

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Meals & Money

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Aug 3, 2012)

One of the great sources for tips on money is Dave Ramsey (www.daveramsey.com). Most of my readers probably know of him or have already experienced money-saving benefits from his advice and variety of programs. Ramsey considers that “food is the biggest budget buster of all. I’ve wanted someone to create a practical solution to the “beans and rice, rice and beans” dilemma. Finally, *eMeals* has done it! Now thousands of my listeners subscribe to *eMeals* from Mealtimemakeover.com [<http://emeals.com/>]. You will save a ton of time and money. And at just \$5.00 per month, *eMeals* is a no-brainer!”

Ramsey also offers tips on how to cut your “food-budget fat” and enjoy doing it while still eating well (October 2008). The scenario is as follows:

“A particular family of two parents and two kids spends a whopping \$1,000 each month on food! Needing some quick advice to get that number down, the wife went to the community forums on My Total Money Makeover.com and asked for advice.”

Here’s a summary of what he offered with a few tips of my own slipped in.

- **Leave Some for Next Time**—Make larger meals that gives you leftovers for lunch. And make a lot from scratch; limit the amounts of desserts; and use cash that save at least 20% on your mealtime bill. This helps you eat out less because your meal is already waiting for you at home.

- **Now We're Cooking**—Ramsey asks, “Do you know how to cook? If not, then you'll never meet your goal.” Start with using raw ingredients to prepare your meal. That means you don't buy pre-made spaghetti, pizza, etc. And bake your own bread. It's tastier and healthier. Keep in mind, the more work you do yourself, the less things will cost . . . such as \$5 for pizza ingredients versus \$15 delivered.

- **Just Say No**—When you run out of something, like chips, before the end of the month, be without for the rest of the month. The same for many of your groceries items. Whatever is left, eat that. When you meal plan, buy less convenience foods, and do home cooking you will save loads of money. The lesson in this is you will have enough money when you learn to say “no” and stay on budget.

- **Stay Away From Snacks**—The cost for snacks such as chips, cookies, granola bars, fruit snacks, and popcorn can send your budget over the edge. Go for healthy snacks that are less expensive than sweet, salty, fatty snacks. The cheapest route is no snacks at all. You won't starve, but you'll save money. You may even lose some unwanted weight.

So, check out *eMeals* and look for tips that point you in the direction of healthy, whole foods, and ways to make mealtime preparation more efficient and

fun for the whole family. Your young children will be growing up so fast before your eyes. So, make meals together and share in making memories they will take with them throughout their lives.

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Mealtime Restaurant Style

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Aug 10, 2012)

According to a LivingSocial Dining Out Survey, conducted by Mandala Research (September 2011), almost 5 meals per week are eaten at your favorite restaurants. That means the national average included .836 were sit down breakfast meals, 1.522 carryout lunch, 1.044 sit down lunch, 1.378 sit down dinner, for a total of 4.78 meals.

Well, last night my husband and I ate at one of our favorite restaurants, The Creek, right here in Boerne, Texas. Not only is it a great atmosphere of the white table cloth variety, but the food is excellent. Two of our favorite dishes is their Rib Eye and Grilled Chicken Breast in Lemon Sauce & Capers. Although we seldom eat beef, we go for the Rib Eye as a real treat for us.

And yes, we share the dish, and there is plenty for us both. The cost then stays within our waistline and budget, even with the \$5 split charge. They also have mixed wild rice and mushroom that is delicious and routinely request in place of potatoes or other starchy complements. Yet, I must confess their wild rice dish they had before with almonds and tomato slices was the best we have ever tasted. Just forget that butter may be part of the menu as well. That's just fine, if like us who's home mealtime routine is low salt/sugar/fats and high on

whole foods, you only do this once in a great while. But I bet you can find other dishes that are a fit for your routine.

Now that your mouths are drooling, maybe you should give The Creek a try for yourself (119 Staffel Street, Boerne). Take in the atmosphere, the view, and find your own favorites and enjoy every bite. And for those history buffs, here's a little history gleaned from their website

(<http://www.thecreekrestaurant.com>) on the actual location and building structures where The Creek serves their patrons.

"The Creek Restaurant, nestled on the bank of Cibolo Creek, was originally created by combining two 19th century residences, since then it has gone through several remodels and expansions. One of the original structures, formerly called Cibolo Blue Heron, was the baggage depot for the Encinal Train Station and dates back to the 1870's. Given the age of the original structures, they would both qualify for listings as Texas Historic Buildings.

