

Luna's Story – The New Cook

Our family story has typically generated sentences like, "Luna can't cook;" "Luna won't cook;" "Luna doesn't cook;" and "Luna's a lousy cook." Responsibility for this reputation was as much mine as anyone's.

It's no small task making a living – perhaps I should say making ends meet – as an artist. I'm proud of my work. But success in one area of my life is not protective of other areas. And there came a day when I finally accepted a friend's invitation to Suppers because I knew how I eat is a problem.

I arrived on a chaotic day in the kitchen, people scurrying around and the facilitator calling out directions to a roomful of women of mixed cooking skills. I made it clear to all who were listening that I don't cook. I don't know what reaction I was expecting, but I didn't get any. The facilitator told me to wash my hands and then sat me down at the counter to shred lettuce (I did not know how to operate the lemon juicer), saying we'd do introductions when we started the meal. As I shredded I thought to myself, I'm not just scared of the vegetables, I'm scared even of the *words* "kale" and "arugula", as if they harbored some dark secret known only to rabid vegetarians. When I was done, somebody wanted me to finely mince the carrots and I blanched because even with my expensive poet's vocabulary, I didn't know what "mince" meant. "Luna's a new cook," the facilitator intervened from the other end of the room.

"New cook. Me?"

It felt like we were starting a new chapter in the story of my life. It was like the mother I never had had arrived wearing a purple apron and a warm smile. Even though writing is my trade, I had not personally experienced a fundamental shift in my identity over a few small words. "I'm Luna, pleased to meet you. I'm a new cook." I practiced my new lines.

How kind. How accepting. How free of the sadness of my mother's kitchen and the unhappiness of the kitchen of my former marriage. This was completely different from my usual. "New" felt shiny and filled with possibility, as in new shoes for the first day of school. When I went home, I wrote "Luna is a new cook" on sticky notes and stuck them up all around. In the pages of my journal, on the bathroom mirror, on the door of my refrigerator, everywhere I looked there were 2 x 2 reminders that I am a new cook. Hurray for me!

My son has suffered the worst of my mood swings and what I now know to be food-driven personality changes. As my moods became more normal, he asked if I was on mood stabilizers, meaning a psychotropic prescription medication. "Yes", I said. "I'm on mood stabilizers, but not from prescriptions." He wondered what else is there. "Food" I announced. He was incredulous. He was amazed. But he, the quintessential skeptic of anything new agey that his mother embraces, could not deny the changes. So slowly he started to eat more fiber and cut down on sugar and gluten too. His moods also became more stable. It was a slow process, but one day we realized that we were not triggering each other's outbursts. We were having calmer conversations. He told his father how I used fresh herbs and cooked from scratch. "I was married to her for 20 years and we ate frozen food from a box. *Now* she learns how to cook!"

At age 62, I have a new relationship with cooking, made possible by the lady wearing the purple apron and the warm smile.