

## Celia and May's Story – My Pleasure

I was sitting in the sushi bar with my Suppers friend Celia, who had set herself a goal of slowing down her eating. In her mind, racing through meals tied in to her compulsiveness, something she hated about herself. She had never succeeded at slowing down alone and decided to try a Suppers experiment with a friend to see if adding a social component made it easier.

Celia sends me a two-sentence e-mail every day, like, "Couldn't slow down eating alone. Was OK with Lori, bad with Sam." Sometimes we eat out so she can practice her skills. That day at lunch she'd plowed through three whole California roles by the time I dipped my fifth piece in soy sauce.

Celia said she was jealous of how much pleasure I got out of taking visual inventory of a meal before I started eating. "I know I'm neurotic," she said; "But knowing it doesn't fix anything." Then she listed things that drive her crazy about food. Basically everything. "You see those last two pieces of sushi on your plate?" (I was getting full). "It bothers me they're still sitting there, why don't you eat them."

She said she had two kinds of eating days, "good girl days and bad girl days". "I either stick with the program and count every point or I enjoy myself." Those are the bad girl days.

I asked Celia, "You mean there was never a time when you ate pleurably *and* ate like a good girl?"

"Well, I guess there were a few times."

Celia was caught up in black or white thinking that gave her only two modes of operation, deprivation or pleasure. Somehow she'd gotten it into her head that pleasure equates with being bad. When she forced herself to remember times she ate healthily *and* experienced pleasure, they were all in social settings. It was good to know this. She discovered that she enjoyed feeling lady like and did not enjoy shoveling food into her mouth. She discovered that she admired people who found food visually appealing and wanted to imitate them, even though she didn't get it. She tossed around ideas about how she could blame her relationship with her husband for her eating speed; he was, after all, the source of all her other problems.

I've served in the role of therapeutic friend to many people at Suppers, sometimes as a cooking mentor and sometimes as just a pair of willing ears. In the end, Celia needed that service more than any other. She set a new goal for herself: experiencing pleasure in eating. And not the intellectual kind of pleasure that's more about approval. No, the visceral kind of pleasure that doesn't really have a definition but you know it when you feel it.

Last time we ate out, she put her chopsticks down twice, waiting for me to catch up. I will never understand what it feels like to be compulsive. But I know what it feels like to be a therapeutic friend.

It feels like pleasure.