Cibolo Creek itself, has gone through a number of name changes since being called "Xoloton," by the Coahuiltecan Indians during the 1600's. In 1716, Domingo Teran de los Rios named the creek "San Ygnacio de Loyola." Later in 1721, during the expedition of the Marques de San Miguel de Aguayo, it became known as "Arroyo del Cibolo" or "Rio Cibolo." Finally, it was referred to as "Cibolo Creek" on a list of sites for potential posts to solidify Spanish claims in Texas.

Permanent settlement along Cibolo Creek was delayed until after the annexation of Texas to the United States. In the late 1840's and early 1850's, the

community of Tusculum, later known as Boerne, was established in honor of Ludwig Borne, a German poet and publicist.”

Now I realize that not all my readers will relate to the white table cloth type restaurants. We all know that variety is the spice of life. And believe me, there are times when my husband says, “Let’s go out to eat.” And what does he mean that day? The nearest Whataburger Fajita Chicken Taco!

My husband’s variety picks seem to fit parts of the stats from the LivingSocial Survey on dining out. Nearly half of respondents considered themselves "meat lovers," 22 percent have a "sweet tooth," and 19 percent are "fast food junkies." On the flip side, 18 percent described themselves as "health nuts," and five percent as "vegetarians or vegans.” Then there is 35 percent who consider themselves "experimental eaters," 25 percent as "foodies," and 11 percent as "locavores," which means lovers of local food.

Sixty-five percent favor Italian cuisine, 62 percent Mexican, 59 percent Chinese and 58 percent choose pizza. When asked what new type of restaurant they most recently tried, Thai was on the top, winning over 25 other cuisines. As you can imagine from these stats, variety seems to be the case for us humans, collectively speaking that is. So, in the next article we will venture to another restaurant my husband and I have on our favorites list, of the oriental variety.

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart. . .

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Mealtime Restaurant Style, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Aug 17, 2012)

What is your favorite cuisine and restaurant? From the previous article, you can only imagine how many choices we all have, even in a fairly small community. There are the ever present fast food ones, such as Whataburger, Sonic, and the like. Then you have the more casual franchises, like Chili's.

Yet, there is always something special about a local restaurant that you can only find in your town or maybe one other in a neighboring community. We all know that there are a few that definitely need help with their menu and their hygiene, but there are those that are special indeed.

Here are just a few in my Boerne community that are on the top of my list, alongside The Creek covered in the last article. . . . Cypress Grille, Hungry Horse, Soda Pops, Dodging Duck, and Bear Moon. There is another that has only been here one year now, The China Bowl. My husband and I love Chinese or oriental food. We have been looking for one that knows how to make more traditional dishes and have the vegetables cooked just right. Often times, there is too much meat and very sparse vegetables in dishes. The vegetables are also often not fresh and are over cooked. The variety of vegetables are also very

limited for western tastes. We love Bok Choy, all kinds of Chinese cabbage, etc. And rarely find it in many Chinese restaurants.

We found a winner though at China Bowl. The vegetables are very fresh with lots of variety. I really enjoy their Moo Shu dish. And they will replace Pork with Chicken when asked. And add more cabbage and garlic too. Yet, being that the owners are Chinese themselves, I believe, you need to be respectful of their preferences to not request too many changes with their dishes.

In my experience, there seems to be a tradition with certain owners to maintain their dishes as offered. I am sure there are several reasons why this is the case, from the way the kitchen is organized and foods are prepared, cultural differences, to just personal preferences by the owners and chefs. Regardless, China Bowl has become a very nice addition to our community's cuisine choices.

We have one little secret we sometimes do when we go to restaurants we like. We bring with us certain spices and condiments we love to "kick it up a notch." We try not to offend the chefs nor owners the best we can. So, we very carefully conceal those little additions while tossing them into the dishes we order. So, I ask that you keep this little secret to yourself. Right?!! And I bet some of you out there do exactly the same too!

In the next article, I will be interviewing one our local restaurant owners for a personal glimpse into his culinary world and whimsy. So, stay tuned!

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also

welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Mealtime Restaurant Style . . . Little Gretel

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Aug 24, 2012)

One of the great things about mealtime, restaurant style, is the variety you have in just about any community, big and small. And in the smaller communities, instead of just the big franchise eateries you have the privilege and opportunity to frequent home-grown, local restaurants. Have you tried the Little Gretel yet here in Boerne?

Well, you will be really pleasantly surprised at all the recipes at Little Gretel with that “Old World” flair. And it’s not just sauerkraut and sausage either! You have got to see what is on the menu to get a glimpse into the variety and unique culinary options you have to choose from.

One of Boerne’s heritages comes from the Germans who immigrated here to start a new life in the Texas Hill Country. It is quite fitting to have a German style restaurants in our midst. To give you a glimpse into this “Old World” cuisine, I decided to interview the owner of the Little Gretel, Denise Mazal. Here is what she offers and invites you to say hello when you visit this unique addition to Boerne’s restaurant scene.

