



gregory kallenberg/aa-s

Lo Whipple

aka Lotanga

Age: 39

Occupation: Austin metro marketing director for Whole Foods

Is Lo Whipple really your name?

No. My real name is Lorie, but don't call me that or they'll think my mother's in town. I got the name "Lo" when I was teaching art classes to 3- to 7-year-olds. They'd call me Miss Lo. "Miss Lo," "Miss Lo," "Miss Lo," so it kind of stuck.

Any relation to the Charmin toilet paper guy?

Unfortunately, no. That's why I had to pick up this Lotanga shtick.

Lotanga's primary purpose in life is what?

First and foremost to have fun. Secondly, kids don't like to eat right. I teach children how to eat well, nutritionally.

Is singing part of your act?

I would do it, but I have a horrible voice. I do wear fruit on my head. Basically, I take kids around each department. We start at the produce department, and I talk about fruits and vegetables, what "organic" means. Then we go to the seafood department and look into Simon the Salmon's mouth and look at his guts. We go over what protein is and the importance of calcium.

Why the hat?

Actually, I'm an artist, and I did a "Lotanga" block print (portrait). She was kind of an island woman. She and her hat of fruit kind of evolved into this real character, and here we are.

Do you find that your hat helps your message or scares the kids into submission?

Yeah, it can scare kids. Like I tried to give a baby a fruit leather, and he kind of shrunk away. But I think usually the kids like it because it's silly.

You're a big proponent of cheese. Why?

We go to the cheese section, and I show them big wheels of cheese, and they're really awed by that because they're so huge. We taste cheese, and I tell them where cheese comes from. But Lotanga is a big proponent of all things in this store.

Do you believe kids get enough cheese?

Kids like cheese. It's very rare when the kids don't enjoy eating the cheese or drinking the milk on the tour. We always give them string cheese because they can pull it apart. They have fun with it.

What would you like to see kids eat more?

Fruit, because it's a hassle-free snack for parents to give their kids. And there's a part of the tour at the end where we teach them how to make smoothies.

What would you say to a child to make her or him eat eggplant?

I would begin by talking about how funny the eggplant looks. Then we would slice it and go over the texture. They like looking at fish guts, so they'll eat strange things if you incorporate them with fun.

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You can see people staring. You can hear the giggles and whispers throughout Whole Foods stores in Austin, Texas. And why? "Just because I have fruit on my head!" says Lotanga (a character created by Whole Foods Team Member Lo Whipple).

Lotanga makes fun out of healthy foods. Through store tours, hands on tasting, recipe sharing and some funky, colorful headgear, Lotanga talks to kids about fruits and vegetables, what organic means, how Simon the Salmon is a good source of protein, how important calcium is to growing bodies, and more.

The object of her tour is to make foods fun, to get kids to try new things while exposing them to the word "nutrition," and to help inspire moms, dads and teachers to encourage kids to eat well.

Look for Lotanga in the pages of Whole Living Magazine starting next month. Here's a sneak peek recipe to get you and your kids into the kitchen and playing with your food. Lotanga says "adult supervision is a must" and probably a lot of fun too!

Hands On Trail Mix

A crunchy addition to lunch or great for an after-school snack.

- 1 cup favorite organic breakfast cereals
- 1/4 cup sesame seeds
- 1/2 cup peanuts
- 1/2 cup organically grown raisins and other dried fruits (papaya, banana, pineapple, apple, dates, mango)
- 1/2 cup shredded coconut
- 1/2 cup carob or chocolate chips

(most items can be found in bulk areas your natural foods store)

Mix together all the ingredients in a large bowl with your hands. Store for up to two months in an air-tight lidded jar.

