

Loricita's Story – "I" is for Isolation

How many years does it take to do what you know you're supposed to do?

I am a veteran of Suppers. And I'm likely to remain actively involved. My tendency to self-isolate is so thoroughly ingrained that I need to work a program to do what I know I'm supposed to do. If I am not actively, consciously participating in my own decision making, I fall back into old habits -- automatic choices -- that are driven by my internal teenager.

My troubled relationship with food started at an early age. I grew up with no same-age siblings or cousins, and my parents came from the "children are to be seen and not heard" school of parenting. Some how I translated this into "I don't need anybody." I was a voracious reader. I played alone and ate alone. I remained this way until I entered graduate school, where I was embraced by a group of Latina women. Slowly, as they plied me with humor, tolerance and delicious Mexican and Peruvian cuisine, I let down my barriers. My roommate told me, "Loricita, you spend too much time alone – it is not good." Fortunately, she helped me come out of the shell I was in and taught me to nourish myself with good food eaten slowly, surrounded with friends and plenty of conversation. I wish I could say I learned my lesson, but no. When I left graduate school I entered a cut throat career in a large corporation where I was called an "individual contributor". I should have seen the danger coming!

I resumed my self-isolating ways and continued for the next 18 years, except for two years in France. Once again I was surrounded by people who eat well, eat slowly, and talk. I loved it again. But did I learn my lesson? No again! As soon as I returned to the States, I reverted back to my old, dysfunctional eating habits and my "lone wolf" behavior. When I was introduced to Suppers by a friend, I was struggling with frequent colds and flu, acne, sleeping problems and arthritis pain. I cringed whenever I thought about meals because I saw food preparation as a chore that took me away from the activities I used to soothe myself – reading, watching movies and riding my bike. At my first Suppers meeting, I was flooded with memories of warm conversations at table in grad school and in France. Now, I am an intelligent, educated woman. I enjoy healthy food, and I respond favorably to community. My life offered me several opportunities to change unhealthy, entrenched habits, and still I reverted back to isolation. Without my friends to create a table for me, I reverted back to behaviors that made me feel lonely and ill. Does that make me some kind of addict? In my mind, this is why Suppers has to be a program, not a class or a club. The healing power is in the community. I need to take my work in this community seriously because I can't fix this by myself. The consequences to me are many: depression, anxiety, weight gain, self-isolation, ineffective parenting and shame.

Each week at meetings, I listen to stories and I tell my own. I have a new appreciation for the saying that "there's strength in numbers". I feel accepted, never judged or evaluated. I feel comfortably challenged and supported simultaneously. I have found a place where I can admit that I ate alone and hated it, that I ate lots of sweets and suspected that it was making me crazy and ill, that I lied to myself about how much I ate and often ate chocolates in secret, a slave to my cravings. I have demons that need to be extinguished by the light of day, but that will only happen in a nurturing community where I feel safe to speak.

I believe that we are designed to experience a sense of belonging. I know I am. I have accepted that isolation leads to illness. We all owe it to ourselves to spend time with one another, be kind to one another, listen to one another, and feed one another so that we are all nurtured and made whole.