Girls living healthy

Gabrielle Hewson

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Date
GIRLS LIVING HEALTHY

A personal journey to a healthier, more fulfilling life

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Computer Graphics Design
by Gabrielle Hewson

School of Design
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Rochester Institute of Technology
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Approval Date: May 16, 2012

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ABSTRACT

My Master of Fine Arts Thesis Project, entitled Girls Living Healthy, is an educational web site for girls ages 8 to 108. It is designed to inform and teach them how to make healthier nutrition and, subsequently, lifestyle choices.

This project combines my passion for healthier living with my skills in, and enjoyment of, writing, illustration, and web design. Girls Living Healthy includes hand-drawn illustrations, original and applied hardcoded scripting language, resource and links, a glossary of less common terms, a quick interactive game called “Mood Swings”, and the culmination of over a year’s personal research and participation. My overall goals with this project have been to change the way this type of information is provided, raise its quality standard, facilitate the sharing of knowledge and wisdom, and empower girls and women so that they may find balance in their lives.

What makes this project unique is that it is based on, and reflects, my personal journey to wellness. I have sought to inform and teach not only through making the results of my research easy to understand, but also through my first-hand experience as a girl with occasional references to, and my reflections on, being a granddaughter, daughter, sister, mother of a daughter, and woman.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

• Build an educational web site for girls ages 8-108 based on my personal journey to better nutrition and a healthier lifestyle
• Assimilate information, put it into understandable terms, and share the core concepts, as well as insights about personal challenges both past and present
• Demonstrate my:
  o passion for healthier living
  o ability to produce clear, concise, and engaging original writing
  o design talents including illustration, typography, and layout, and
  o skills in web design, as well as front-end development
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Obesity is consistently on the rise. Though we are living longer, obesity statistics around the world indicate we are not necessarily living healthier. Women, in particular, face a variety of chemical, physical, and emotional changes that not only impact the way we eat, but also the way we live. For me, the way I eat and the way I live have gone hand-in-hand and reflected my sense of self, my confidence, and my sense of humor. The more horizontally challenged (fat) I got, the smaller my world became and the more my emotional resilience became brittle. I didn’t have my own gravitational pull, but I did literally feel the weight of haunting emotional baggage and the impact of my unconscious eating. I, like many of us, felt myself mentally spiraling downward to the dark world of self-loathing and disgust, and a fear of my own reflection. What had happened to me? What is happening to many of us?!

Mealtime in many cultures is an honored time to gather family and friends; to start, or catch up on, the day; and, to share in the preparation, eating, and cleanup. Mealtime is recognized as an important nutritional and social part of the day— from planning and shopping to preparation, serving and eating. They are scheduled three to four times daily, and are designed to relax, refuel and rejuvenate, and often last up to two hours; long enough to allow for community, meal enjoyment, and aid digestion. Still many societies have developed a reverence for the erroneously perceived productivity of multitasking, and, in doing so, have tended to gravitate towards prepackaged and fast “foods” rather than taking time to plan, prepare, and enjoy meals.

Obesity is one of many signs that we (particularly Americans) are multitasking and convenience-fooding ourselves into dis-ease and really large coffins! It is, in many ways, a root cause for other forms of disease\(^1\) that hamper or strike so many people down. Obesity is the result of unconscious eating, the absence of daily movement, and the byproduct of fast “food”. And when I say fast “food”, I not only mean drive-up-order-and-eat-in-5-minutes food, I mean “food” that is processed for added shelf-life and commercially mass-produced for consumption, AND any “food” packaged to eat on-the-fly bypassing a more civilized mealtime.

\(^1\) Note that, for purposes of the goals of this thesis project, disease, defined as “an impairment of health or a condition of abnormal functioning”, (Princeton), from this point forward, and throughout the Girls Living Healthy web site, is referred to as “dis-ease” because such “impairment” throws our bodies out of ease and into a state of dis-ease.
SURVEY OF LITERATURE

As I began my personal research I read or resourced specific subjects from over 48 different print resources including books, journals, magazines, and newspapers to gain a foundation of knowledge about how whole foods and "foods" specifically effect our bodies, and how one might prevent various "common" states of dis-ease such as blood pressure highs and lows, depression, digestive discomfort, headaches, hyperactivity, irritability, lethargy, sleeplessness, and more.

To discover what resources were already in existence on the worldwide web, I conducted a variety of online searches. I found several web sites and web site-based activities, but most were superficial and never got to the core of nutrition or lifestyle. The majority of these sites were written simply for monetization with short ambiguous sentences that failed to provide a viable piece of truly useful information. Many of these sites are also geared toward selling products or services versus providing substantive, applicable information – to the point that their content simply becomes cliché. So why are we all getting muffin tops? Could it be that part of the problem is the fact that when we are ready to help ourselves and we are looking for solid answers, we are getting pitched “buy-me” concepts and sold a bunch of rehashed information culled from the latest fad-du-jour and sensationalized to scare us into submission?

ADULT-FOCUSED SITES

Following are some examples of “health” related government-sponsored, commercial, and personal sites currently on the web.

1. http://life.familyeducation.com/ - The Family Education Network, touts itself as "the best of the Internet's content, resources ". Presentation is text- and ad-laden, cluttered, and, overall, superficial in content. One has to navigate through screen-obscurring product ads for commercially popular toys. Under sections entitled Healthy, Nutrition & Dieting Advice for Moms, there are links to quick articles of 1-3 short sentences with stock photography presented in 8-10 click-through slides, followed by links to more advertising, and government-sponsored content and information bureaus. Ironically all "brought to you” by companies like Cici's Pizza!

world population, and the environment. The site presents “core themes” that include: Children and Families; Population and the Environment; Global Health; Aging; and, Gender. This site is clearly more focused on global proactivity for Third World countries, containing the results of poor nutrition (as lack of food) throughout one’s lifetime, not worldwide “food” gluttony and obesity.