Sharon: Thank you Denise for the opportunity to get to know you and your offerings for *Mealttime, Restaurant Style*. What got you started in the restaurant business?

Denise: My heart has been in the restaurant business most of my life. Ever since I was a little girl, I was fascinated by all aspects of the food industry. Following in my mother's footsteps, I learned to be creative by looking, tasting and preparing a wide variety of culinary foods.

Sharon: When and how did you get started with Little Gretel?

Denise: The vision of Little Gretel came to fruition when my daughter, Veronica, approached me a few years ago and encouraged me in opening a restaurant where she could apply her knowledge after having managed the front of the house for other restaurants. Combining this idea with my expertise in the kitchen, together we conceived Little Gretel.

Sharon: What inspired you to create the restaurant layout?

Denise: The layout of Little Gretel was not created overnight. By traveling throughout the United States and abroad over many years, a whole lot of ideas were funneled into one. From the colors of the interior and matching textures and textiles, we slowly progressed into combining what would be visually pleasing to the eye. This and the fact that we live in a German town, we wanted it to be European and attractive and accepted by the community.

Sharon: What motivated you to choose what's on the menu?

Denise: It was apparent that we had to combine the favorite American food with the traditional German and authentic Czech cuisine. The German portion was to satisfy that country's dishes; the Czech recipes to foment my heritage.

Sharon: What qualities and qualifications do you look for when hiring your employees?

Denise: Professionalism is our main goal. In the kitchen we look for individuals who are experienced with the ability to produce and present Little Gretel's dishes. Our servers must be knowledgeable, well presented and courteous. All of the above must be team players and produce a hospitable environment.

Sharon: How has your restaurant evolved since its opening?

Denise: We are very fortunate to have accomplished our goals. We are continuously striving to better ourselves; and through positive (and negative) comments, we take immediate action. Our growth has evolved through repeat customers, advertising and word of mouth.

Sharon: What do you see for the future?

Denise: Our "crystal ball" tells us to continue to strive and perfect what we have accomplished so far and to look forward with what we consider to be one of the leading restaurants in Boerne. We cannot take anything for granted. We must continue to move forward!

Sharon: Thank you Denise for your vision and dedication to bring the Little Gretel to Boerne. And for all my readers out there . . . isn't it time to say hello to Denise at the Little Gretel? Be sure to tell her you read her story about the restaurant from the Boerne Star *From the Heart* byline.

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.

From the Heart. . .

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Mealtime Restaurant Style . . . Hungry Horse

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Aug 31, 2012)

As mentioned previously, one of the great things about mealtime, restaurant style, is the variety you have in just about any community, big and small. And in the smaller communities, instead of just the big franchise eateries you have the privilege and opportunity to frequent home-grown, local restaurants. Here's another restaurant plus catering Boerne loves . . . Hungry Horse.

The Hungry Horse Restaurants started in 1983 by owner and creator Steve Artale. Steve has been recognized for his passion for excellence by the Boerne community with the "Best Business of the Year" multiple times, plus his contributions through many charities and non-profit organizations. With so much heart Steve has put into the community, I just had to hear his story.

Sharon: Hello Steve. Thank you for the chance to sit down and chat about your love of food, your restaurant, and people. *What got you started in the restaurant business?*

Steve: I was an athlete in the military for four years and traveled all over the world. I then made a decision to get out of the military because it was a hardship tour and didn't want to be away from my wife. But before I got out, I didn't really know what to do with my life. I was at a crossroads. I majored in

Sociology, minor in Psychology. I was really having a hard time and didn't really have any job skills. So, I was out for a run with a buddy, and he noticed I didn't look so hot. So, I was talking to him about it. He said, "You know, you love to cook and entertain. Why don't you go into the restaurant business?" I asked, "how do I do that?" He said, "I have a job waiting tables at this restaurant, Steak and Ale."

So, finally I had some direction. I got out of the service and got a job as a busboy at the Steak and Ale. Then I found out I was good at it. But I decided if this is what I was going to do I might as well learn everything from the bottom up. I learned to bus, prep, be a lunch steak cook, bartender...I did every job. I then took my first management job at the New Braunfels Smokehouse. I knew absolutely nothing about managing. The owner gave me the keys and said "good luck." And through the school of hard knocks I ran that place for five years. I then took a managing job at Fuddruckers. From there I made my decision to go out on my own. Some of my friends I was in the military with and I wanted to start a business. So, we decided to put a restaurant together. We raised about \$110,000 and opened up our restaurant in 1983.

