



## Lulu's Story: Healing My Heart

The year 2018 was a major turning point for my health. I had a massive heart attack. The pain in my chest was so severe, it felt as if someone was squeezing my heart and trying to pop it.

When the EMT arrived, I was in such bad shape, he said, "Honey, why did you wait so long to call?" He picked me up and got me into the ambulance. It was the scariest ride of my life. After stops at several hospitals, who could not admit me, I was finally admitted at Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa. The medical team told me my heart was dying and that I wouldn't survive open-heart surgery.

The hospital contacted some of my family members who arrived at the hospital. I thought it was the end for me and I told them all how much I loved them. Miraculously, the medical team figured out a way to save my life. Instead of the heart surgery, the cardiologist was able to insert four stents (tubes that can keep arteries open).

In 2019, I lost my partner and love of my life, John, in a tragic accident. He also had health issues and we had always been there for each other. We really were soulmates. Soon after his death, I lost my mother, two of my aunts and my uncle. The sense of loss was overwhelming. It was emotionally draining. Later that year, I ended up in the hospital because one of my stents had moved and I also had a COPD attack. I was extremely malnourished. By December, I had lost my home in American Canyon. I was now a disabled and homeless senior

citizen. I only had enough money to rent a single room in Santa Rosa.

In 2021, I ended up in the hospital again due to another COPD attack. While in the hospital, I learned that I also had diabetes. They were going to release me, and I had no idea how I was going to take care of myself. I shared my predicament with a nurse and was so grateful when she connected

me with Food For Thought. I qualified for FFT's Medically Tailored Meals Program, which provided meals and nutrition counseling to Medi-Cal patients with congestive heart failure. The program made a big difference in my recovery process. It is amazing that FFT has a dietitian on staff to

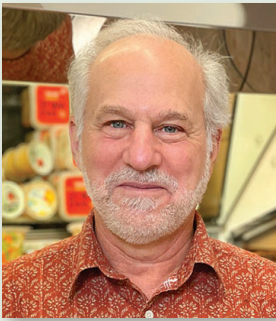
provide nutrition counseling, ensuring that clients get the right foods for their condition.

The meals were portion-controlled, which is important for me. With diabetes, a spike in insulin could be deadly. When I left the hospital, my blood sugar was at 397, but since receiving the medically tailored meals, it has dropped to 150. Food really is medicine for me.

Food For Thought takes care of me on an emotional, physical and mental level. I really appreciate the client services team. Carlos, the client services assistant, is like a ray of sunshine. He is always so kind and patient and really cares about my health. I look forward to connecting with him. Recently, I was able to transition to FFT's new Meals That Heal Program. I look forward to continuing to work with FFT's team to help heal my heart.

*"It is amazing that FFT has a dietitian on staff to provide nutrition counseling, ensuring that clients get the right foods for their condition."*

Meals That Heal is a free meal program open to any Sonoma County resident on Medi-Cal who also has a qualifying medical condition including congestive heart failure, kidney disease, HIV/AIDS, severe malnutrition or cancer. For more information, contact Client Services Director Nina Redman at [NinaR@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:NinaR@FFTfoodbank.org) or (707) 887-1647 ext. 119.



## A Message From Ron . . .

Isn't it hard to believe we are two years into the COVID pandemic?

Despite the difficulties we faced, Food For Thought increased our services from 1,000 to 6,000 clients per year over the past two years! This was possible because of an unprecedented level of support from our community. Donors gave generously, volunteers helped us deliver to clients all over Sonoma County, local businesses and charitable foundations increased their support, and the County of Sonoma funneled emergency funds to us for our COVID-19 Nutrition Program.

As COVID recedes, we are expanding

*“Whether you make a gift, volunteer or donate food, your help makes a difference!”*

outreach to enroll more clients in our programs. We created two new programs last year, the Oncology Program serving people

in treatment for cancer, and the Full Belly Program, serving pregnant mothers and their families (see Full Belly spotlight on page 4). Our Full Belly Program will directly address food insecurity during pregnancy, an intervention that will greatly improve health for the mother and newborn child. Giving these infants and families a healthy start in life will strengthen our entire community.

To our donors and volunteers: your support is the reason we are able to provide services for the most vulnerable members of the Sonoma County community. We hope to continue to expand our high-quality “food is medicine” services, as there are many more people in need throughout the county. Whether you make a gift, volunteer or donate food, your help makes a difference!

