

Our Sorta Kinda Introduction

A Tale of Two Sisters

Hi! We're sisters Janet and Greta Podleski. Pleased to meet you. There! Now that the formal "introduction" is out of the way, we can move on to the informal introduction, which really isn't an introduction at all, but a little story. A little story that's a little long-winded, mind you (we love to babble!), but a story that we hope will inspire you to achieve your goals, whatever they may be. Whether you're trying to change your eating habits, lose weight, launch a new career, or even become a better parent, the journey we're about to describe will show you that, when you dream big, set goals, work hard, refuse to quit, and let passion be your guide, just about anything is possible. We'll also explain how *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!* came to be, and why we believe, with all our hearts, that this book can help you to feel better, look better, and cook better! If you're one of the millions of people who doesn't have a clue what to eat anymore (Are carbs okay? Will fat make me fat? Is protein a magic weight-loss aid?), we can help. We *want* to help! But first, we'd like you to get to know us a little better. What would possess two Polish sisters from St. Thomas, Ontario, to mix pots and pans with pens and puns in an effort to improve people's eating habits? Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale...

Ten years! Hard to believe that so much time has passed since we wrote and self-published our first cookbook, *Looneyspoons: Low-Fat Food Made Fun!* It seems like only yesterday that we were sequestered in the basement of our tiny Ottawa bungalow, holed up in our claustrophobic, makeshift office, with unopened Visa, MasterCard, and utility bills piling up (why bother opening them when you can't pay them?) alongside a stack of rejection letters from publishers. Greta, an avid cook since the age of five, was dreaming up delicious, low-fat recipes while Janet, the domestic nightmare, was researching and writing lifestyle tidbits and food trivia that would liven up the margins alongside the recipes.



Look out *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition!* Here we are in the '70s after just two weeks on the high-protein Scarsdale Diet.

Only a year apart in age, we had been sibling rivals all our lives. So, when we think back to those trying times, we marvel at how we worked together in (almost!) perfect harmony in that musty, sparsely furnished basement—despite having risked everything, despite being flat broke, and despite having to cope with the stress of not knowing whether our stack of loose pages would ever become a “real” book on bookstore shelves. Oh, yeah...and despite having made a pact to keep the whole project a secret, vowing not to tell even our mother or four older sisters! Forget sibling rivalry. At that time, we felt more like conjoined twins, inextricably linked at the brain! Two sisters sharing one passion—to help people eat more healthfully.

It all started in early 1995. Inspired by Greta’s love of cooking, Janet’s knack for writing, and both of our corny senses of humor, we came up with the idea to create a zany, one-of-a-kind, low-fat cookbook. Actually, we pictured it being more than just a cookbook—it would be a lifestyle guide that would bring clarity (and fun) to the confusing, intimidating, and often boring world of nutrition and dieting. “Everyone loves to eat and everyone loves to laugh,” we reasoned. “Why not combine the two?” So we did. We wrapped the entire cookbook in humor—silly cartoons, corny jokes, and “punny” recipe titles like *Jurassic Pork*, *Miss American Thigh*, and *Chili Chili Bang Bang*—to make the normally dry subject of nutrition easier to digest. Pun intended, of course! We were sure there was nothing like it on the market, and we passionately believed that this book would make a real difference in people’s lives, helping them to lose weight, feel great, and live longer.

We literally went for broke to get our beloved cookbook on store shelves. Greta had already moved into Janet’s modest basement, and then,

just one month after hatching our “brilliant” plan, we decided to quit our secure full-time jobs—on the same day, no less! To fund our project, we cashed in all of our retirement savings (we didn’t have much) and sold our possessions at an “everything-but-the-kitchen-sink” yard sale. We sold furniture, TVs, stereos, clothing, and unopened infomercial purchases like our Ron Popeil Pocket Fisherman, Chia Pet, and ThighMaster—basically anything that wasn’t nailed down. In the heat of the moment, Janet drove her car onto the front lawn, tied balloons to the antenna, and sold it for \$5,000! We went 14 months without any income while writing the book, living off proceeds from the yard sale, credit-card advances, personal loans, and the occasional bake sale or bottle drive (seriously!). We would have resorted to panhandling had Greta not needed every single one of our pans to develop recipes!

