

## Serendipity in “A Tale of Two *Sisters*”: Author Janet Podleski Inspires Entrepreneurs at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Raj Manek Memorial Banquet

On the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Raj Manek Memorial Banquet, guests were entertained and inspired by the keynote speech of Canadian entrepreneur, Janet Podleski. As serendipity would have it, it was also the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of *Looneyspoons*, the breakout, bestselling cookbook that launched Janet and her sister, co-author Greta Podleski, to fame (1996).

The Podleski sisters gave up “good jobs” to undertake a risky “secret project”—a cookbook that delivered both nutritional information and humour in the margins surrounding Greta’s delicious recipes. Greta was the genius cook; and Janet, the talented marketer and writer.

Part of the success they achieved came from their refusal to let barriers stop them—Greta had “no formal culinary training,” and neither of them “any food industry experience, publishing experience or money.” Still, they cashed in their savings and RRSPs to launch the project, working 14 months without income. It was a long haul that saw them spending \$10K in groceries over eight months, cooking five or six meals per day, so that every day felt like they were labouring over “Christmas dinner.”

By the time they developed a draft of the book, they were \$80K in debt, “owed everyone” money and had “three credit cards . . . racked to the limit.” At times, both sisters felt desperate and ready to give up.

All of the eight American publishers whom they sent their cookbook refused it, saying that it was “not suitable” for mixing food with humour. But Janet and Greta persevered, knowing in their gut that their book “would change people’s lives for the better, if [they] could only get it on store shelves.”

A watershed moment came when Dave Chilton (of *The Wealth Barber* fame) agreed, on the advice of his mother (herself a good cook), to “help those girls publish their book!”: Mrs. Chilton had declared that their recipes provided not just the “best *healthy* food” she’d ever eaten, but “the best food, *period!*” Dave provided the funding and the experience with publishing that the sisters needed.

In Canada, a book must sell 10,000 copies to become a “bestseller.” But between the autumns of 1996 and 1997, *Looneyspoons* sold 325,000 copies, holding the number one spot on the Canadian bestseller list for 85 consecutive weeks! Three other, successful cookbooks followed.

Janet maintains that the “secret recipe” of the sisters’ books was their humour—saying that she and Greta “dreamed in puns.” Some of recipe titles are “Jurassic Pork,” “Tuna Turner,” “Mission Shrimpossible,” and “Celine Dijon Chicken.” The books also feature hilarious cartoons by Toronto’s Ted Martin.

Facing the banquet hall’s entrepreneurs, Janet squared her lively, brown eyes on us and concluded: “Anything is possible if you follow your heart, listen to your gut and leave room for a little serendipity and synchronicity.”

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