

## Mary's Newcomer Story – They Raised Me To Have Faith

I didn't get off to a very good start. It's hard to talk about my family of origin without feeling disloyal. But since at Suppers we're supposed to be making good matches between our problems and our solutions, I think I have to give a name to my childhood experience.

It was an alcoholic home. My parents were people of faith and raised me to love God, but we lived on canned vegetables, meat, potatoes, cigarettes, coffee, and alcohol. I thought this is what all families are like. If there was ever fresh fruit in the house I don't remember it. Of course, I had no idea which of my problems related to the family relationships or the food or what have you. Alcoholic household was my norm.

So in college I smoked and drank. I ate food I only now realize was bad for me. Fortunately, I was nagged by a desire not to be like my parents. So first went the cigarettes, then the alcohol. But I never ate well. Some how thirty years slipped by and my health nose dived in a way that really got my attention. My grueling work schedule and poor diet caught up with me in my late forties. I think it would be safe so say I wore myself out working all hours and eating most of my meals away from home. The problems included long standing constipation, brain fog, memory loss, sense of feeling overwhelmed and a laundry list of physical complaints. I felt ninety years old and I wasn't even fifty yet! My doctors called it fibromyalgia.

Earlier this year -- just before I came to Suppers -- I couldn't function at all. I was in and out of hospitals, spinning among doctors, was it swine flu? Lyme's Disease? Even the infectious disease specialists never found anything conclusive after spinal taps. So it was deemed viral. I lost fifteen pounds in the hospital. One good thing that happened was I got a good talking to from the staff nutritionist. She said I had to make every calorie count, only nourishing real food was allowed.

But I had never eaten what she said was healthy. I never cooked, didn't recognize the vegetables, didn't know their names. I hated vegetables. When a friend told me about Suppers I soon realized that this program would save my life. It didn't matter that I was intimidated by food and cooking. Good nutrition had become a life and death matter for me. But how was I going to make peace with vegetables?

The logical miracles started happening the first day I arrived. The food was delicious! I ate leaves whose names I did not know and enjoyed them. I started having bowel movements every day or two, which if you have lived with the misery of constipation your whole life is a small miracle.

I volunteered in a community garden to learn even more. Imagine me, Mary, harvesting chard and preparing it deliciously.

It's been only a few months. My memory is not what it should be. I still have a filing system and contrivances to compensate for my poor memory. As my strength returns, I feel the pull to work ridiculous hours and still care for my aging mother (who still lives on coffee and cigarettes) so I have set my goals for Suppers with self-care at the top of my list: I will work less. I will eat as I'm learning at Suppers. I will take care of my mother. I will learn from my lessons and proceed with a clean heart. And above all, I will be grateful to my parents who, for all their faults, raised me to have faith in God in Heaven, who wants this healthier life for me.