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“*Looneyspoons*, by Janet and Greta Podleski.” In bestseller fantasyland, we appeared ahead of blockbusters such as *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *Men Are from Mars, Women Are From Venus*. We tacked that list to our office wall (right onto the yellow-painted paneling!) and stared at it day and night, visualizing ourselves as regular guests on *Oprah*. Then, on our office chalkboard (we weren’t very high-tech back then), we scribbled “*Looneyspoons*: One million copies sold!” (We later discovered that 10,000 copies sold would be considered a bestseller in Canada. Oh well. Go big or go home.) To avoid the naysayers—people who would certainly discourage us by calling us “nuts” or by saying, “The last thing the world needs is another low-fat cookbook,” we decided to keep the venture to ourselves. We declared it our “secret basement project.”

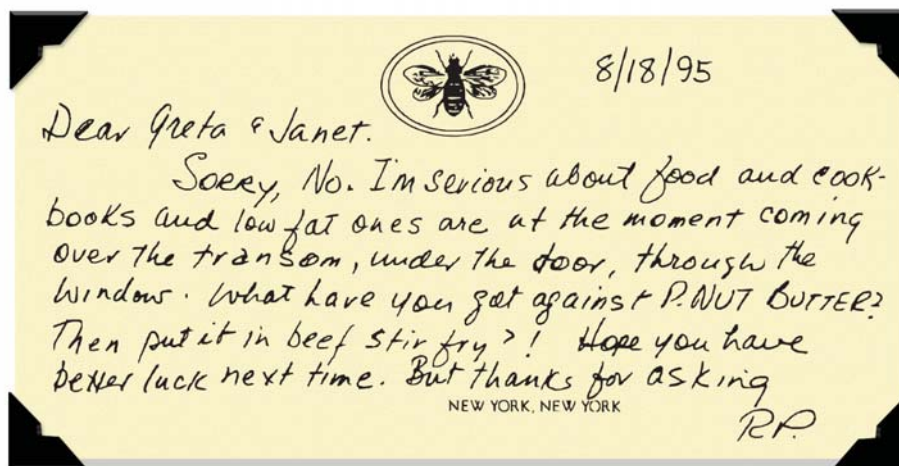
When our bank accounts dwindled to a paltry \$1.17 between the two of us, we optimistically mailed our manuscript to the largest New York publishers. It wasn't long before every single one of them bluntly turned us down. To them, we were simply two unknown "would-be" authors from Canada, without a track record, without an agent, without a hope. And our work was too much of a break from tradition. "A cartoon-illustrated cookbook? You must be joking!" Actually, we were joking! That was the point! Jokes and food...food and jokes! But they didn't get our point and, at that time, we were \$80,000 in debt, unemployed, and starting to get on each other's nerves.

Desperate, but undaunted, we solicited the help of David Chilton, author of Canada's all-time bestselling book, *The Wealthy Barber*. How we managed to woo Dave is another story in itself, but, in a nutshell, it was his cookbook-loving mother who convinced him to get involved. He dropped off sample pages of *Looneyspoons* at her house and asked her to try out a few of the recipes. After a week of cooking and taste-testing, she told Dave it was the best food she'd ever eaten! "You mean the best low-fat food?" he asked. Dave's mom replied, "No. The best food, period!" Well, that was good enough for Dave and he offered to finance our entire project right then and there. Truthfully, we think he felt sorry for us, too. We were completely broke and Janet had by then resorted to using her credit card to pay

her mortgage. Not exactly something *The Wealthy Barber* teaches! Dave wrote us a personal check for \$2,000 to "help us out" and told us we could repay him "someday." We never did. The three of us formed our own publishing company, Granet Publishing Inc. (we spliced our names together but somehow forgot to include Dave's. Oops!) and, thanks to Mrs. Marjorie Chilton, *Looneyspoons* officially hit bookstore shelves in September 1996.