3. http://girlshealth.gov/ - Girls Health is owned and maintained by the Office of Women’s Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. No less superficial than the other sites visited, it does not appear to be updated that frequently (even annually). For example, the Nutrition page was last updated September 22, 2009. The goal appears to be quick information and links placed to “demonstrate” that the government is concerned about our health and nutrition.

4. http://www.women-health-and-family-tips.com/ - One of thousands of Site Build It (SBI) monetization sites that follow special content formulas for making money off a site and maximizing search engines. Articles are written around meta words, word counts are kept extremely short, and content is pat. This site over uses stock footage and talks at visitors telling them what to do, geared toward a specific product push and/or Google Ads. SBI sites are cookie-cutter in format, look, and substance, with the core priority being monetization per clicks, links, and ads. These sites offer more clutter and superficial information overload than useful, applicable content.

5. http://womenshealth.gov/ - This site is a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health project, and another SBI-like site, both in format and the information it provides.

KID-FOCUSED SITES

Activity-containing sites for kids are overly simplistic and do not explain to children how food works with (and “food” works against) our bodies and why it is important to eat consciously. Children are also not taught about commercialization, industrial “food” production, and the power of advertising vs. what is truly good for them to put into their bodies. They are more often than not told to follow the USDA “food” Pyramid – a tremulous structure at best. Activities are geared toward younger
children (3-7) or homogenized to cover popular “food”-related content alongside “food” ads aimed at tweens and teens.

1. http://teenshealth.org/kid/ - TeenHealth uses the same formatting and content presentation as the previous sites mentioned.
2. http://www.pbskids.org - It is interesting to note, particularly with the PBSKids site, how text-laden the information is, given the relatively young demographic.
3. http://kidshealth.org/ - The irony of the Pumpkin O’Meter game on this site that is presented as a “nutrition” activity focused on candy.

**PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS**

When I go online, I want answers. I don’t want to weed through a bunch of simplistic and circular content, advertising, links-upon-links, or hit dead ends after being promised a big information payoff from the link, site or article title. Since everyone learns differently, a site needs to include written information, visuals, activities, and repeat content in new ways to stay engaging, interesting and entertaining. I, personally, have found that injecting a sense of humor into learning tends to lock in concepts and spawn both proactive thought and discussion. I got an A in Business Law because I remembered all the funny ways my teacher presented the information, relating to his work as a trial attorney and his moonlighting as a stand-up comic. I decided taking a humorous approach with more quality content and less flash and fluff would both engage and inspire girls to learn and then empower others. In addition, since this is a personal journey, I share my thoughts, experiences, and faux pas. My hope is that my sharing will enable girls to identify with my challenges and, hopefully, learn from my many ridiculous “what if” thoughts and unconscious mistakes made along the way.
SITE FLOWCHART

The site was built based on the intensive research I had conducted over the eight months preceding its implementation. The cumulative notes from my personal research came to over 280 typed and hand-written pages. In putting together the flowchart for the site (page 7), I wanted to reduce the information I’d gathered to its simplest form without becoming ambiguous, simplistic, or trite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls Living Healthy Flow Chart</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Splash</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F-Factor</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More F-Factor</td>
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<td>Puberty</td>
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<td>Pregnancy</td>
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<td>Motherhood</td>
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<td>Self Esteem</td>
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<td>Academics At</td>
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<td>Home</td>
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<td>Role Models</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Golden Rule</td>
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<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>Personal Growth</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>Mum Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menopause</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mood Swing Fun</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Eating</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Addict. “Foods”</td>
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<tr>
<td>More “Foods”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caffeine</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Caffeine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beverages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chocolate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meats &amp; Dairy</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Meats</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Dairy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Still More Dairy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Processed “Foods”</td>
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<tr>
<td>More “Foods”</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMOs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
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<td>More Sugar</td>
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<td>Nat. Sweeteners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glycemic Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>Com. Sweeteners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hidden Sugars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art. Sweeteners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugar Hurts Us</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Whole Foods</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legumes &amp; Beans</td>
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<td>Nuts &amp; Seeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
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<tr>
<td>More About</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whole Grains</td>
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<td>Water</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nutri. Sources</strong></td>
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<td>Antioxidants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Calcium</td>
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<td>Carbohydrates</td>
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<td>More Carbs</td>
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<td>Cholesterol</td>
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<td>Enzymes</td>
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<td>Esa Fatty Acids</td>
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<td>Fiber</td>
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<td>Minerals</td>
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<td>Nutritional Fats</td>
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<td>Protein</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamins</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nutri. Pracs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetarianism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veganism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macrobiotics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raw Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Combining</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dis-ease</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>pH Balance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Allergies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pills Vs. Nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mindset</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagination (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intentions (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoughts (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adventure (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relaxation (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyle</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family (soon!)</td>
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<td>Friends (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laughter (soon!)</td>
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<td>Mealt ime (soon!)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Empowered</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Footnotes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>About</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog (Interim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recipes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribute</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Site map</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>E-Book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The site consists of seven primary sections entitled: F-Factor, Eating, Mindset, Ability, Lifestyle, Empowered, and Sharing. Each section has a specific focus.