Sharon: *When and how did you get started with Hungry Horse?*

Steve: We started with Hungry Horse in 1983. Getting the name was difficult. We had investors and no one could make a decision. We finally threw a name party. We had to pick ten names. One girl had been to England, and there was a white table cloth restaurant called the Hungry Horse. It did not get picked as best name, but it had the highest score. So, we ended up picking that name,

and it started us in our career. We started out with a very limited menu. It was very hard. We came close to running out of money. Our turning point was at the 1 ½ year mark. I went without any salary for a year and a half. I would say the only reason we made it in the restaurant business was because my wife worked and we lived on her salary. Then we did really good for 8 ½ years. We made enough money to purchase a second restaurant ten years later, in 1993.

Sharon: *And it was called the Hungry Horse?*

Steve: Yes. We had two Hungry Horse restaurants in San Antonio. By that time, I had moved up to Boerne to live. For eleven years I commuted to both restaurants. One day I drove all the way through traffic and got home. There was my wife and two daughters ready to go out to eat in San Antonio. My wife then rolled her eyes and said, "Why do we not have a restaurant in Boerne?" I said, "I don't know." About a year later I was in a court case, up on the second floor, looking out the window. The building I was looking at had a for lease sign.

It took two years to convince the owner to sell it to me. And that is how we started here in Boerne, about 2001 or so. Usually an opening for a restaurant, you have a honeymoon period of, say, three months, maybe six months. We went on a year and a half run. It was unbelievable! The business was great, and people were hugging me and thanking me for opening up the restaurant. We were one of the first few places open seven days a week from 11 to 9. We were a full scale, family restaurant that could serve everyone's needs at one time. I was making more money on one store than the two in San Antonio. That's when we sold the other stores; and all my businesses were here, where we also run a

catering business. This January 2013 will be 30 years in business. I am proud of three things...staying in business for 30 years. Never missing a payroll, and staying married to the same girl for 39 years.

Sharon: As you described what you have done at your Boerne location, *what inspired you to create the restaurant layout?*

Steve: Some of the restaurant layout was due to the sport I did when I was in the military. One of the events I did was equestrian jumping. The name lends itself to it. I used original jumps I got from Fort Sam, and we set them up just like regular jumps. But over the years, our theme has been more about family. And we probably did a better paint job here because my wife was involved in that.

Sharon: *What inspired you to choose what's on the menu?*

Steve: My wife and I grew up in families where we cooked all our meals, especially the dinner meals. When we were stationed at Fort Sam, no children, we ate out a lot because of our schedules. And every place you would go you could get a hamburger or steak, then baked potato or French fries, and a salad. We wanted something that was a full scale meal. Eating out a lot we would grab ideas of what we liked. Our menu has grown over the years primarily because of our customers' needs. But we have a really good mixture. Dad can get a steak. Mom can get a salad. Teenager can get a cheeseburger. The little brother can get a mini corndog or macaroni and cheese.

Sharon: *What qualities and qualifications do you look for when hiring your employees?*

Steve: In the restaurant business to be successful . . . hot food hot, cold food cold, and smile at your customers. And that is not something you can teach. You need to have people that care. If they care, you can teach them those three things. If they don't care, you can never teach them that.

Sharon: *As you have described earlier, do you have any more to add on how your restaurant has evolved over the years?*

Steve: Probably the most is my own personal needs . . . how I have changed my eating habits...watching my kids grow up, and their friends' eating habits. When we find that people want something, we put that on our menu. We try to meet everyone's needs.

Sharon: *What do you see for the future?*

Steve: I see us continuing to grow the catering business, which also helps our sales here. But we see our biggest growth in our catering business with all types of catering . . . weddings, businesses, everything from breakfast, lunch, dinner, small groups, large groups, catering people's home, large family picnics and festivals. We do just about anything that is a need from our customer base. We see an expansion in our webpage and Facebook. And I will continue to always market through schools, churches, and charities. The cash we tend to give out we give to schools, churches, and charities. It's a good feeling to give to a group that will make a difference in our community.

Sharon: *Any other comments you would like to add? Something you would like to say to my readers?*

Steve: Boerne is a great community to live, work, and I hope I can retire here too. I just love this community. It just has great people.

Sharon: Thank you Steve for giving us a great glimpse into your life and work on behalf of the Boerne community and the Texas Hill Country. And offering such friendly atmosphere and food for us all straight from the heart. And for all my readers out there . . . be sure to say hello to Steve at the Hungry Horse. Tell him you read his story from the Boerne Star *From the Heart* byline.

Sharon L. Benedict, is a speaker, author, and weaver, and loving it! She is available for speaking engagements, free-lance writing, and will even weave you a one-of-kind creation, just for you. Sharon also welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com. Visit her website at www.celebratingyourjourney.com.