

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

*Kathleen Dempsey*  
**Crunch Time**

MY NAME IS KATHIE AND I'M AN ADDICT.

Actually I am recovered now but there was a time when I was dependent on a substance. It was a true addiction. I thought about it all the time. How and when I could have it again. I organized my days to provide opportunities to indulge.

It was a very specific craving. They had to be Mission brand stone ground white corn tortilla strips, not the triangular shaped ones. The salsa had to be Pace Picante Medium. My husband Marty and I would make special trips to Costco to buy them in foodservice quantities. A box containing three large bags of chips, and a half gallon of Pace.

I craved the salty crunch which was tricky to maintain, since we lived in the humid climate near Lake Michigan. Once a bag was opened, they wouldn't stay crisp for long. When the crunch was gone, the thrill was gone. That rarely happened because I could polish off a thirty-two ounce bag in a couple days. Although I filled up on chips, I still ate meals with my family so my consumption of them didn't send up any red flags. I diligently watched for signs they were onto me.

One day while doing housework I took a break to satisfy the gnawing need that didn't stop. I was sitting at the kitchen table hunched over a bowl of chips when in walked my son, Bryan.

"Mom, you're eating chips again? Do you think that's healthy?"

"Who are you, the nutrition police?" I snarled. "I'm just having a snack while I do your laundry."

"My laundry huh? The salsa stains don't belong to me. You're touchy!"

"I don't see why you're so interested in my diet, that's all." So they had noticed.

Chips were always on my mind. During a busy day of errands, I made an excuse to stop at home, leaving Marty in the car while I dashed in to retrieve a recipe so we could shop for its ingredients. Inside I rushed to the cabinet, grabbed the chips, devoured three handfuls, quickly dipping each crisp strip into the wide mouthed jug of tangy red elixir and stuffing it into my mouth. He knew what I was up to. I reeked of corn chips and picante when I got back into the car. A cloud of denial and self loathing hung over me.

To make it appear less excessive, I incorporated chips into many meals. I served them with our sandwiches at lunch. Our dinner menu was frequently a Mexican dish which dictated accompaniment of chips and salsa.

Dining out always meant a Mexican restaurant. There was only one in our town, La Seniorita. Taco Bell didn't count. I can only imagine trying to tear open enough of those hot sauce packets, my hands shaking with intensity. For variety we trekked to Hacienda Vasquez in a nearby town. Together, Marty and I ate two baskets of chips before dinner arrived. He was my co-dependent enabler in my substance abuse.

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Oddly my behavior didn't scream compulsion to Marty, who preaches moderation as the key to wellness. He and the children stood by me during this spell and mostly overlooked my strange behavior. I don't know why it started. There was no intervention and I didn't go cold turkey. It ran its course and gradually faded much to the surprise and relief of my family and me.