In its first year, beyond our wildest dreams, *Looneyspoons* sold a whopping 325,000 copies, making it, according to "people in the know," one of the fastest-selling books in Canadian publishing history. Wow! The publishers who rejected us offered to "take the book off our hands." We declined, as we were having way too much fun! Since then, we've sold about 850,000 copies in Canada alone, which they say is unheard of for a self-published book. After all, we're just Janet & Greta, not Simon & Schuster! Our "secret basement project" spent 85 consecutive weeks on Canada's national bestseller list. We should know, since our mom checked the list and phoned us every single Saturday. Guess you could say we wrote a book in our basement and it became a best *cellar*!

While selling lots of books was certainly exciting (paying off our massive debts felt pretty good, too!), we can honestly say that what thrilled and motivated us more than anything was the feedback we received from readers. Thousands of letters, e-



No one wanted to publish *Looneyspoons*! We were even rejected by a literary agent, who "scolded" us for telling people the number of fat grams in a tablespoon of peanut butter! We cried for days.

mails, and phone calls came pouring in from everywhere and everyone—men, women, busy mothers, single fathers, seniors, teenagers—all eating more healthfully and having fun doing it. “I lost 50 pounds!”; “I dropped four dress sizes!”; “My doctor can’t believe how my cholesterol levels have improved!”; “My finicky kids are finally eating vegetables!”; “The food was so good, I got healthy by accident!” We would read each and every letter, and we’d literally dance around our office, high-fiving each other with excitement. (To this day, we still respond to every single e-mail. If you don’t believe us, just test us!) We were really pumped to hear that our book was making a difference and impacting people’s lives. Our fax machine would be humming with orders from bookstores, and we would react with, “Hey, that’s great...but did you read that letter from Mrs. Smith from Calgary who said that her meat-and-potatoes husband drools over our vegetarian lasagna and lost 20 pounds by using our book? Cool!” (We’d often pick up the phone and end up chatting with people like Mrs. Smith for an hour!)

We eventually sold *Looneyspoons* into the U.S. marketplace and embarked on a whirlwind book tour: 20 cities in 30 days! It almost killed us. We lived in airports and hotels, traveled with one suitcase each, and changed cities just about every day, saving weekends for doing laundry and crying. We were exhausted, but excited. We’d often do 10 interviews in one day, five or six of them involving cooking demonstrations (poor Greta!). One highlight of our tour was making an appearance on *The 700 Club*, a popular religious show out of West Virginia. We’re often asked, “Why would *The 700 Club* invite two Canadian cookbook-writing sisters to be guests on their program?” Well, when Janet phoned the producers to ask if we could appear on their show, she mentioned that we were sisters—and

we’re pretty sure they thought we were nuns! Yes, *that* kind of sister! We showed up with low-fat cheesecake and stacks of cookbooks and vowed to change people’s habits, though we weren’t wearing them!

Within a year of the book’s release, readers started asking for more. After what we’d just been through, the thought of writing another book was overwhelming, to say the least. And frankly, we were certain that we’d drained our brains on *Looneyspoons*. How could we come up with another 150 ridiculous recipe titles like *Veal of Fortune*, *I Yam What I Yam*, and *The Way We Stir*?

But the letters and phone calls just kept coming. And you know, when people are pouring out their hearts, taking the time and effort to write very personal, emotional letters explaining how your book has changed their lives for the better, it’s pretty tough to ignore. We were spurred into action, motivated and determined to give our readers what they were asking for. Dave

Chilton, our super-talented partner, great friend, and president of Granet Publishing Inc. (we made him president to make up for the whole Granet naming boo-boo) challenged us not just to match the quality and appeal of *Looneyspoons*, but to surpass it.