1. F-Factor includes issues germane to girls such as how puberty, motherhood, and menopause affect changes in our nutritional needs and body chemistry.
2. Eating is the largest section and includes sub-sections entitled: Addictive “Foods”, Whole Foods, Nutrient Sources, Nutritional Practices, and Dis-ease.
3. Mindset contains sub-sections entitled: Attitude, Imagination, Intentions, and Thoughts – all, important in goal achievement and social balance.
4. Ability is about proactivity including Adventure, Exercise, Relaxation, and Sleep.
5. Lifestyle touches on how girls spend their time each day, whether they choose to do so alone, with family and/or with friends; and, also includes a sub-section on mealtime as a venue for improved social interaction, relaxation and quality family time.
6. Empowered contains resources that include a term glossary, footnotes, the web site’s site map, and a future eBook.
7. Sharing is a venue for just that; enabling an exchange of information, and for visitors to share their experiences with me and others, recipes, recommendations, and more.

**THESIS CONCEPT EVOLUTION**

The idea for my thesis project started to bloom after I read Mireille Guilano’s book *French Women Don’t Get Fat* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). Reading about the time and care the French spend planning and creating each meal, with the finest and freshest ingredients, and how each meal is both an occasion and a work of art, reminded me of my maternal grandmother. She was French/German descent and an extraordinaire orchestrator of meals and gatherings; the consummate hostess, chef, and party planner. Her meals were always made from scratch and delicious, and it wasn’t until I read *French Women* that I realized just how French I’d been raised. My admiration and respect for my grandmother’s meal planning and preparation, and the importance she put on meal time as a social gathering and learning opportunity inspired me to explore and compare French cultural and nutritional lifestyles similar to those here in the U.S.: organic, vegetarian, vegan and raw.
I then started looking closer at the natural nutritive value of foods and applying the basics of my research to my own habits by eating more consciously, retraining my palate, and making healthier “food” choices in the summer of 2011. I wanted to both make myself accountable and keep track of my progress. To commit myself, on May 12, 2011, I started a blog called *Une étape à la fois* (French – in honor of my grandmother – for “one step at a time”, representative of my process), where I began tracking the progress of my project and collecting my Survey of Literature and Bibliography references, as well as other data I hoped to incorporate into the site.

I also recognized the importance of building a community early on and engaging their contribution to the project via feedback and support. On July 19th and 20th, 2011, I conducted a survey of 120 girls and women, ages 16-55, to solicit their input re: a domain name for my thesis web site. Domain name options were: healthygirlslifestyle, healthylivingforgirls, healthygirlstoladies, girlslivinghealthy, and healthygirlslife. Resulting feedback was as follows:

- healthygirlslifestyle: 12
- healthylivingforgirls: 14
- healthygirlstoladies: 2
- **girlslivinghealthy**: 21
- healthygirlslife: 8

57 total responses

With an overall 47.5% response rate (95 texts with 50 text responses (52.6%) and 25 emails with 7 email responses (28.0%), the domain name **girlslivinghealthy.com** was confirmed and secured that week.

Putting the fruits of my research into action and applying much of what I was learning to my own life, I shed over 26 solid lbs. of excess fat in just three months without working out regularly or denying myself gastronomic pleasure. I also kept a paper journal to track notes and milestones. As I began seeing and feeling results, I wondered how I could blend the best cultural and traditional nutrition and lifestyle practices to not only improve my own life, but also share with other girls.

From there, my thesis began to evolve and move forward. My research led to the beginning ideas for the project’s flowchart (page 7). Pictures of illustrations and concepts of layout to fit the content also began to take shape. By Fall 2012, I was drafting logos, playing with fonts, creating wireframes and prototypes – all with the user experience at the forefront. Winter 2012 was spent building fleshing out...
wireframes and prototypes, researching and trying several JavaScript options for specific site dynamics I hoped to attain, starting to convert my research into concise chunks of information that led seamlessly into additional information that would take visitors deeper into subject areas and still be text light and chockfull of quality content. This time was also spent pulling it all together with hardcoding, and testing and retesting formatting, layout, and flow logic. Spring 2012 was spent tweaking scripting and design, creating and adding artwork, and designing, illustrating, and implementing the Mood Swings activity.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

My initial implementation of this thesis was me-focused because I had to understand what I was doing and why, before I could relate to what everyone else was. I needed to fully assess how I felt physically, scrutinize my habits and evaluate my nutritional and lifestyle impulses. I realized that more often than not, I simply wasn’t thinking as much about “food” as I thought I was.

I started researching material online, looking for people who demonstrated realistic nutrition and lifestyle success. I went to the library and bookstores and starting reading. I found information that I could relate back to my earlier healthier lifestyle and started reading through every aspect of specialists’ philosophies and findings regarding healthy nutrition and overall health (mental, emotional and physical). I studied how foods affect the body from head to toe. I studied the history, cultures and origins of foods. I studied different nutritional practices. I took all of this and started to pull together what I felt would logically work for me. And, I am still fine-tuning my nutrition and lifestyle, but I’ve found a good base of applicable information I believe will benefit fellow females in very positive ways.

LOGO IDEATION & COLOR THEME

The Girls Living Healthy logo came about after careful consideration of form, color, message, and ultimate usage; however, it wasn’t the easiest task because I was so close to the subject matter. I began sketching and mocking up prototypes in Adobe Illustrator in Fall 2011. My goal was to create a logo that was legible, free flowing, and
rounded with curves, as well as playfulness. However, I wound up making legibility my prison and my resulting designs were too structured and rigid.

First drafts, though well received, for me, fell short. My initial letter shapes were based more on t-shirt legibility and wound up being too simplistic. They lacked the organic, free-flowing feel I was hoping for. They didn’t say female, and though fun, it leaned toward childlike on first impression. I knew I had a long way to go.

I also knew the site’s color theme was going to be dictated to a degree by the logo I decided on, so, while I was still working through logo ideas, I put together a series of color themes based on my first logo ideation, and posted them (picture at right) on Facebook to get people’s feedback. The questions I included in my post were focused on colors, asking them what combinations spoke to them, came across as feminine, appealed to their perceptions of being a girl. Beyond that, I was looking for a color scheme that was both playful and fun.

