

Zita's Story – My Hungarian Grandma

When I was a little girl in Hungary my grandmother used to preserve all sorts of veggies from her garden. We ate these often, mainly with meat dishes of which we had a lot, especially during winter. At that time fresh (which meant not processed, but not really fresh because it was imported) vegetables were not available in Hungary during the winter months and I was told to eat our veggies because they had lots of Vitamin C. My dad believed if we ate Vitamin C-rich food we would not have to see the doctor during winter. (Thinking back at my early years I was pretty healthy.) I did not need much persuasion; I have always loved the sour taste. Our family's favorites were pickled cucumbers, green tomatoes, peppers and cabbage, with sauerkraut the number one favorite during winter and pickled cucumbers the favorite during summer. Starting from May we made pickled cucumbers almost every week. As soon as one jar was gone the next was already out in the sun waiting to be "done". I learnt everything from my grandma; it was not a big deal for us, rather a way of life.

Now in America three decades later, I signed up for a fermentation course at a health food store. I did not know exactly what it was about (we never used the technical word "fermentation" while I lived in Hungary; we just pickled our vegetables) but it seemed interesting and healthy and I wanted to learn about it. The Master Fermenter, a farmer himself, gave a long introduction to the health benefits of fermented foods. I became very excited to actually learn all about it as it was a hands-on class. He also shared stories from his childhood when he learnt to ferment from his Slovakian grandmother. As Hungary and Slovakia are neighboring countries, I found it interesting and thought maybe I had heard about it. I kept on listening. Only about 20 to 30 minutes into his presentation I started to realize it all sounded very familiar. When he switched from "Why lactobacilli is healthy" into the "how to actually ferment" I had an AHA moment. I had a strange feeling this was nothing new: first, disappointment. That's it? So simple! Then, discovery: Oh my God, I know what he is talking about. And then excitement: I grew up fermenting veggies, I can do it. And acknowledgment: This is the new IT thing and fermenting is unbelievably healthy. I made a decision right on the spot to reintroduce this into my life.

Only now do I realize the value of what Grandma taught me. When I got back from my course I called Grandma's 70+ year old daughter, my Aunt Maria to share my excitement and discovery with her. She still lives in the same village. She just laughed at my "discovery"; there was nothing new for her. I also asked her about wine making because the Kombucha that was offered during the course resembled the smell and the taste of fresh wine that the grown-ups used to make. (If only I had been introduced to that as well by my grandma!) I also looked it up on the net because I wanted to understand the science behind this simple method. That is when I learnt for example that my favorite sauerkraut has not only Vitamin C but also Vitamin B1, B2, B6, B12, E, K, niacin, iron, copper and on and on. It regulates fat digestion and cholesterol, aids in red blood cells, makes heart muscles stronger and stimulates cell growth. It has anti-cancer properties and last but not least is a very effective way to treat hangover!

I came to the Suppers program because I wanted to learn about true healthy eating. I started reading the information on the website and I must admit it was and still is enlightening for me! How can people live without wheat, dairy and sugar? What can you eat? The Suppers program has been the best health investment I have ever made, and it affects me, my family, friends, and fellow moms and so on. I truly became a Suppers enthusiast! I share my knowledge with anybody who is willing to listen for three minutes. Now I understand. Now I get it, healthy eating finally clicks. It is certainly a different way of eating from what one learns from the Food Pyramid.

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So far I have learned these things: Just because I buy something in the whole food store it may not be a "whole food" (crackers, chips, pretzels, etc.). I can differentiate between processed food and the whole foods we are designed to eat. I regulate my blood sugar better. I cook more at home. I eat more veggies than ever before, I feel so much better and experience few if any of the symptoms associated with low blood sugar. Because of the wealth of information I have received at Suppers I feel empowered, I make conscious decisions about my food choices every day.

At Suppers we talk about the "spirit of co-creation", which to me means the healing force that rises when we feel we are actively participating in creating the program. This is how I felt when I brought samples of my fermented vegetables to share at a meeting. There was great enthusiasm among members who want to learn to do this. When I teach them how, my Hungarian Grandma will be sitting next to me smiling, "These are just pickles." Just?