

in 2000 before taking jobs as a German translator and office manager at the automotive company ThyssenKrupp, a circulation clerk at the Baldwin Public Library in Birmingham, a certified English-as-a-second-language teacher, a perfume salesperson and doing various temp work. Later, she would devote her free time to researching food science and learning about martial arts, salsa dancing and sailing.

Howard is also a freelance writer and novelist who owns her own "wordsmithing" company, The Poignant Pen, where she provides book coaching and editing services. Last year, as part of her interest in international studies, she journeyed to Costa Rica for two months to immerse herself in the country's cuisine and learn the Spanish language. Now, just for fun, she's teaching herself to speak French.

And all that doesn't even take into account her current venture, a new product line of culinary media aimed at helping people explore healthy and creative cuisine dubbed The Cultured Cook.

"I've always been a fast learner and a fast reader," the 32-year-old Berkley resident said. "Plus, I live alone, so no one interrupts me. It gives me a lot of free time."

Howard's Cultured Cook products include her first cookbook, "Discover, Explore, Cook: Culinary Adventures in Your Own Kitchen"; cards filled with "Healthy Substitutions and Pantry Essentials" for smarter trips to the grocery store; a calendar celebrating the fresh fruits and vegetables each month has to offer; and lists of kitchen equivalents designed to make following recipes easier and more accessible.

Howard spends much of her time working on the Cultured Cook Web site, for which she writes all the material and takes all the photos. There, she shares an array of her favorite recipes, and

Howard's interest in cooking intensified in the past four or five years when she began studying the culinary traditions of countries all over the world. Using a combination of healthy eating and exercise via salsa dancing and martial arts, she dropped from a size 14 to a 4. It was a personal experience that played a major role in shaping her own approach to food education.

"The health food craze sometimes turns off moderate people," Howard said. "They're interested, but they don't want to be overwhelmed by it all. ... I just want to get people interested in cooking — to show them that it can be a fun, exciting adventure, not a

seeing how other people eat."

Shortly after kicking off The Cultured Cook last July, Howard enlisted Sherry — whom she described as "an awesome, super-creative textile artist" — for help designing and creating boutique tote bags for grocery shopping. Sherry promptly crafted about 25 funky, three-dimensional bags for sale on her daughter's product line, and now she is working on custom aprons and placemats to go with them.

Sherry, 69, of Royal Oak explained her creative process as being very simple and free-spirited. "I always start with the same canvas — a blank, pre-made bag

WOODWARD TALK, January 28, 2009 – 13A

— and then I just make whatever suits my fancy when I pull it out," she said.

Teaming up with Lisa has been a great experience for her, she said. Describing her daughter as motivated, positive and self-confident, Sherry was impressed by all the hard work she has put into The Cultured Cook in just six months' time.

"She's always doing exercise, always in a good mood. There are very few times when she's not upbeat," Sherry said. "I'm really lucky to have her as my daughter."

Lisa is focusing her abundant energy on making The Cultured Cook an all-inclusive culinary guide, one that encourages people to broaden their horizons by sampling healthier, more exotic dishes.

"I'm trying to tread the line of making things that are unusual, but not so unusual that people are afraid to try it," she said. "Because I don't want to just be a resource

for people who diet — I want to be a resource for everyone. It's a chance for me to combine all my interests in a way that's profitable to me and helpful to others."

Ultimately, she hopes her work will help contribute, as her Web site declares, to a population of more "knowledgeable nibblers."

"Culinary knowledge is a very needed thing right now," she said. "I would like to be able to reach out to the broader community to help people ... become more healthy while also getting involved in cooking in a very affordable, down-to-earth way. I think I could fill that void for people."

For hourly rates on Howard's food coaching service, to order any of her products, or for anything else on The Cultured Cook, visit www.theculturedcook.com.

You can reach Staff Writer Jeremy Selweski at jselweski@candgnews.com or at (586) 218-5004.