At the time, I was more concerned with color vs. design feedback because I was still working through design ideas on my end. I hoped that perhaps finding the color theme would aid my design progression. Color was, in fact, a contributing factor because, to my surprise, the most popular color among the girls responding was blue.

I decided to make a warm blue the predominant color with secondary accents of orange and pink, and tertiary accents of variations on some combinations of these three colors, keeping them, for the most part warm in nature overall. I wanted playful, colorful, and happy; and, I knew what colors were already standing out in the many watercolor paintings and watercolor pencil illustrations I’d been working on since the summer of 2010 when I’d picked up my pencils, paper pads, paints, and brushes and had begun illustrating as a creative outlet.
Meanwhile, I took my logo design to the amazing designers in my life that included professors and fellow students. Professor Chris Jackson articulated what was bugging me about my first design: it was too geometric and angular. He was right! And, I realized that, just like my initial sketches, I was thinking inside rather than out of the box. Rather than use letters or shapes to mold the logo, he suggested I return to the words: girls living healthy. He noted that my illustrative style for the project and my desire to introduce a watercolor feel with a light cartoonish quality, lent itself to a curvier design that I might get by playing with some of the free web-friendly fonts out there. So, I literally went back to the drawing board and started playing with fonts both on their own and mixed with others.

Future ideations included a variety of fonts both on their own and with others, word and/or letter overlaps, sharing letters among words, stacking, distorting, creating my own letter ligatures. I drafted my own letter shapes in an effort to emulate the female form. Then, ultimately, I pulled some of these ideas together in Adobe Illustrator to come up with the final logo. There I played with placement, line spacing, letter kerning, capitals, lowercase, multiplication of shapes, and color. In Illustrator, everything looked perfect and crisp.

But human beings are not perfect and crisp, and girls are always evolving, bettering ourselves, and, for the most part, willing to show some of our rough edges and imperfections. And, I didn’t like the extreme contrast generated between the perfection and solid nature of the Illustrator logo. Solid translated back to rigid and structured. Since I knew that I wanted a watercolor feel and watercolors have a mind of their own (much like us girls), no one stroke,
wash, or splatter looks identical, so I opted to color the logo in by hand, scan it and then fine tune the blacks in Illustrator for clarity and crispness of line while allowing the beautiful imperfections of watercolor pencil and water wash to blend the colors.

**FONTS**

The Girls Living Healthy logo came about after careful consideration of form, color, message, and ultimate usage. The fonts for the site evolved from the logo design that was both playful and elegant. They are: Kingthings Wrote (Font Space), used for “girls” (in the logo only); Veggieburger (Font Squirrel), used for “living” and “healthy” (in the logo, and site section titles and navigation). Veggieburger also seemed aptly named for at least a portion of the site’s nutrition focus, though this was only coincidental. I actually was first drawn to the lowercase “g” in this font style because it had “curve-appeal” and uniqueness (two very girl qualities). I chose the serif font Palatino for its legibility and elegance. It is a strong serif font with feminine flourishes.

**METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN**

Since so much of my research was based on our body chemistry and the chemistry of whole foods and other “foods” we consume, it was challenging to cull key information to keep the site light rather than text-laden. In addition to editing and reediting to say as mush as possible in as few words as possible, I utilized design strategies such as page and column formatting, accordion-type collapsible sections, and JavaScript-based fly-out navigation. The site currently contains 96 pages, with growth potential for many more. Each page allows the visitor to drill down to additional information should they wish to pursue a certain subject further. On-page links to additional resources both on and off the site, and a term glossary were created to round out the visitor experience, enabling girls to more fully research the subjects that interest them and find answers to their questions. The site’s blog link was originally created to establish and track my progress. This blog will eventually be a community hub for girls to exchange girl-focused information about nutrition and health with one another.
Overall, the site’s content reflects my personal journey in a way that enables other girls and women to relate to the issues we have in common. The key points I address are the very same challenges I have experienced and how I responded to them (good and bad).

Fun nuances on the site include a strong focus on the human side of the user experience, a splash page illustration that comes to life via parallax scroll scripting and serves as a portal to the site itself, and a Moodswings activity (found in the F-Factor section, of course) where visitors can click on four sections of a portrait to create faces that match the moods rotating behind it. I added this simple activity to lighten tone and provide a little expressive outlet (pictured at right). Illustrated humor sprinkled throughout the site includes a representative drawing of “food” addiction in the Addictive “Foods” sub-section of Eating (page 18), personal insights, and vignettes in colored rounded-edge boxes at the top of each section (pictured at right), and colorful and dynamic JavaScript based navigation.

**LAYOUT DESIGN**

Because of the extent of my research and the depth of the subject matter, I realized that the best way to layout the site was to allow, to a degree, the content to
dictate the format. I wanted some consistency of structure, particularly navigation and breadcrumbs, but I also knew I couldn’t fit a square peg into a round hole without sacrificing the free-flow of content and visual engagement I wanted.

Ironically, like my initial logo design, my first layout designs were rigid because I was too focused on structure and didn’t include content until later. The content was truly key to all that went into this site from the logo to the fonts to the demographic focus, to the appropriate colors, illustrations,

layout, and more. It wasn’t until I relaxed a bit that everything started to flow. I had been so fixated on my time deadlines for this project near and dear to my heart, that I didn’t want to rush; I was essentially fighting with myself and not letting my creativity flow like I wanted the site to. Alas, we do tend to get in our own way, don’t we?

