

Camille's Story – She Let Me Get Away Too Soon

I didn't know what, exactly, to expect when I first went to Suppers. But two friends suggested on separate occasions that I try this program. Both had heard me lament my inability to break my addiction to sugar. I had never heard of Suppers before. Imagine, a support group made up of people who want to help others rid their lives of sugar!

It became clear as soon as I got to the meeting that I would not just be subtracting sugar from my life, I'd be adding cooking skills. The day I arrived, I was well beyond the entry level "if you can make a pot of coffee, you can make a pot of soup". I love food and enjoy food preparation, but somehow I got away from my mother too soon and never learned to cook in the natural course of things. I've never felt confident in the kitchen. In the past when I've hosted dinner parties, I haven't been able to relax and enjoy myself because I was worried either about the food or the timing. Eventually, I began ordering in at least part of the meal because I didn't trust my ability to execute an entire menu successfully. The things I have enjoyed most about the Suppers Program are learning about ingredients, natural ways of enhancing flavor, and food preparation. The experience of arriving early to cook, reading recipes and asking for clarification, and enjoying a wide variety of ingredients has helped me feel more comfortable in the kitchen. Also essential was having a "therapeutic friend", like a cooking mentor, whom I could contact between meetings with my questions. During the past few months, my friends and family have been asking why the food tastes so good. My recent experience of hosting a dinner party drove home for me how much of an impact Suppers has had on my life.

A few weeks ago, I decided that I had enough Suppers dishes in my repertoire to try to make a meal for a group of special friends. I made the first course -- carrot ginger soup -- the day before. A few hours before my guests arrived, I oven roasted Brussels sprouts and a medley of root vegetables, made a pot of brown and wild rice cooked with kombu, and prepared the ingredients for shrimp with sun-dried tomatoes. My friends loved the soup and were happy to wait ten minutes while I stir-fried the shrimp. I loved putting all these brightly colored foods in beautiful bowls and watching my friends eat with great enthusiasm. Moreover, because the food was so easy to prepare, I was able to relax and enjoy my own party. Everyone ate second helpings of everything, and one friend even asked to take home leftovers. They wanted to know what was in each dish, and what kind of "cuisine" it was. I hadn't really thought of this as cuisine; it was just Suppers food, but I was happy to seize this opportunity to explain the program to them.

To be fully self-disclosed, I need to add that I did buy some hors d'oeuvres and I did make an olive oil cake. I have made strides dealing with my sugar addiction, but perfection isn't my goal, that sounds a little compulsive to me. The addition of generous portions of roasted vegetables and naturally sweet items like yams is helping with the transition to a healthier way of being. I am greatly relieved by this whole notion of nutritional harm reduction. With no pressure to be perfect, I can speak honestly at meetings about my steps and missteps while I seek a way of eating that's satisfying without sugar, or at least with a lot less.

I came to Suppers to learn more about eating healthfully and to find ways of breaking my addiction to sugar. What I hadn't anticipated was learning so many new skills and habits that would make getting off sugar more doable. Sugar can be a real force to reckon with; it certainly is in my life. The benefit of the Suppers program to me has not just been the support I needed to reduce my dependency on sugar for mood manipulation. The benefit has been teaching me that good, whole, healthy food can be delicious, easy to prepare, aesthetically appealing, and an expression of love and creativity.

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It's just not that hard, especially when there are people dedicated to mentoring aspiring cooks who got away from mom just a tad too soon.