

A daughter's words of wisdom; [ONT Edition]

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Full Text (1098 words)

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My late father, a Boy Wonder who became a physiologist well-known for his medical research (sorry, dear dad, for boasting), was a reluctant star in the tough, working-class Montreal family into which he was born.

Because of his golden curls and innate intellect, he was the source of much competitive kvelling by his Jewish mother who, the moment his predictably perfect report card arrived home, would phone her relatives to gloat. This hurt, annoyed and often alienated him from the sibling and cousins whose scholarly achievements he outshone.

As a result, my dad refused to allow anyone in our family to claim they were "proud" of another member, so painful had all this been for him.

With more apologies Dad, and I have a hunch you'd understand, I must state here and now that I am immensely, unabashedly proud of both my lovely daughters. Not only are they sweet, talented, smart, compassionate human beings, these two adorable young women are also enthusiastic and accomplished cooks.

Last year in a column, I told you how Ruthie, 17, became infatuated with wheat berries and perfected a salad that combined them with beans, chopped fresh vegetables, vinaigrette and a sprinkling of pomegranate seeds. Also in her mushrooming repertoire are a super stir-fry, key lime pie, cheesecake and linzertorte.

My elder offspring, Esther, is 34 and lives happily with her husband Nathaniel in gorgeous Courtenay, B.C. She's a psychotherapist with M.S.W. and RCC (registered clinical counsellor) after her name who operates her own practice. Her specialties are family therapy and eating disorders. She loves to cook and has had a way with a whisk since she was young.

On her recent visit here, we sat down for a cozy chat/interview after a delicious Mother's Day dinner she'd prepared. Herbal tea in hand, my soft-voiced, dark-eyed daughter began by listing her various eating styles over the years, some of which I remember all too well.

"From age 15 to 21 I was a vegetarian," Esther recalls. "I ate a lot of veggie burgers, manna bread, soy milk, granola and things that didn't need cooking." For 12 years, she ate "some meat," then became a vegan (no meat or dairy) about a year ago.

Her relationship with food has not been easy, an irony not lost on her food-writer mother. It's something she freely admits now but took care to hide when young. "I had an eating disorder," she says bluntly. "It started at 15 and by 17 was out of control."

I knew at the time she was a troubled teenager but had no idea until recently how bad things were.

"I was bulimic and anorexic," Esther continues. "I was bingeing, purging with laxatives, fasting and over-exercising," offering what seemed like a good reason at the time. "I broke up with a boyfriend who then went out with a skinny girl who was an exercise fanatic," she explains. "I

made the wrong association that, if I looked like her, he would want to go out with me."

Bad things happened to her health. "I lost hair in chunks, my skin went funny, my digestion was ruined, my electrolytes were out of whack, I fainted a lot, had blackouts and my weight went up and down." This lasted six years.

Esther admits she'll never be free of what she calls "the monster" but says she's now the best she's ever been.

"I've made peace with my body and food," she says calmly. "I don't think I'm ugly and focus on my intellectual abilities and other capacities rather than how I look."

A popular therapist who's fast gaining a reputation, she finds this former struggle helps in her work.

"I've been there," she begins. "You can't pass anything by me. I'm a living example of someone who's survived an eating disorder and done well."

She explores existential questions with her clients "Who am I? What is my purpose? What are my gifts? What can I contribute to the world?"

It's shocking, she says, that 70 per cent of Canadian women are on a diet and that 80 per cent have dieted by age 8.

She finds cooking soothing. "When you eat well," she says, "you nourish your spirit, not just your body. One of the greatest acts of self-love is treating your body well - eating good food, exercising, doing something spiritual like yoga or meditation."

These days, Esther and Nathaniel grow their own fruit and vegetables and eat a meal together every night. "I set the table, like you taught me, Mum, with napkins and candles."

Fare includes "a healthy smoothie every morning, lots of big salads, nuts, seeds, soy ice cream and whole-grain pasta with roasted veggies."

For more info, check the National Eating Disorder Information Centre at www.nedic.ca and Esther's website, www.estherkane.com

She adapted this recipe from one in *The Almost No-Fat Holiday Cookbook* by Bryanna Clark Grogan who drains the potatoes from the marinade and cooks them in single layers on four lightly oiled baking sheets. Esther leaves the marinade in during cooking, which produces some very crispy and other not-so-crisp spuds. Amazingly, it uses no fat.

Lemony Roasted Potatoes

This can easily be halved. You can cut the potatoes in wedges; they may take longer to cook.

About 16 Yukon Gold potatoes (5 lb/2.2 kg), scrubbed not peeled

2 cups water

1/2 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (2 to 3 lemons)

2 tbsp lemon zest

1 head garlic, cloves peeled and finely chopped

1/4 cup chopped fresh herbs (oregano, basil, rosemary or a combo) or 2 tbsp dried Italian spice mix

2 vegetable bouillon cubes

2 tbsp cornstarch

Salt + freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cut potatoes in about 3/4-inch cubes. Arrange in one very large or two large baking dishes in single or, at most, double layer.

In medium saucepan over medium-high heat, bring water, lemon juice, lemon zest, garlic, herbs, bouillon cubes and cornstarch to boil, whisking constantly.

Reduce heat to low; simmer, whisking, until thickened, about 1 minute.

Taste; add salt and pepper. Pour over potatoes. Cover with foil. Refrigerate 8 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 400F.

Stir potatoes to coat with marinade; replace foil. Roast on middle rack of oven, covered, about 45 minutes or until potatoes are just tender.

Remove foil; roast about 20 minutes more or until nicely browned.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

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[Illustration]

Lucas Oleniuk toronto star Esther Kane shows off her no-fat Lemony Roasted Potatoes. After successfully battling food disorders, she has become a therapist who helps others with similar problems.

Credit: Toronto Star