I sketched up a general wireframe template and mocked the template up in Adobe Photoshop to get a sense of space, then decided to let the content dictate the number of columns per subject page, column size, picture and special section placement. I created boxes in my CSS that allowed for 1-, 2- and 3-column layouts, keeping box heights flexible. The resulting layout combinations flow nicely with one another from page to page.
I also knew I wanted the site to have a splash page. From the beginning, I had designs on creating a layered illustration that would be animated by the visitor’s mouse via a parallax scroll as a subtle interactive element. I also wanted the illustration to set the tone and color theme, be inviting, and introduce the site’s focus and logo. The final illustration (shown below) includes an enter button below it by also serve as a link to the site’s home page.
USER INTERFACE DESIGN

My goal was to keep the visitor experience simple and intuitive. I wanted ease of navigation on every page so I included top, side, and bottom navigation, as well as breadcrumbs at the top and bottom of each page to keep visitors apprised of where they are at any given point on the site.

To test my initial site draft I had about 50% of the pages and their content complete; all formatting scripting and linking done; and, some illustrations in place. At this point, it was mid Spring 2012. I created a Facebook page that received 55 likes the first day it was launched. On that page, I noted milestones, and posted questions to what was developing into a Girls Living Healthy team happy to provide feedback. I loaded up the site labeled as a test site and asked the team to visit and explore, then provide me with their impressions, thoughts, and critique.

Much of the feedback I received focused on overall impressions of the site. People liked the logo, illustrations, and color theme. Those who commented on content like the fact that so much information was available in one place, while others thought there may be simply too much text. The latter, also noted that they hadn’t read any content on the pages they visited. Those that had interest and read the content appreciated its depth of information.
My next opportunity for user feedback came with Imagine RIT on May 5, 2012. This is an annual event at the Institute that brings 10,000 people from Upstate New York and other states onto the RIT campus to explore the many innovations and talents coming out of the school. The primary demographic tends to be large families looking for a carnival-type day, so many outside and inside activities are geared toward fun and games. Despite this, I had the opportunity to personally interview testers of my site and received a tremendous amount of positive and constructive feedback from visitors that were serious about improving their health and lifestyles. Overall, however, Imagine RIT was not conducive to serious site testing as over 50% of the visitors to the Computer Graphics Design lab that day were children and large families looking for respite from the warm weather and computer games to play. Still, the input I did receive from my face-to-face exchanges was both encouraging and valuable. And, overall, the site did pique even the game-focused visitors’ curiosity.

**ILLUSTRATION DESIGN**

My overall goal for the site’s illustrations was for them to be engaging, whimsical, colorful, and elegant. I used the following color media:

- Windsor Newton watercolor paints
- Caran d’ache Supracolor Soft pencils
- Koh-i-noor Rapidograph pens

To give the site rich, but delicate, color.
I did most of the illustrations on a variety of watercolor papers, depending on background texture preferences for each of the paintings, or smooth bristol to insure clean ink lines, when desired. Illustrations were then scanned into Adobe Photoshop, converted to .pngs or .jpegs, then cleaned up edges, when necessary, and saved for web devices to reduce file size. At all points, my goal was to maintain the organic look, feel, and integrity of each and every hand-drawn or painted illustration.

**TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Technically, I wanted my hardcoding to be clean, well organized, and logical. For every day I added HTML, CSS, and/or JavaScript, I also spent time streamlining them. I regularly checked my pages with the W3C Markup Validator ([http://validator.w3.org/#validate_by_input](http://validator.w3.org/#validate_by_input)) and CSS Validator ([http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/#validate_by_input](http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/#validate_by_input)) using direct input. This practice helped me avoid many glitches in functionality most often attributed to typos.

I also checked the site pages periodically on Chrome, Firefox, Safari, and Opera. I chose not to focus too much on the sites compatibility in IE before version 10, though I did what I could to include webkit scripting to bridge some of the communication gaps. There are still issues with IE in all its versions with regard to some drop shadows, ghost lines around some images, and IE versions preceding 10 also showed all special characters such as dashes and ampersands as their styling language (i.e., & shows up as &; and a long dash, also called an “m” dash, showing up as &mdash;). I also checked the site and its functionality on iPods, iPads, MacbookPros, and iMacs to insure that hover states translated to and worked well when touched on mobile devices.

Finally, I ran site pages through various browser checkers including [http://netrenderer.com/index.php](http://netrenderer.com/index.php) (to check IE compatibility via individual screenshots based on the site page’s URL), and [http://browsershots.org/](http://browsershots.org/) (to check a variety of browsers and their many versions).

Further technical considerations weighed heavily on the user experience and the site’s dynamic interactivity. Given that the site is 90% informational text, it was important to keep it well ordered as well as fresh, easy, and fun to navigate.
LESSONS LEARNED

While implementing this project, I learned the importance of clean script not only for functionality and loading, but also for legibility and reference. I therefore made a point of using the cleanest scripting possible and regularly checked browser interactivity across a variety of platforms.

Being new to JavaScript at the time, one challenge was creating an accordion function that enabled users to not only open up sections to read further, but also to access anchors within these sections from different pages. When accessed, I wanted visitors to land at the top of the reference, with the reference showing up at the top of the page. I consulted forums, professors, and fellow students. The experience, though frustrating (I dug my heels in and would not settle for anything less than the functionality I was seeking) prompted me to explore more about JavaScript.

I had a general idea of the look and feel I wanted, but wasn’t sure how I was going to integrate watercolor paintings with watercolor pencil and ink drawings, and maintaining visual consistency. I learned to let the content inspire me. As a result, one of my favorite – and most popular illustrations among Girls Living Healthy fans – was the Addictive “Foods” illustration found on page 18 of this documentation.

Another challenge was editing content to insure core information. Often, due to the length of some of the more technical words alone made attaining clear, crisp design while maintaining needed information rough, at best. Still, I am happy with the flexibility of column layouts I was able to incorporate while keeping the look consistent. And, the challenge to attain less-is-more, enabled me to strengthen my writing as well.

