

Shelley's Story - One Piece of Fruit

"I will not journal."

"I will not eat breakfast."

"I will not give up meals of pasta and bread."

Shelley's list of "will nots" was endless. I got the job of being her therapeutic friend -- although we didn't have a name for it yet -- to help her change the way she ate so she could lose weight and "feel her loving," her words. In Shelley's mind, her frequent inability to feel loving feelings was all wrapped up in her food issues, but she wasn't willing to change a thing. And whenever she felt pressed, she resisted or lied her way out. Every suggestion I made was categorically dismissed; I felt more like her therapeutic enemy.

But she kept coming back.

Like many of the first generation to try out Suppers, Shelley made a contribution that was so significant it was incorporated into the program design. Shelley taught us that the program had to include the reality that people resist, lie and argue and that these are just part of some people's change process. Resisting change gives you an opportunity to feel how awful staying the same is. Lying helps you save face, buy time, and feel in control if somebody else is trying to control you. And trying to argue with people who don't take the bait, frees you to look in the mirror.

I found assignments for Shelley to try and told her the program would still work even if she lied to me (pure speculation on my part at that point). She was not willing to do anything about eating, but she loved clothes shopping. So we gave her the assignment of buying clothing that fit. Some of her self-loathing came from the discomfort of stuffing herself into clothes that restricted her movement and made her uncomfortable. This was a breakthrough because it gave her her first experience at cooperating.

Eventually, we talked about food journaling. Whatever she was doing with food experiments, I don't know which reports were true and which were false. But something important was happening. She was responding to acceptance. We tried creatively working on lying, and she came up with a few real doozies that had us all collapsing with laughter. Our acceptance of her with her resistance to change turned out to be an important part of her change process. One day she said, "I'm ready to eat one piece of fruit. Per week."

"I'll take it!" It was the first shift in eating she was willing to take, and this time I believed she meant it. For the next couple weeks we heard lots of complaints about that one piece of fruit. Yup, that's our Shelley.

Fast forward a couple years: I opened the frig at Shelley's and there were *stacks* of boxes of cherry tomatoes and blueberries. It took a long time to turn her taste buds around, but she eventually did it. Today, Shelley feasts with her eyes and enjoys the whole esthetic of her meals. Color has become very important. She floats around in a five-pound range about 20 pounds less than where she started. She exercises every single day. Occasionally, she binges around social occasions, but she gets right back on her program the following day.

The Suppers Programs owe Shelley a debt of gratitude for teaching us the healing value of acceptance. The program would never have been gentle enough without it. It is Shelley we have to thank for leading us to the fundamental program principle of actively practicing non-judgment.