

Ingrid's Story – This is Not About Will Power

If the bariatric surgery office hadn't made me wait for a couple months, I would have had part of my body removed. I was that desperate. I know people who think the surgery is heaven sent, and for them I'm happy. Personally, I think having part of one's body removed because you can't stop eating is nutty. But I was just about to do it because I was entirely enslaved to food and I saw no other way out. Desperation is not a strong enough word to describe my situation. I'm so grateful a nutritionist rescued me from my prison of terror and steered me down another route.

This is not about will power. Whatever my compulsion is, it operates on a plane beyond the reach of human will power. Many a time I would wake up to find a mess of wrappers or dirty dishes in the kitchen, with only the vaguest recollection of going down there in the middle of the night in a virtual trance, prowling around in the frig. Then there were more conscious behaviors too, like when I'd order fast food, making noises about buying for the whole family when in fact it was all for me. I would go home and eat until I was numb and hate myself after. I'd even pass up social invitations I might have enjoyed, fearing my friends would see me at my worst if I couldn't control my eating at the buffet table.

I related these embarrassing experiences at a meeting with people I'd never met before. I was surprised to hear myself revealing embarrassing secrets to complete strangers. But as I continued to observe what was coming out of my mouth, I realized I had no telltale anxiety, no fidgeting, I was at ease. There is something about the culture of Suppers that makes it possible to walk into a meeting and start speaking my truth. "I never met you before, but I feel safe already." That sentence actually came out of the mouth belonging to me, Ingrid, the closet everything.

So many things clicked at once. After years of spending fortunes on diet programs that made me feel ashamed, this free alternative was making me feel peaceful and confident. I was going to be doing my own experiments, not squishing myself into somebody else's protocol. My eating decisions would be about what I need, not what they're selling. In a moment, I got it that what I needed was real food, not pre-packaged, nutritionally calculated, scientific food-like matter. Food.

Within the first few meetings, it was plain that the missing link for me was accepting that the foods I binged on were the ones I was addicted to. I would have to do experiments to determine which ones I could enjoy in moderation and which ones I'd have to avoid totally, at least for a while, because they triggered binge eating. And the antidote was not lectures, weigh ins, or talking about my relationship with food. The antidote was cooking together, eating together, talking together, emphasis on "together". For me this is as much about the people as it is about the food. I arrive at a meeting and without fail, the second I walk in the door I feel the warmth of family Thanksgiving.

I've been assured that as my body does its housekeeping, my mood and emotions will become brighter and brighter. In a few short weeks I feel the difference already. I leaned over to the woman next to me, "So am I feeling more emotionally at ease because the food is healing me or because I found a community of non-judgmental friends?" "Who cares?" she said. "As long as it works."

Yeah, who cares. There's something very complete and satisfying about preparing a meal with a bunch of people and sitting down to eat it. Who cares if I'm responding to protein, carbohydrates and fat or support, acceptance, and love. When somebody takes the time to buy my food, teach me how to prepare it, and light a candle for my evening meal, I start feeling fed long before the first spoonful of soup goes down.