

# Roberta's Story

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Food has always played an important role in my life, first learning to cook and grow my own vegetable garden with my mother's guiding hand ... sharing (and as a teen often preparing) nourishing meals for our family table ... and savoring new food experiences from travel and the catering expertise of my extended family.

Never seeing food and nutrition as mutually exclusive areas of expertise, I chose to make them a focus of my career as a writer, educator, and consultant. From the start, the "total diet" has been my underlying message —and "the great tastes of good health" has been one of my taglines.

Like so many others, my career as a dietitian has taken remarkable, and some unexpected, directions ... nutrition curriculum design and implementation for Dairy Council, USDA/Team Nutrition, FDA, the National Science Teachers Association, and others ... handling food and nutrition marketing communications, recipe development, food styling, and translations ... working with diverse groups and cultural informants on multicultural nutrition projects ... appearing on national media as a spokesperson and serving as a newspaper and magazine nutrition columnist ... leading professional organizations such as the Food and Culinary DPG of the Academy, and the Global Culinary Initiative of Les Dames d'Escoffier ... addressing food and nutrition issues when speaking and conducting workshops around the US and Canada, and in Europe and Asia ... providing leadership in the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior and for James Beard Journalism Awards ... and authoring and co-authoring food and nutrition books for the public, secondary textbooks, and children's books. How blessed we all are to have a career with so much diverse opportunity!

Each opportunity has been its own career adventure, providing unique chances and needs for lifelong learning and for meaningful and different ways to apply food and nutrition knowledge and communication skills. And every project has required top professional priority, discipline, daily and weekly goals, and good client and editor relationships. When asked to name my best work, my answer has been, "The next one."

What has been my most daunting challenge -- and greatest satisfaction? The responsibility of writing an evidence-based book for the public that represents the Academy's positions, current Dietary Guidelines, the food marketplace, and key health issues—and that reflects and supports the best practices of our profession and members. I recall the challenge of crafting the first few words of the *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Complete Food & Nutrition Guide*, now 800 pages in its fifth edition. The strategy? Starting with a detailed 50-page road map (outline) and seeing each chapter as a single work (small task) until all 26 chapters could be neatly edited into a single, cross-referenced book. The satisfaction? The positive responses from my peers and the national award recognition for the book.

I've always seen food as a connector and a means to cultural understanding, learned from years of volunteering and parenting with international youth and cultural exchange. When people of different backgrounds gather around the table, their foods and foodways provide a comfortable place to start a conversation, often leading to broader and positive cultural experiences; food is, after all, the oldest diplomatic tool. Beyond that, striving for cultural competence is, in my view, a professional and personal imperative. The reason? We communicate more effectively when we can engage across and within cultures with respect, trust, and joy.

With all this stated, I am honored to have written two chapters – on culturally sensitive communication and on book authorship -- for *Communicating Nutrition: The Authoritative Guide*. And I hope this book will inspire other nutrition and health professionals, as others have inspired and mentored me.

*"Promoting positive nutrition and the great tastes of good health"*

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