for a while—I was wrong. In August of 2007, I got another message from Bea. I had been organizing some more fall hikes and getting the word out. She told me she just returned from a little hiking herself. She had joined a local hiking club, and following Yosemite, began hiking with husband David and friends nearly every weekend. At one of these meetings, she met a group that needed one more person to do a multi-day hike in the High Sierras east of Yosemite. Bea took the spot. In just six days of hiking, Bea Flores, lupus, fibromyalgia, and asthma survivor, covered 52 miles of trails averaging about ten miles per day. Her high point was the summit of Vogelsang Peak just out of Tuolumne Pass at over 11,500 feet elevation. Their base camp was at 10,000 feet. In April, Bea struggled to take one step at a time in the cold snow for those initial four miles. By August of the same year, only four months later, she was still taking one step at a time—just for an extra fifty miles! I nearly fell out of my chair when I read her High Sierra e-mail message. I am still amazed at what the human spirit can accomplish when on fire with health and wellness—and especially when on the trail!

Bea has healed herself from the inside out using healthy foods and exercise. Her personal "healing trails" led to hiking experiences which she claims has spiritual health benefits for her. Interestingly, new research was published in early 2007 about the extended benefits of "ecotherapy" or exercising in the outdoors over exercising inside a gym or building—Bea is living proof. Bea never had that "exercise high" in the gym. Now, for days after good hikes, Bea says she is totally energized from her outdoor hiking experiences. Bea definitely has found the exercise high now—but at true elevation on a mountain trail.

*Reflections from survivor and warrior Bea Flores...*

Bea would like to encourage others with lupus, fibromyalgia, or different health problems to give self healing and wellness a serious attempt. She urges that people **MUST** push through their initial barriers and never give up. It took her years of struggling to gain traction with her health. She used her outright anger to drive permanent behavior change—and never looked back. She trains by gut and listens to her own body and sense of pace. On Bea's first hike, her lungs felt like they were on fire, but she adjusted her pace and persevered. I asked how much she weighed or how much weight she had lost doing all these hikes—she didn't even know! She never gets on a scale! She also never diets. Bea goes by how she feels. She knows how to eat for health and how to move in order to be fit. The rest she said will take care of itself. Aging healthy and well is her objective—simple and to the point.

# The Healing Trails of Bea Flores

*(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)*

Hiking has opened up a whole new social circle of healthy and supportive friends for her and husband David. The hiking of 2007 has literally changed her life—for good. At the end of our interview in October 2007, I had to ask Bea what was next. She said, “How about a one-day hike to the top of Mt. Whitney Coach RJ? That’s something I’ve also wanted to do.” I have a gut feeling that we’ll all be seeing Bea on the top!



***“Hike Leader” Bea & Coach RJ @ East Canyon Trail***

**"Wilderness is a necessity...a fountain of life... thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people who are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." —John Muir**

**Coach Comments:** At the end of the day as a Wellcoach, it’s rewarding to know that you are fortunate enough to make a difference in people’s lives with the most important thing of all—health. It’s not just a job—it’s my passion and life’s purpose to help people BE WELL. Bea has been an incredible inspiration to me as a Wellcoach and health educator; she is a true WellPRO along every step of her journey’s healing trails. Thanks Bea. You’ve helped me more than I have helped you!

Bea is now one of my hike leaders that assists in helping other women get in shape through outdoor hiking. I am happy to let her take the lead as we are all inspired to follow.

See y’all on the trail,  
Coach RJ