After accepting his challenge, we sequestered ourselves once again, this time for well over a year. Greta no longer lived in Janet’s basement (thank heavens!) and we didn’t have to resort to yard sales to raise money, either. Phew! The result was *Crazy Plates: Low-Fat Food So Good, You’ll Swear It’s Bad For You!*, published in 1999. Dave’s mom, our most important critic, said everything about it was just plain better! We’re very proud of that book and we still chuckle every time we read the goofy recipe

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titles— *Mercedes Buns*, *Celine Dijon Chicken*, and *Love Me Tenderloin*, to name a few.

We were blown away by the response from readers. Not only were there wonderful tales of weight loss, improved fitness, and better health, but also fans told us they were reading *Crazy Plates* when cooking was the last thing on their minds—in cars, in planes, in trains, in beds, in living rooms, in cottages, at the beach. Heck, we even had an 80-year-old man tell us that he kept *Crazy Plates* in his bathroom, he thought it was so funny! (We took it as a compliment and reminded him that that’s where the fiber ends up anyway.) In its first 12 months, *Crazy Plates* sold 350,000 copies, shocking all of us by beating *Looneyspoons’* first-year sales. We even sold *Crazy Plates* on the big, U.S. shopping channel (QVC), where we spoke a mile a minute, doing our best Ivana Trump and Joan Rivers imitations. Can we talk? Yes, we can—faster than auctioneers, if we have to! Also, our book was one of the finalists for the prestigious James Beard Cookbook Awards.

While that was truly an honor, nothing was more exciting than attending the fancy, shmancy awards ceremony in Times Square, where we met two of our childhood television idols: The Fonz and Jack Tripper (a.k.a. Henry Winkler and John Ritter)! Those were *Happy Days*!

All in all, we felt blessed and deeply grateful that we were able to realize our dreams. Who’d a think that *The Leaning Tower of Pizza* and *Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Colored Polka Dot Rotini* would help so many North American families to eat well and laugh their way to good health? Plus, tacked onto the wall next to our phony national bestseller list (the one with the whited-out number-one spot), we posted the real bestseller list, with our names at the very top...no liquid paper required! What a thrill!

In 2001, we made a huge leap from the publishing business to the frozen-food business with the introduction of *Crazy Plates Meal Kits*, based on our favorite recipes. Our meal kits were designed to help busy people eat healthfully when they don’t have the time or energy to cook. Our slogan, “It’s



Our mom always made us pose with our bowling trophies when we were little. Fast forward 30 years and here we are again, this time with our Grand Prix Awards for our *Crazy Plates Meal Kits*. (Since we eat right and exercise regularly, we could still fit into the same clothes! Well, sorta.)

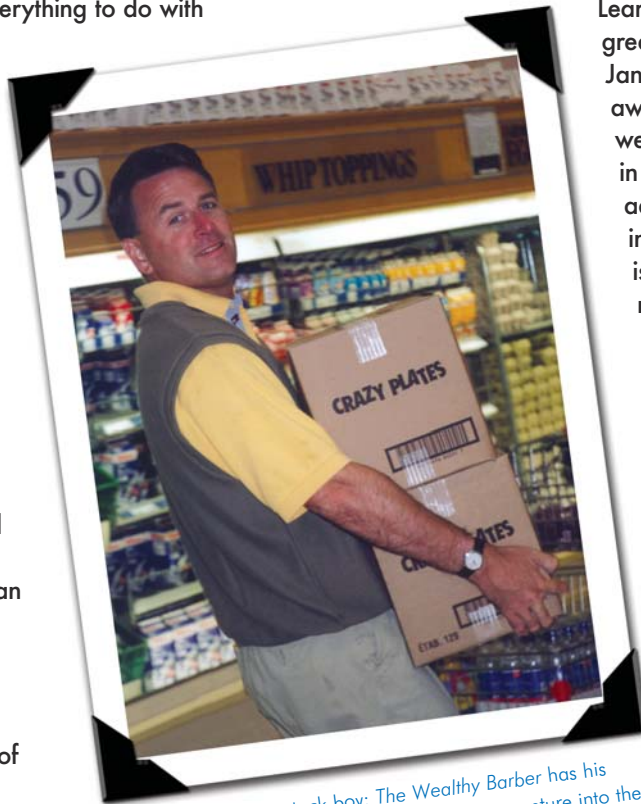
cooking from scratch, but we do the scratching!” struck a chord with consumers as they conveniently prepared meals like *Worth Every Penne* and a chicken stir-fry called *Stir Crazy*. At a glitzy soiree in Whistler, BC, we were stunned when our meal kits were voted “Best New Grocery Product of the Year” by the Canadian Grocery Industry. Yee-ha! We love trophies! Thank goodness we received two, otherwise Janet’s mantel would still be empty.

