

## Jamie's Story – Rebuilding the Foundation

The “click” for me happened the moment I heard the words “nutritional harm reduction”. I have had eating disorders since I can remember, but it was when I was attending a Suppers workshop for parents of homeschoolers who were concerned about their children that I had my revelation: I don't have to do this all at once.

What a relief to find an alternative to all-or-nothing-at-all thinking. Here was a spokesperson from the Suppers program giving me credit for small, incremental changes I could make for my children and my self, changes I could feel good about even though I wasn't getting any of this perfect. I went for my children, but change had to start with me. I've been in a bad relationship with food for 24 years. With a variety of therapists, things were “dealt with”; only it wasn't a comprehensive package for long term recovery. One therapist had nutritional experience, but she only preached about the food pyramid.

My story is a story of patience, patience with my self, patience with change, patience allowing the people who wanted to help me have their effect. After years and years of, shall we say, “negative food experiences”, how quickly did I think I was going to get better? Participating in Suppers was in truth not a pleasant experience. I was triggered right and left, but I kept coming back, in part because the group was depending on me.

I like being honest. Here is the truth. I have an eating disorder that landed me in in-patient care for 12 weeks about 17 years ago. The choice was hospitalization or bowel resection for all the damage I had done from laxative abuse. To give you an idea of how rooted I was in bad eating, let me share that my first word was “Mama”, my second word was “Papa”, and my third was “French fries”.

So many people tried to help me. At one point I was participating in research at Rutgers and I finally told the researcher, “Stop inventing eating disorders; I don't want anymore.” I don't know if he understood the power of the obsession and how frightening one's own anger can be.

Since that time, I have had two pregnancies. With the second I experienced such a deep post partum depression that I had to be treated with SSRI antidepressants. That was 11 years ago. For a long while I have wanted to not be dependent on these drugs. Fortunately, when I told my psychiatrist that I wanted to consult with a nutritionist and use the support of the Suppers program to reduce my meds, she was in whole-hearted agreement. She's European and knows how horrible the standard American diet is.

With her blessing, I started working the Suppers program and following the advice of a nutritionist who volunteers his time for the program. My team members. To make a long story short, I am now free of antidepressants. I am having normal emotions, including perfectly average anger, and instead of running back to meds when I have anger I can stare down the uncomfortable emotion and remind myself, “This feeling is normal in the circumstances.” We did not have oodles of money to spend on supplements to replenish my brain with the building blocks of good mood chemistry. So whatever I got had to be targeted. I had heard that all the people in my group who reduced depression naturally had required fish oils to restore their starving brains. I took them and was not disappointed.

What were the benefits of all these lifestyle changes? I did not feel slow all the time. My energy came back. I got a part time job. I became a more consistent parent. I became productive again for the first time in years. I started doing my husband's laundry again for the first time in three years. You have no idea how good it was for my marriage to be doing his laundry again! Migraines resolved. I learned to make a pot of stew and fix my eyes so

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that it looked like breakfast. I stopped snoring and don't require the sleep apnea machine anymore.

Suppers was one of the cornerstones for my new foundation that helped me accomplish these goals. Suppers is proactive. It supports you while you try changing behaviors. I'm not a cook, and what Suppers did for me was to put me in contact with food that used to intimidate me. It gave me a safe place to experiment. It brought me closer to people who could help me put my issues into perspective. It expanded my awareness into areas from which there is no going back; enlightened once is enlightened for good. Though there have been rough times, I can't tolerate going too far backwards now that I know what it feels like to feel good.

My husband and I were a team too. Diabetes runs in his family, and he can't tolerate milk. Right there, the Suppers principles were complementing what we needed to do at home, so people on my teams that weren't meeting each other were cooperating in my process.

I will have my ups and downs. But there is something that can never be taken away from me. I know what it feels like to feel so good in my body that eating my old favorites is not even an option. It's like there's an editing mechanism in my brain that deletes that cookie some place between my eyes and my awareness. I continue to keep the changes I made and look for ways to bring in new ones. Bringing in those new things does not meet with resistance the way it did in the beginning.

The changes we have made in our family's diet have been slow and incremental, and they have met with opposition. But as my foundation is remodeled, my daughters' foundations are being shored up by what I learn at Suppers. What I want for my daughters is the same as what I want for myself: that they will feel truly comfortable in their physical bodies.