



Greta (left) and Janet (right) Podleski

Eating With A Happy Heart

The girls who are making us fall in love with healthy food

By: Jennifer Layman

Janet was rushing around her home, getting ready to leave for a golf tournament. As she gathered everything and headed out, she slammed the door...and caught her finger in the frame. Managing to get the door unlocked without passing out, she flagged down a neighbour to take her to the hospital, blood gushing everywhere. She registered with the emergency department and took her seat in the waiting room.

A young woman, a member of the medical staff, approached her. "I know who you are," said the woman. "You changed my life."

The "Janet" in this story is Janet Podleski, who, along with her sister Greta, penned the famous Looneyspoons series of cookbooks. The cookbooks have been life-changing in the lives of many people, including the young woman in the hospital that day.

The young woman told Janet she had been an overweight, self-conscious teenager with not many friends. When her mother found Looneyspoons at the bookstore, they cooked four meals a week from the healthy cookbook. The change in this young woman's life was transformational. She lost 80 pounds and gained a whole lot of self-confidence. She ended the story telling Janet she was getting married later that year.

"People pour their hearts out," says Janet, commenting about the letters and emails they receive about the cookbooks (of which she and Greta read every one). "They've lost

tonnes of weight or they have dramatically changed their health. We hear a lot from mothers, and mothers of children with eating disorders. We feel honoured to be in a position where we can be good role models."

Here's their story.

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”

The two sisters, just 11 months apart in age, have pretty much merged their identities in creating the Looneyspoons brand. They appear together on every cookbook: Looneyspoons, Crazy Plates, Eat Shrink and Be Merry and The Looneyspoons Collection. It has always been "Janet and Greta," since that day in 1994 when they hatched the healthy cookbook plan, against all odds.

Janet and Peter had just purchased a new home in Ottawa. Janet was working in sales and marketing for Corel Corporation, and Greta was working for the Minister of Revenue. The two had always been

competitive sisters, so when Greta proposed moving into Janet's basement, well, Janet was a bit leery. Still, she agreed, especially after Greta promised to cook for them.

Cooking was a gene that Greta inherited from their mother, but which somehow managed to skip Janet entirely. So having someone else do the cooking was fine with Janet and Peter. After several weeks of many delicious meals, Greta broke the news that all the food she had made was actually healthy. Janet and Peter couldn't believe it! And that's when Peter said, "If this is healthy, you should write a cookbook! It was the start of something that would take their lives in a whole new direction.

Looneyspoons soon became an all-encompassing project. They worked before and after their jobs, on weekends and holidays but soon it just wasn't enough. The girls decided it was time to quit their jobs and do this "basement project" full time. (They never told anyone they were writing a cookbook, not even their mother. They referred to the cookbook as their 'basement project.' They didn't want anyone to tell them they were crazy, which they already had some sense that they probably were.)

"We thought, what's the worst thing that can happen?" said Janet. "We just knew if we could get this book on the shelves, people would like it."

The opportunity they saw was that healthy eating cookbooks at the time were a little on the dry side. Boring, in fact. Written mostly