

How the Cookie-Pusher Changed My Perspective by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt

Mo and I flew to Atlanta last summer to visit my grandparents. I love my grandparents. They're a total riot... and I don't think intentionally so. Take, for example, the day they took us to lunch. My grandmother confessed that she just couldn't bear the thought of not being able cook us a lunch, so she decided to deal with it the only way she knew how: she took us to the local steakhouse so that we could partake in their salad bar.

This salad bar was much like every other steakhouse salad bar in the South. Not only did we have our choice of iceberg lettuce or iceberg lettuce, but we also got to choose from a variety of canned fruits, unnamed chunks of pressed meats, and puddings with skin. Mo and I were in heaven. How could we not be with plates piled high with iceberg lettuce and cherry tomatoes? We thought we'd hit the jackpot! "Just eat what you can and I'll take you out later," I said in my best ventriloquist impersonation.

"Don't y'all want any boiled eggs or cheese for that salad?" asked my concerned grandmother when we returned to the table. "It's just that the baby here's looking a bit thin." Mo, then 11, by the way, is the baby. We politely declined and proceeded to eat our food with greatest gusto we could muster.

When Mo went for her second plate, my grandmother discreetly got up from the table. As I continued eating, I watched my grandmother go to the desserts counter, grab something, and corner Mo by the salad bar. I saw Mo talking to her, but couldn't tell what was being said. Later I learned that my grandmother had been attempting her usual Granny Coercion Tactics: "Why don't you just have a cookie? You don't have to tell your mother. I can't believe she makes you eat this way!" Mo later told me she responded, "She doesn't make me eat this way. I'm choosing to." I remember seeing my grandmother returning to the table, looking defeated, and munching on the swiped cookie.

As Mo recounted the cookie incident to me that night, I thought, Man, when I was her age, I would have never turned down a cookie! When I was her age, I was eating fast food, buckets of candy, and, basically, anything on offer. So, what happened in the chasm between my grandmother and my daughter? What did I learn from my grandmother and my mother that would have spurned me, a raw vegan?

So many raw foodists that I've run into have said that they chose their lifestyle from a place of lack – lack of health, lack of nutrition, lack of energetic attunement. I chose mine from an abundance of love and excitement. Yes, those other pieces were and are important to me, but the joy of eating and the appreciation of eating in company... those I got from my grandmother. Some of the funniest and sweetest memories I have of my childhood center around food. And, yes, we may have been eating Burger King at the time, but the feelings of love were fat and plenty.

I understand that when my grandmother was pressing that cookie onto Mo that it wasn't from a

place of deviousness. I know her. She struggles with comprehending how someone could not want to share a joy-filled taste experience. For her, this sharing is connexion, intimacy. I feel this way, too, when I offer someone a taste of my latest creation. I love her for that gift.

I used to be angry at my maternal lineage. Sometimes I would get so despondent from having to undo all the years of unhealthy eating. Focusing on that negativity left me exhausted. In order to heal, I began to recognize that I couldn't have gotten here if I wasn't intelligent, compassionate, and appreciative of the humour of it all... all the things I learned from grandmother. This path from my grandmother to my kid may be lined with fried foods and double-iced birthday cakes, but underneath that is a real love, a real need to feel close to someone.

In order to honour my path, I have to honour my grandmother's and my mother's... and all the women before them. I have to see that each of them learned from their mothers and believe that they tried to improve upon what they were taught. It's so exciting to think that Mo will take my lessons around food and eating and push them up a notch. Where will she end up? What will she teach her children? And will I get my chance push a raw vegan cookie on them?

Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt is a raw foods chef and teacher and owner of Rite Food and Company (www.ritefoodandcompany.com), which offers workshops on intentional and joyful eating. Lisa Marie and her homeschooled daughter, Mo, record a weekly podcast – called Sweet Peas Podcast – chronicling their raw foods journey together.