So there! Now you’re somewhat acquainted with our story. And that’s important, because everything you’ve just read has everything to do with the book you’re holding in your hands. *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!* is the culmination of our experiences over the last 10 years. What inspired us to cook up our meatiest, juiciest, most flavorful batch of pots and puns ever? Once again, it all boiled down to passion.

In 2002, Janet decided to go back to school, studying at the Canadian School of Natural Nutrition to become a Registered Nutritionist. She did it because she truly loves the subjects of health, fitness, and nutrition. In fact, she can’t get enough of them! On her bedside table, you won’t find a Harlequin romance, *The Da Vinci Code*, or even *The Wealthy Barber*. Nope. Each night, she curls up with the likes of *The Encyclopedia of Natural Nutrition*, *Fat Wars*, *Healthy Fats for Life*, *Food and Mood*, and *Eating Alive: Prevention Thru Good Digestion*. Enough to put anyone to sleep, huh? (She does flip through the occasional *Men’s Health* magazine, too. She likes the “pictures!”)

Janet’s experience at school was life-changing. Learning in depth about the value of eating nutrient-filled foods—how it affects our cells, our organs, our

bodies, and ultimately, our lives—was really eye-opening. She applied new concepts to the way she ate and the way she exercised, and saw dramatic improvement in her own life. After that, she was driven—obsessed, actually—to share her recent enlightenment with everyone. Janet couldn’t wait to teach our mom, sisters, and friends everything she had learned about healthy living. The seams of Janet’s brain were literally bursting with excitement! (Good thing jugs of shampoo were on sale at Costco!)



From stockbroker to stock boy: The Wealthy Barber has his assets frozen in the grocery store thanks to our venture into the food business.

Learning all the “latest and greatest” in nutrition made Janet realize, “Wow! An awful lot has changed since we wrote *Looneyspoons* back in 1996!” We’re the first to admit that some of the information in our first book is a little outdated (but the recipes still rock!). Low fat isn’t the main focus now, though it’s still important. Good fats are. Eggs, nuts, and avocados are back in. Processed, refined foods (bad carbs) are out. There have been great strides and advancements in the study of weight loss, metabolism, trans fats, cholesterol, blood sugar, anti-oxidants, heart disease—you name it, researchers

have discovered more about it. With so much new information out there, Janet felt compelled and obligated to bring the fans of *Looneyspoons* and *Crazy Plates* (and anyone else who would listen!) up to speed.

That’s when she knew she had to call Greta. “Greta,” she said. “We really *must* write another book! I’m bursting at the brain seams!” Much to Janet’s surprise, Greta replied, “Funny you should say that. So am I.” You see, she had just had her own epiphany of sorts.

