

Jen's Story – The Surest Form of Poison

As a newcomer to Suppers, I busied myself chopping vegetables, filling water glasses, taking notes, and cleaning up. I did not want to open my mouth except for food because I knew I'd say the wrong thing. I live in a near constant state of expecting to be judged.

The topic that day was "how we got into this mess to begin with." It was a general meeting. Some of the people were diabetic; others wanted to explore if their depression and mood swings related to their lousy diets. Just like me, there were people sharing anger, frustration, fear, and especially self-loathing for the role they played in acquiring a largely preventable disease.

Before I knew it, out of my mouth popped the words, "I think sugar is poison, at least it is for me."

Right away another newcomer, a nurse, clucked her tongue. Shaking her head, she said "Sugar isn't poison. There's no such thing as a bad food."

I shrank into my seat. I could barely hear what happened after that, but the next thing I knew the facilitator was asking the nurse to make that into an "I" statement, "Just like Jen did when she said, 'I think sugar is poison, at least it is for me.'"

The nurse hesitated for a moment. I don't think she was accustomed to being corrected. Then she said, "I can take or leave sweets, my biggest problem is with caffeine." I really admired how fast she got on board.

You better believe that over the next few months, every time I opened my mouth, I spoke "I" language. That nurse did too. With time we came to understand that we had an obligation to our Suppers group to preserve the safe settings of the table. And the most important way to do that was to actively practice non-judgment and honor each member's competence to find their personal pathway.

Then one day a newcomer came and we went around the table practicing "I" statements. When it came around to me, I said, "I think the surest form of poison is judgment." The nurse, who has since become a pretty good friend of mine, said "I'm with Jen, now that I'm off caffeine."

At Suppers it just doesn't matter what experts say. They can argue with each all they want on the other side of these four walls. In here, we all know from vast personal experience that healing happens when it's safe to experiment and share our observations with no fear of being judged.