I'm feeling cautiously optimistic that COVID infections will continue to decline, so that we can fully open our doors to clients and the public soon. We miss you!

In service,

Ron Karp, Executive Director

# Ways to Give

Here are some ways you can help provide food + love to more than 6,000 of our Sonoma County neighbors in need:

## Make an Online Donation

You can easily make a tax-deductible gift to Food For Thought on our website: [FFTfoodbank.org/take-action](https://fftfoodbank.org/take-action)

## Donate Food

We could use your help keeping our shelves stocked with healthy food for our clients. If you are able to drop off any of these items at FFT, we would greatly appreciate it: **Peanut Butter, Spaghetti Sauce, Olive Oil, Whole Wheat Crackers and Saltine Crackers.**



To drop off food, please come to the parking lot and speak with one of our food bank clerks. The address is:

**6550 Railroad Avenue  
Forestville, CA 95436**

If you would like to host a food collection, please contact [ChelseaP@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:ChelseaP@FFTfoodbank.org).

## Leave a Legacy

We ask you to consider leaving a legacy gift to Food For Thought. You can easily donate through your will, trust, insurance policy or retirement plan, at no extra cost to you. Your legacy gift will help feed our future neighbors in need in a profound and lasting way.



If you are ready to include a gift to Food For Thought in your will or trust today, head to [FreeWill.com/FFT](https://FreeWill.com/FFT) to get started with FreeWill, a free online tool that you can use to write a legal will in 20 minutes or less. Scan here:



## Questions

If you have questions about any of these ways to give, please contact **Karen Gardner, development director, at (707) 887-1647 ext. 102 or [KarenG@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:KarenG@FFTfoodbank.org)**

**Please support our Major Business Sponsors:**



Food For Thought is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation.  
Our Federal Tax ID is 68-0181095.



# From the Kitchen

## Eggplant Parmesan

This delicious baked recipe is sure to become one of your family favorites!

(Serves 4)

### Ingredients:

½ cup ricotta cheese  
6 tablespoons mozzarella cheese, grated  
¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese  
2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley, plus more for garnish  
1 eggplant, sliced into ½ inch rounds  
2 large eggs  
1 cup seasoned breadcrumbs  
Olive oil spray  
1 ½ cups marinara sauce

### Instructions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper, or coat with non-stick spray. Combine ricotta, mozzarella, Parmesan and parsley in a small bowl.

Break the eggs into a shallow bowl and scramble, and place breadcrumbs on a plate nearby. Dip the eggplant



slices in the egg, and then cover in breadcrumbs. Place on the baking sheet. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the eggplant has browned and softened. Remove from oven, and top each round with 1 tablespoon marinara sauce, then 1 tablespoon of the cheese mixture. Return to the oven, and cook for about 5-10 minutes, until the cheese has melted. Serve with remaining marinara sauce. Add parsley as a garnish.

## Food Is Medicine Concept Supported By Medi-Cal

This year, California's Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) took a monumental step in recognizing food as medicine. In January of 2022, DHCS launched California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal, (CalAIM), an initiative to transform the state's Medi-Cal program. Now, in addition to the traditional clinical services covered by their health insurance companies, Medi-Cal patients will have better access to social services, such as medically supportive food, housing support and other non-medical services.

"Through our work with the California Food Is Medicine Coalition (CalFIMC), an association of community-based nonprofit organizations providing medically tailored groceries and/or meals designed by a dietitian, Food For Thought helped advocate to ensure nutrition services are included as a CalAIM benefit," said Ron Karp. "This is really groundbreaking. Research shows that providing medically supportive food to



people with serious medical conditions helps to reduce hospital readmissions and improve health outcomes."

FFT is now contracting with Partnership HealthPlan of California, the only Medi-Cal provider in Sonoma County. Through a referral process, Medi-Cal

patients at risk of malnutrition will now be able to receive nutrition counseling and nutritious food from FFT.

"This is a significant shift in providing services to our most vulnerable residents," said Karp. "Delivering proper nutrition services to those in need along with other essential services will help ensure that Californians who need life-changing support actually receive it. FFT has been fighting food insecurity in Sonoma County for decades and we are very proud to be a part of this effort."