On one of her regular grocery-store trips, Greta

was approached by a male acquaintance in the bakery section and was asked her opinion about a new low-carb bread. “Yeah,” Dan bragged, “I’m all over this low-carb-diet trend. Got me a case of low-carb beer and I’m just lovin’ it. I used to drink six cans a week of the old stuff, but now I’m up to 12 cans and I don’t even need to worry about it, since it’s good for me.” Yikes. He could tell by the stunned look on Greta’s face that she didn’t exactly approve of his new-found “health” kick. “And I got rid of the apples in my kids’ lunches, too. I had no idea I was poisoning them with all those carbs!” It was more than Greta could take. Beer: good. Apples: bad. Is that what it’s come to? She politely informed her friend that perhaps he was a little misguided in his approach and presented him with some simple facts about proper nutrition and the benefits of eating fruit, including the occasional Golden Delicious. She had no idea that during her 10-minute, healthy-eating soliloquy, someone was attentively eavesdropping, and that same someone just happened to be an employee of the low-carb bread company! “Geez,” replied the bread salesman,

“I don’t mean to interrupt, but you really seem to know what you’re talking about. You should write a book about that stuff to help people like me—I don’t have a clue what I’m supposed to eat anymore.” “Good idea,” was Greta’s reply.

Though 10 years had passed since our first cookbook debuted and nutrition science had advanced, some things hadn’t changed at all. As Greta’s “close encounter of the grocery-store kind” revealed, when it comes to health and nutrition—especially the subject of weight loss—most people are still confused and intimidated. Many don’t even know where to start. There’s so much conflicting information, so many fads, myths, and misconceptions, it’s hard to figure out who to

believe and who to trust. What really works? How can I safely lose weight and keep it off forever? Low fat, no fat, high fat, high protein, no carb, low carb, bad carb, good carb—good grief!

We had a long talk about the low-carb craze, its pros and cons (it isn’t all bad!), and the reason why diets, in general, fail. The truth is, no matter how much people say they care about their health, no matter how much someone wants to lose weight, no one wants to give up their favorite foods or sacrifice

the pleasures of eating. And who can blame them? Pizza tastes better than celery sticks any day! Regardless of your goal—whether it’s to lose weight, lower your cholesterol, or increase your energy levels—bland, flavorless, diet food is just not going to cut it. Not for the long haul, anyway. Whether it’s low fat or low carb, great taste is a must. Are you really going to eat low-carb tortillas that taste like sawdust just because they contain only 6 grams of net carbs? Likewise, how long can you eat steak, bacon, and cheese before you’re sick of them and sick from them?

We felt compelled to *step up to the plate* and give people

the tools they need to make healthy eating both scrumptious and satisfying. Both of us desperately wanted to make sense of the fad diets that had people shunning apples and guzzling low-carb beer, clear up some of the myths and misconceptions about losing weight, make the subject of nutrition easier to understand, and most importantly, teach people how to *eat* instead of how to diet. Plus, we really needed an outlet for our endless supply of stupid jokes!

“That’s it! We have to do something!” Greta announced. “Let’s create the first-ever *know-carb, know-fat* cookbook!” And because she’s the bossy one, that’s the exact moment *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!* was born. To say we were passionate about it would be an understatement. For the next two years

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(double the time we spent on either *Looneyspoons* or *Crazy Plates*), we literally lived, breathed, and slept this book. As Willy Nelson (kinda) said, “It was always on our minds.”

Before writing a single word, Janet spent six months researching and compiling health and lifestyle information, aiming not only to educate readers, but also to entertain and motivate them. She asked herself, “What would I want my 74-year-old Polish mother to know so she’ll be dancing to Bobby Vinton songs at the age of 100? What tips would I want to share with my sisters, Donna, Theresa, Margie and Helen, or with my best friend, Leanne? What information would improve their health, their hips, their energy levels, their quality of life?” That’s the stuff we packed into this book.

Then there was the food. Greta, who Dave calls “The Rainman of Healthy Cooking” (she has no other talents), was at her obsessive-compulsive, perfectionist best, chaining herself to her stove for well over a year, painstakingly creating 150 brand-new recipes that wouldn’t sacrifice taste or sabotage waists. You would have loved being one of Greta’s test-kitchen dummies. She’d pull into their driveways at dinner time, delivering her culinary experiments right to their front doors. “Here comes Meals on Heels!” they’d shout with glee. Only when recipes received an enthusiastic double-thumbs-up did they qualify for entry into the cookbook. Greta shopped at one grocery store and spent nearly \$10,000 on ingredients. (She accumulated so many customer-loyalty points, she’ll never need to buy windshield-washer fluid again!) She vowed to stick with her original *Looneyspoons* recipe-development philosophy: “If I can’t find the ingredients at my local grocery store, then I’m not putting them in the book,” reasoning that people are too busy nowadays to shop at two or three different stores searching for exotic ingredients. Humbly stated, the recipes in *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!* are Greta’s best work yet! Some of our personal favorites include