CONCLUSION

My passion and focus for this thesis project has been to educate girls so they can develop healthy habits, appreciate them and stick to them; and to help women like myself, regain their vim, vigor and zest for life before, during and after motherhood. The Girls Living Healthy web site is a resource for current information about the best fresh organic “food” nutrition practices and as a community where girls can exchange ideas for healthier living. Girls Living Healthy is just the beginning of a long-lasting and fruitful enterprise enabling girls and women to help each other live ever-healthier and more rewarding lives.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is a list of books that I have read or am reading or hope to read with regard to gathering information for my thesis. This list is in alphabetical order by subject. Those books that I find extremely enlightening or helpful are most often mentioned in my chronological blog. I will have a list of recommended reading and resources once my thesis project is complete.

PRINT RESOURCES

FOOD-BODY CHEMISTRY


KIDS NUTRITION


LIFESTYLE RESOURCES

MISCELLANEOUS BOOKS/REFERENCES


ORGANICS


VEGETARIAN RESOURCES


VEGAN RESOURCES


RAW “FOOD” RESOURCES


INTERNET RESOURCES

AGRICULTURE/ORGANICS


SIMILAR CONCEPTS


MISCELLANEOUS

http://validator.w3.org/#validate_by_input May-June 2012. W3C Markup Validator
CSS Validator (http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/#validate_by_input)
http://netrenderer.com/index.php May-June 2012. – resourced to check IE compatibility via individual screenshots based on the site page’s URL
http://browsershots.org/ May-June 2012. – resourced to check a variety of browsers and their many versions
APPENDIX

Coding examples, data collection, and surveys have been referenced throughout this documentation. A copy of my original proposal presented for approval in November 2011 follows.
Thesis Proposal by Gabrielle Hewson
ABSTRACT

My Master of Fine Arts Thesis Project is an educational web site portal for girls and women, ages 8 and up, to inform and teach them how to make healthier nutrition and, subsequently, lifestyle choices. It combines my new passion for healthier living with my skills in web design and illustration. My overall goal is to facilitate sharing and to help girls and women find balance in their lives. What makes this project unique is that it is based on and reflects my personal journey to wellness. I will inform and teach not only through research but also through my first-hand experience as a daughter, a mother of a daughter, and a woman.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Obesity is consistently on the rise. Though we are living longer, obesity statistics around the world indicate we are not necessarily living healthier. Women, in particular, face a variety of chemical, physical, and emotional changes that not only impact the way we eat, but also the way we live. For me, the way I eat and the way I live have gone hand-in-hand and reflected my sense of self, my confidence, and my sense of humor. The more horizontally challenged (fat) I got, the smaller my world became and the more my emotional resiliency began to get brittle. I didn’t have my own gravitational pull, but I did literally feel the weight of haunting emotional baggage and the impact of my unconscious eating. I, like many of us, felt myself mentally spiraling downward to the dark world of self-loathing and disgust, and a fear of my own reflection. What had happened to me? What was happening to all of us?!?

Obesity is killing us. It is, in many ways, a root cause for other diseases that hamper or strike so many people down. Obesity is the result of unconscious eating, the absence of daily movement and the byproduct of fast food. And when I say “fast food”, I not only mean drive-up-order-and-eat-in-5-minutes food, I mean food that is processed for added shelf-life and
commercially mass-produced for consumption, AND any food that we eat on-the-fly. Mealtime in most cultures is a time to gather one’s family and friends; to start, or catch up on, the day; and to share in the preparation as well as the eating. In most cultures outside the U.S., mealtime is scheduled and honored as an important nutritional and social part of the day – from shopping to preparation to serving and eating. Mealtime should be a three-times-daily event that allows one to relax, refuel and rejuvenate. Mealtimes in other cultures can last up to two hours a sitting, long enough to help digestion on its way without our bodies having to fight with society’s reverence for the mythical productivity of multitasking. We’re multitasking and convenience-fooding ourselves into disease and really large coffins!

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

As I began my personal research I found several web sites but most were superficial at best and never got to the core of food, nutrition or lifestyle. The majority of sites were written simply for monetization with short ambiguous sentences that never got to a point or a viable piece of information. Many food, diet, nutrition and health sites are also geared at selling products or services versus providing substantive, applicable information – to the point that it all simply becomes cliché. So why are we all getting muffin tops? Could it be that part of the problem is the fact that when we are ready to help ourselves and we’re looking for solid answers, we’re getting pitched “buy-me” concepts and sold a bunch of rehashed information culled from the latest fad-du-jour and sensationalized to scare us into submission? I want to change the way information is provided and raise its quality standard.

Following are some examples of government-sponsored, commercial, and personal sites currently on the web:
http://life.familyeducation.com/
The Family Education Network, touts itself as "the best of the Internet's content, resources ". Presentation is text- and ad-laden, cluttered and, overall, superficial in content. One has to navigate through screen-obscuring product ads for commercially popular toys. Under Healthy, Nutrition & Dieting Advice for Moms, there are links to quick articles of 1-3 short sentences with stock photography presented in 8-10 click-through slides, followed by links to more of the same, advertising, and government-sponsored content and information bureaus. Ironically this site is "brought to you" by companies like Cici's Pizza!

http://www.prb.org/
The Population Reference Bureau focuses on health, world population, and the environment. The Bureau site presents what they call "core themes" that include: Children and Families; Population and the Environment; Global Health; Aging; and Gender. This site is clearly more focused on global proactivity for Third World countries, but contains some interesting data such as the results of poor nutrition throughout one's lifetime, however, poor nutrition here is lack of food, not gluttony.

http://girlshealth.gov/
Girls Health is owned and maintained by the Office of Women's Health in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. No less superficial than the other sites visited, it does not appear to be updated that frequently (even annually). For example, the Nutrition page was last updated September 22, 2009. The goal appears to be quick information and links placed to “demonstrate” that the government is concerned about our health and nutrition.

http://www.women-health-and-family-tips.com/
One of thousands of Site Build It monetization sites that follow special content formulas for making money off a site and maximizing search engines. Articles are written to include meta words, word counts are kept extremely short, and content is pat. This site, over uses stock footage (much like what most novices do with ClipArt) and talks at visitors “telling” them what to do, geared toward a specific product push or Google Ads. SBI sites are highly formulaic and cookie-cutter in format, look, and content, created by laymen with the core priority on making money on clicks, links, and ads. The majority of these sites offer more clutter and superficial information overload than useful, applicable content.
http://womenshealth.gov/
This site is a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health project, and another SBI-like site, both in format and the information it provides.

PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

When I go online, I want answers. I don’t want to weed through a bunch of simplistic and circular content, advertising, links-upon-links, or hit dead ends after being promised a big information payoff from the link, site or article title. Who really has time for any of that? Since everyone learns differently, a site needs to include written information, visuals, activities, and repeat content in new ways to stay engaging, interesting and entertaining. I, personally, have found that injecting a sense of humor into learning tends to lock in concepts and spawn both proactive thought and discussion. I got an A in Business Law because I remembered all the funny ways my teacher presented the information, relating to his work as a trial attorney and his moonlighting as a stand-up comic. I decided on the approach for my thesis project for all of the reasons and examples given in this proposal and to inspire others to truly inform, teach and empower others with more quality content and less flash and fluff.

My site will utilize watercolor-like Flash character illustrations and the application of textures in Photoshop to create backgrounds and abstract shapes in the “cartoon modern” style of the 1940s and 50s brought into popularity through United Productions of America (UPA) for the overall look of the site. For samples of this style, please see Figure B on page 6. My hope is that this will enable them to identify with my challenges and, hopefully, learn from my many ridiculous “what if” thoughts and unconscious mistakes made along the way.
The site flowchart will look something like this:

Illustration inspirations for the way the site will be illustrated come from a variety of wonderful cartoons created between 1942 to present. They include (Figure B below, from top to bottom): School House Rock’s “Sufferin’ ‘til Suffrage” 1979, Warner Bros. Chuck Jones classic “The Dover Boys at Pimento University” 1942, MGM’s Tex Avery classic “Swing Shift Cinderella” 1945, Disney’s “Phineas and Ferb” 2007 to present, and United Productions of America’s *Cartoon Modern* style “Gerald McBoing Boing” 1950.
DESIGN IDEATION

The idea for my thesis project started to bloom after I read Mireille Guilano’s book *French Women Don’t Get Fat* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). Reading about the time and care the French spend planning and creating each meal, with the finest and freshest ingredients, and how each meal is both an occasion and a work of art, reminded me of my grandmother. I started looking closer at the natural nutritive value of foods. My admiration and respect for French meal preparation and the importance of meal time as a social gathering, learned as a child, inspired me to explore and compare French cultural and nutritional lifestyles similar to those here in the U.S.: organic, vegetarian, vegan and raw.

From there, I started applying the basics of my research to my own habits by eating more consciously, retraining my palate, and making healthier food choices this past summer. As a result, I’ve shed over 26 solid lbs. of excess fat in just three months without working out regularly or denying myself gastronomic pleasure. As I began seeing and feeling results, I wondered how I could blend the best practices of both cultures to help girls and women make healthier lifestyle choices.

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

I conducted a survey of 50 girls and women, ages 16-55, to solicit their input re: a domain name for my proposed web site. With a response rate of over 80%, the domain name girlslivinghealthy.com was secured in July 2011. I have created a temporary splash page for this URL in preparation for my thesis project. Additionally, I started a blog called Une étape à la fois (One step at a time), where I began tracking my Project and collecting my Survey of Literature, as well as other data I hope to incorporate into the site.

The site will consist of one major section focused on nutrition, and a substantially smaller
sub-section focused on lifestyle, since better nutrition inevitably creates a healthier lifestyle. The Nutrition section will feature the best nutritional practices for: organic, vegetarian, vegan and raw/living food. This section will also speak to growing our own food organically, healthy meal preparation, and the importance of drinking water. This section will also include issues germane to girls and women such as how puberty, motherhood and menopause affect changes in our nutritional needs and body chemistry. The Lifestyle sub-section will focus on mealtime as a venue for improved social interaction, relaxation and quality family time. The site content will reflect my personal journey in a way that enables other girls and women to relate to the issues we have in common. The key points I address will be the very same challenges I have experienced and how I responded to them (good and bad). Supportive research will include books, professional journals and articles available in print and on the Internet, and, personal and professional interviews.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The thesis project web site will be illustrated with watercolor-like illustrations using Adobe Creative Suite 5/5.5. I’ve chosen the watercolor color scheme and feel to give the site the gentle, feminine, and inviting environment I want for my female demographic. The site will be built using HTML/HTML5, CSS/CSS3, and JQuery and Javascript, where applicable.

My initial implementation of this thesis was me-focused because I had to understand what I was doing and why, before I could relate to what everyone else was. I needed to fully assess how I felt physically, scrutinize my habits and evaluate my nutritional and lifestyle impulses. I realized that more often than not, I simply wasn’t thinking as much about food as I thought I was.
I started researching material online, looking for people who demonstrated realistic nutrition and lifestyle success. I went to the library and bookstores and started reading. I found information that I could relate back to my earlier healthier lifestyle and started reading through every aspect of specialists’ philosophies and findings regarding healthy nutrition and overall health (mental, emotional and physical). I studied how foods affect the body from head to toe. I studied the history, cultures and origins of foods. I studied different nutritional practices. I took all of this and started to pull together what I felt would logically work for me. And, I am still fine-tuning my nutrition and lifestyle, but I’ve found a good base of applicable information I believe will benefit fellow females in very positive ways.

