

Dr. Bonnie's Story - Camaraderie

The greatest benefit and joy for me from the Suppers program has been the camaraderie of women working together to accomplish something for the benefit of all. Of course, men are welcome too, but there is a natural, feminine, cooperative energy reflected in the spirit and structure of the program. Everyone is encouraged to take a turn leading the opening blessing, or reading one of the concepts and boundaries before the shared meal. We are also encouraged to become facilitators, to learn the program and to start new Suppers groups in other locations, passing Suppers on in an organically growing movement. We are all valued for our roles as leaders and teachers.

This sort of non-hierarchical cooperative effort seems to come naturally to women, although it has been inhibited since the isolated nuclear family became the societal norm. In earlier times, there were multigenerational extended families, grandmothers passing their culinary skills and traditions down to mothers and daughters. Now each woman struggles to feed her family, alone in her kitchen full of the latest modern conveniences, but no better the cook for all of the equipment. And many of us are exhausted after working all day at a paying job and – unsupported – we take the family out for fast food.

I am a medical doctor, trained many years ago when there were not so many women in medical school, in fact only 20% of my graduating class were women. Observing over the past three decades the kinds of stress that compromise our immune systems and rob us of our vitality, I've come to the conclusion that cooperative endeavors are very important for women's health. There are good reasons for this in terms of human evolution. Female bonding was particularly important in our early evolution, to ensure the survival of the young. Even though modern day babies are likely to grow to adulthood, the wiring that makes women seek community and camaraderie has not gone away. We are still social creatures; we are designed to feel happiness and comfort in each other's company. Overwork, social isolation, and stress often express as depression, an indication that we are low in serotonin which is not – as some would have you believe -- a Prozac deficiency. Helping and talking to each other are the antidote for such stress and isolation. They raise our serotonin levels and help us experience a sense of well-being that has been called a "Helper's High". Embracing our community and eating real food are much better ways to correct our unhappy mood chemistry. The alternative – stuffing ourselves with the carbohydrates we crave – is a less healthy, biochemical way of raising serotonin, yet so many of us reach for just that solution.

I was originally invited to Suppers for what I can contribute to the program design and literature. But I stayed because the nourishment of helping and working together is as important to my health as the wonderfully nourishing food we are learning to prepare, to make us healthy in body, mind and spirit.