Dilly Beloved (page 90), *Chicken Littles* (page 20), *Feast from the East* (page 40), *Turk du Soleil* (page 134), and *Girl-Guy Cookies* (page 168). All of the taste, but not on your waist—we guarantee it!

In *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!*, you’ll notice some general themes sprinkled throughout the pages. Calories count. Portion sizes matter. Dieting stinks! Making small, gradual changes to your lifestyle and eating habits is much more effective than

making sweeping overhauls. Healthy eating isn’t all or nothing. It’s what you do consistently, over the long haul, that matters most. Do the best you can most of the time and, once in a while, treat yourself so you won’t feel deprived. In fact, *make sure* you indulge every now and then! How’s that for “dieting” advice? We *need* comfort foods like chocolate, pizza, cheesecake, and ice cream. Those foods are happy foods, emotional foods. They stave off irritability, depression, and anxiety. Our brains need them. They make us smile.

Unfortunately, the concept of “moderation, balance, and variety” sounds pretty boring to most people. It’s not the latest Hollywood fad, it’s not sexy enough, scientific enough, effortless enough, or fast enough. Most people are looking for that instant, don’t-lift-a-finger, miracle ACME Blubber-Busting Solution that will magically obliterate fat (overnight, if possible!).

Which brings us to our next point: The truth is, if you want to lose weight, you’ve gotta eat less and move more. Sorry. Someone had to tell you and it might as well be us! There’s no easy way around it. If a revolutionary, miraculous weight-loss potion or formula actually existed, we’d be reading about it on the front page of every newspaper, no one would be overweight, and all those Sunday morning infomercial hosts would be out of jobs (no more Blubber-Busting Solution!). No matter how you dress it up or how you label it—low carb, low fat, high protein—in the final analysis, losing

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weight is about burning off more than you chew. (That's why we've included motivating little tidbits called The Ex Files to encourage you to make exercise a daily habit.)

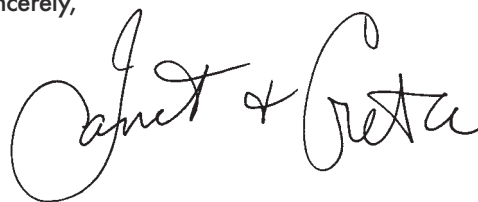
Sure, healthy living takes some discipline and commitment, but you're worth it, aren't you? If we were to achieve only one goal by writing this book, it would be to convince you that what you eat really does matter. We'd be thrilled to hear that you're taking better care of yourself and that you've made a commitment to eat more healthfully because of something we've said or written. Please feel free to contact us! We love hearing personal success stories from readers.

Since it was our dream to make *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!* the best cookbook we could possibly write, we spent two full years on it, sacrificed our social lives, and nearly drove each other crazy. We added Colin Erricson's fabulous food photos to each chapter, plus some cool stitching to the binding so your pages won't fall out when you're making *Chicken Teriwacky* for the 500th time.

We even used extra-special, super-high-quality paper so the book would feel good in your hands. We sweated the small stuff, big time, to make this book the best it could be, hoping our efforts and our words would motivate you to become the best you can be. (Yes, we sound like Oprah sometimes, but that's because we love Oprah!)

So, now that we're finally finished babbling, what are you waiting for? *Eat, Shrink & Be Merry!*

Sincerely,



Janet & Greta
Sisters, but not nuns



Our Polish mother, Alfreda, was thrilled about our new book but confused by the title.
"Eat, Shrink & Be Married! You girls are so funny!"