DISSEMINATION

I have experience with successful Search Engine Optimization, having increased a local non-profit corporations search engine rankings by 300% and visitors by 600% within the first eight months of my employment with them – AND I didn’t do it through online advertising and pat meta words! I focused on quality content and active quality online participation. Meaning, I contributed writing to other blogs or sites, and updated the site constantly with quality content. Therefore, I will utilize my skills in this area to maximize search rankings and visits to my site. Creating a web site as a hub for information, and promoting that site, along with maintaining an active blog and participating as a presenter or information contributor at as many nutrition-based events as possible, is an ideal way to create a community resource that reaches around the world. By making my site content-rich, fun and educationally interactive, I will be able to help teach girls and women how to improve their nutrition and their lives.
PROMOTION

I would also like to submit my thesis project to several competitions including, but not limited to:

1. SIGGRAPH -ACM Student Research Competition (Deadline: February 2013)
   http://s2012.qltdclient.com/submitters/posters

2. Communication Arts Interactive Competition (Deadline: October 2012)
   http://www.commarts.com/competitions/interactive


4. UCDA Design Competition http://ucda.com/competition.lasso


6. Interactive Media Awards (Deadline: September 2012) Web Design
   http://www.interactivemediaawards.com/

7. HOW Interactive Design Awards (Deadline: September 2012)
   http://www.howdesign.com/design-competitions/interactive-design-awards/

8. SXSW Interactive Awards (Deadline: September 2012)
   http://sxsw.com/interactive/awards


TIMELINE

My timeline for this project began this summer when I committed to a healthier nutritional journey and subsequently began improving my lifestyle. Over the next two quarters at RIT, I will continue to my thesis research including reading, meeting with nutrition specialists both at RIT and in the Rochester community, and corresponding with other worldwide nutrition specialists via email. I have also continued to build assets for the site. My work will include: fleshing out the storyboard/flowchart and coding. This first quarter of my second year, has been focused on fine-tuning my thesis concept during Thesis Planning with Professor Marla Schweppe. This will enable me to hit the ground running Winter quarter. And, I worked as often as possible with Professor Luvon Sheppard to continue experimenting with watercolor techniques along this vein as well. My Thesis Committee was confirmed this quarter to be: RIT Associate Professor, Chris Jackson, serving as Chair; RIT Professor Marla Schweppe; and, Assistant Vice President, Donna Rubin from RIT Student Wellness Program. Full committee meetings beginning Winter Quarter will be scheduled as follows: Wednesday of weeks 5 and 10; and, in Spring Quarter 2012 weeks 3, 6, and 9. Individual meetings with Chris and Marla will be weekly, as I will see them both around classes Winter Quarter. I will schedule with them regarding specific concerns that might take more than a few minutes, according to their availability. Meetings with Donna will be scheduled ahead of time and calendared the first week of Winter Quarter.
During Winter Quarter 2011-2012 my timeline will be:

December  Finalize content for site  12-16 hours minimum per week
January   Begin design and flowchart  12-16 hours minimum per week
February  Finalize design of site and flowchart  12-16 hours minimum per week

During Spring Quarter 2012 my timeline will be:

March   Create and build assets  18-24 hours minimum per week
April   Code educational interactivity  18-24 hours minimum per week
May   Code site, launch, present/defend/show  18-24 hours minimum per week

EVALUATION PLAN

I have a base test group of friends, students, staff, and colleagues that I will have test the web site prototype. I will create a rubric/checklist for them to fill out based on their user experience. I will then implement any necessary changes before final live launch.

Once launched, I will continue to solicit feedback on the user experience via the site itself through a brief (3-6 questions) post user experience email-able survey.

CONCLUSION

My passion with my thesis project is to educate girls so they can develop healthy habits, appreciate them and stick to them; and to help women like myself, regain their vim, vigor and zest for life before, during and after motherhood. I will do so by providing my web site as a resource for current information about the best fresh organic food nutrition practices and as a community where they can exchange ideas for healthier living. It is my goal to graduate in May 2012, however, Girls Living Healthy is just the beginning of a long-lasting and fruitful enterprise enabling girls and women to help each other live ever-healthier and more rewarding lives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
The following is a list of books that I have read or am reading or hope to read with regard to gathering information for my thesis. This list is in alphabetical order by subject. Those books that I find extremely enlightening or helpful are most often mentioned in my chronological blog. I will have a list of recommended reading and resources once my thesis project is complete.

Print Resources

Food-Body Chemistry

Kids Nutrition

Lifestyle Resources
Miscellaneous Books/References

Organics

Vegetarian Resources

Vegan Resources

Raw Food Resources
Internet Resources

**Agriculture/Organics**


**Similar Concepts**


Exhibition is open till September 18th, 2011.


A collection of resources for a variety of diets, free, includes LOTS of commercials.

Screenshots borrowed for Survey of Literature on pages 4 and 5:

[http://teenshealth.org/kid/](http://teenshealth.org/kid/)
[http://www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org)

Links to Illustration Inspirations on page 8:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dPF0SGh_PQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dPF0SGh_PQ)

“Sufferin’ ’til Suffrage” 10/28/11

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpOPyjmB8SI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpOPyjmB8SI)

“The Dover Boys at Pimento University” 10/28/11


“Swing Shift Cinderella” 10/28/11

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcy1LiC5VI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcy1LiC5VI)

“Phineas and Ferb” 10/28/11

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNsyQDmEopw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNsyQDmEopw)

“Gerald McBoing Boing” 10/28/11