



The Grasshopper Story

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I would like to share a family story that helped me understand how worried eaters might feel when they are trying a new food.

When my sons were ten and thirteen we traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to study Spanish for a month in an immersion program. We lived and ate with a local family. We were served absolutely delicious food for the entire month and on our last day, our hostess went to the mercado and brought home a *surprise*. "What is it?", we asked in our newly emerging Spanish. Her response was "chapulinas". We had to look up the word in our Spanish dictionary as she could not translate it into English. It was *grasshoppers*, yes, really, *grasshoppers*.

We wanted to be polite. We wanted to appreciate our surprise, but *grasshoppers??!* Really?!. So, since my children looked at me as if to say "Mom, YOU are going FIRST", I started checking them out. First off, they were dead. That seemed like a good start as I had read that in some parts of the world people eat *live* bugs. Next, they obviously smelled like garlic and I like garlic. However, the very large bowl of grasshoppers was all *parts*, head *parts*, body *parts*, leg *parts*, antenna *parts*...parts! Now I began to seriously get worried. I asked our hostess, "how do we eat them"? She demonstrated how she piled some guacamole on a flour tortilla and then put on a handful of them, yes, a handful of *parts*, folded the tortilla and ate

the delicacy! All eyes were on me. It was my turn to eat grasshoppers.

I took a tortilla, which I like, and put on LOTS of guacamole. Then I bravely felt one little "*part*," with my fingertips, put it on the pile of guacamole, folded it and ate it. My mouth felt a tiny little crunch, but I expected a crunch because it had "crunched between my fingers". Everyone giggled, but I was proud I did not embarrass myself by gagging. But, the *trying* was not over. This was not a little snack for the *gringo family*, it was LUNCH. So, by my fourth one, I still had a lot of guacamole, but I had a whole cluster of *parts*. They did not *taste* particularly bad or good as my generous mounds of guacamole dominated the flavor but they were noticeably crunchy in the center of the mouthful. We all lived through this experience with lots of laughter and photos.

I realized later that I had just experienced being a worried eater and I naturally did the things we do to help our worried eater friends. First, I *looked* at the new food, and asked about it. I *smelled* it and could relate to a smell that I already liked (garlic). I *watched* someone else eating it. I *felt* it with my fingers while preparing it. I got to try it at *my own pace* with lots of guacamole and tortilla initially to camouflage the worrisome taste and texture. I added a little more of the worrisome food at my pace and I fed it *to myself*. It was clear to

me that if someone else had put a pile of grasshoppers on a spoon and tried to FEED ME, I would have gagged or vomited and it would have been an overall very bad experience.

Because I was able to go at my own pace, I ended up having a good time (even though grasshoppers may never end up on my favorite food list!).

We need to respect the *worry* when children are anxious about trying new foods. We need to help them learn something about the new food ahead of time through watching us and through all their senses and *absolutely* let them go at their pace. We now remind parents of worried eaters that they might consider

every new food they offer their child to be a grasshopper and new food offering may well be easier! Consider *everything is a grasshopper* to a worried eater.

Throughout this book we will use the grasshopper story as a reference in our strategies for support of children worried about trying new foods. ~Marsha Dunn Klein



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