

CHAPTER 4

THE FLAVORS OF MY LIFE

TASTING THE SWEETNESS OF SAVASANA, hearing that voice during the Forward Bend pose, and revisiting my childhood trauma was just the start of my holistic journey.

When I signed up for my first cooking class, I was simply doing something that I perceived would move me more into the middle class. I didn't realize that I would be challenged to integrate all of my different flavors into a healthier and more self-caring version of myself.

I wanted to learn more about this holistic health lifestyle and how I could participate in creating my own good health. Holistic Wellness regularly sent newsletters to my home. But it was the personalized letter that Gia sent to me that encouraged me to schedule an in-home consultation. The letter seemed to speak directly to my need to rebuild my shaky foundation.

After getting the letter, I immediately called Gia to schedule an appointment. She came to my house in the way I imagined doctors made house calls in the 1950s. But she didn't look like a physician; she wore loose-fitted natural fabrics, a kind of middle-aged Eileen Fisher chic. The way she moved

in her clothes showed an easy flow with nature. I admired that about her.

After our initial greetings, she examined my whole life and my surroundings. I had never received this kind of attention from anyone. She made me feel like everything in my life mattered, and that it has contributed to who I am. I felt like I mattered. I must admit, that was a new feeling.

Gia pulled out her client notebook and glanced at the intake form. I fixated on her fingernails. They were short and manicured, but not polished. They were not like the nails I saw on the professional women in the corporate world, which were lengthened with gel, silk, or acrylic and polished flawlessly. Gia's hands looked strong, natural, and yet beautiful.

As she talked, I listened raptly. "Saeeda, the basis of holistic health is to have our internal world be at peace with our external world." She went on to ask me about my sleep, menstrual cycle, a significant other, family, and friends.

Gia was like a doctor who made house calls. But she also went a little deeper, like a psychologist, a clergyman, and a friend. Nothing was off limits. I got the impression that my health mattered to her.

She explained that outside things affect how we express peace and harmony, or dis-ease and dis-harmony, and vice versa. Holistic health looks at the whole picture, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually — not to mention financially. She talked about being at peace with it all.

After Gia took inventory regarding how I viewed my life, we visited my kitchen. Opening up a small beige metal cupboard door revealed two boxes of Cracklin' Oat Bran and tomato sauce (the other four boxes and jars were in the freezer, since I stockpiled two-for-one coupons just like my mother.) I had bowtie pasta noodles, herbal teas, orange juice, milk, bread, ketchup and very few fresh fruits and vegetables — one onion, several stalks of celery, a carrot, and a few apples. I also had the remains of my bulk cooking ingredients from the class — brown rice, lentils, steel cut oats, barley, and shiitake mushrooms.

I handed the Cracklin' Oat Bran box to Gia and she showed me how the cereal contained multiple forms of sugar products, all of them refined.

We examined most of the food items in my cabinets, refrigerator, and freezer. I was amazed that so many items were loaded with sugar: my dry cereal, tomato sauce, ketchup, and even my bread. Not only did sugar appear in everything, I learned it was listed under different aliases such as cane sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup, sucrose, maltodextrose, and high fructose corn syrup.

Gia departed, leaving me with lots of information and food recipes to make. I thought long and hard about what she suggested. I could slowly phase out these items or give it all away and start fresh with better quality foods. She encouraged me to cook more and share meals with others. I was committed to following her instructions, even if I didn't like to cook that much. I didn't realize it at the time, but what I did was a radical detox, no processed food, no sugar, and only whole food meals.

I learned later that my regular consumption of refined sugar (both the known and unknown) affected my pancreas (insulin levels) and my liver (a place to store sugar as fat). Sugar made me feel tired and grumpy, especially during pre-menstrual time. But mostly, I felt spaced out and numb.

When I stopped consuming sugar, I experienced a chemical withdrawal from it similar to my Uncle Paul's heroin withdrawal.

I became depressed, yet I was no longer fuzzy. I was less irritable and fatigued. I was in the process of sobering up. Even though it was challenging, I knew it was the right thing for my body and my mind.

The detox reminded me of the time when I went through the entire fourth grade without knowing something was wrong with my eyesight. By fifth grade, I'd had my eyes tested and, lo and behold, I needed glasses! With glasses, I could see much better. I didn't like everything I saw at school or in my neighborhood or at home, but at least everything was clearer.

The three-day detox had a similar effect to wearing glasses. I didn't like what I saw, but the picture was clear.

At Gia's advising, I made a broth called Sweet Veggie Drink. It nourishes the pancreas and helps eliminate processed sugar cravings. I wanted

to add a kind of sweetness to my body that was not experienced in a quick or refined way, but rather in a way that lingered. This was how I was starting to feel about life. Since I was no longer numbed by the wrong kind of sweetness, and I sensed that I wanted to taste a richer and fuller life. I didn't want instant gratification anymore; I wanted to experience life's flavors in a healthy way. I wanted a delicious life, where my inside environment was at peace with my outside environment.

So I took inventory of my life, from what was in my cupboards to what was in my heart, and I found flavors that were sour, pungent, and bitter.