# Full Belly Program: Investing in the Future of Sonoma County

In the fall of 2021, Food For Thought launched its new Full Belly Program to provide support for clients who are pregnant and are at risk of malnutrition. “We want to support our clients’ overall health and ensure that they give birth to healthy babies,” said FFT’s Dietitian Nina Redman. “We offer nutrition education and groceries, enabling families to eat healthy during the pregnancy and for three months after the birth. We are happy to be able to invest in their health and our community by working with local health care partners who provide program referrals.” Currently, FFT partners with West County Health Centers (serving Sebastopol, Guerneville and Occidental), Petaluma Health (Petaluma and Rohnert Park) and Corazon Healdsburg (Healdsburg, Windsor, Geyserville and Cloverdale).

“Food For Thought’s Full Belly Program has been amazing for our clients. I have already connected about 30 pregnant patients at risk of malnutrition to FFT. Their response has been so positive. They really appreciate having healthy food delivered to their doorsteps. Shopping for groceries can be challenging when you are pregnant, especially if you have other children,” said Maria Hermosilla, Comprehensive Perinatal Service Program Manager at Petaluma Health. “I manage the intake process with pregnant patients and try to get a complete picture of their health, life circumstances and if they have any preexisting conditions. Being able to offer nutrition counseling and nutritious food to my patients that are struggling really helps. Knowing that FFT has a registered dietitian on staff puts me at ease. Nina is amazing. I love being able to offer my patients this valuable resource.”

Sarah Hollister, Perinatal Service Coordinator at West



“The Full Belly Program is wonderful! I appreciate the high quality of the food and access to all the healthy fruits and vegetables. The team at FFT makes sure that ordering and pick up goes smoothly. I have a large family and my newborn baby is just two weeks old. It is so helpful to have enough healthy food for everyone—especially now with the high cost of food and gas. It gives me peace of mind to know that my family is getting proper nutrition.”

— Grace, Full Belly Program Client

County Health Centers adds, “I love this program. We can provide families with support when they need it most. I had a patient who was having a tough time recovering after giving birth and she told me that she didn’t have the strength to make it to the supermarket. She was nursing her baby so neither of them was able to get the proper nutrition. We worked with the client services team at FFT to get her on the program and I am happy to report that she and the baby are doing much better.”

## Upcoming Events

### Food For Thought YOGA BENEFIT *summer series*

Join Elana Love, yoga teacher and Food For Thought's own Development Coordinator, for a summer yoga series, with all proceeds benefiting Food For Thought!



**Register Now!**  
**[FFTfoodbank.org/yoga](https://fftfoodbank.org/yoga)**

Tuesday, May 24, 2022 | 6:00 p.m. at Food For Thought  
Tuesday, June 7, 2022 | 7:00 p.m. at Bees N Blooms  
Saturday, June 25, 2022 | 10:30 a.m. at Ron Rubin Winery  
Saturday, July 9, 2022 | 10:30 a.m. at Landmark Vineyards  
Saturday, July 23, 2022 | 10:00 a.m. at Hook & Ladder Winery  
Thursday, August 4, 2022 | 7:00 p.m. at The Happy Dahlia Farm, LLC

Questions? Contact: [ElanaN@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:ElanaN@FFTfoodbank.org) (707) 887-1647 ext. 117

JOIN US FOR FOOD FOR THOUGHT'S ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

### Our Long Table AN EVENING OF FOOD, FRIENDS & MUSIC BENEFITING FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**Sunday, June 12, 2022 | 4:00 - 8:00 p.m.**  
**Vine Hill House, Sebastopol**

This fundraising gala will include local wine and beer, live music, a multi-course dinner by Park Avenue Catering, an exclusive live auction and a raffle! \$200 per person.

**RSVP ONLINE:**  
**[FFTfoodbank.org/OLT](https://fftfoodbank.org/OLT)**

**QUESTIONS? CONTACT:**  
**[KristenP@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:KristenP@FFTfoodbank.org)**  
**(707) 887-1647 ext.126**



Food For Thought’s mission is to foster health and healing with food and compassion.

**Food For Thought | (707) 887-1647 | [info@FFTfoodbank.org](mailto:info@FFTfoodbank.org) | [FFTfoodbank.org](https://fftfoodbank.org)**

