

# *From the Heart. . .*

## *. . . Lifeskills for Today*

*By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC*



### **Mealtime Memories**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 5, 2011)

“When I walk into my kitchen today, I am not alone. Whether we know it or not, none of us is. We bring fathers and mothers and kitchen tables, and every meal we have ever eaten. Food is never just food. It's also a way of getting at something else: who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be.” What a remarkable statement made by Molly Wizenberg, author of “A Homemade Life: Stories and Recipes from My Kitchen Table (2009).”

At first, you may think the connection is obvious. But really is it? When you sit down at a restaurant or your dinner table and take your first bite, what is your first thought? Could it be that you are more in the moment enjoying the food and company than anything else? Yet, if we really give some extra thought in that moment, we just might remember something more. For me, it was how much Dad loved his t-bone steak and potatoes. The memory also had attached to it times when Dad would come home late with too much to drink and demand his steak at 9-10pm at night just as my sister, brother, and I were going off to bed.

There were other more pleasant memories, such as with Mom's mandarin orange Jell-O salad. Although I was never partial to Jell-O, I remember she was always smiling and happy when serving one of her favorite dishes. Then there were those

barbeque weekends where Dad would heat up the grill for steaks on a Sunday afternoon. During those times, he wasn't drinking and had a welcoming smile for us. His anger seemed to melt away on those days. In later adult years, many more fonder memories around the dinner table made up for those sadder childhood times.

No matter what our childhood or adult experiences might have been, mealtime is intimately connected to an array of recollections—fond and joyful recollections as well as hopefully only a few sadder ones. What memories surface for you at the dinner table last night or that picnic at the lake you had last month? For your young and adult children, take this opportunity to ask them this question. Be ready and willing to hear their memories without judgment or being defensive. And be sure to thank them with a hug for sharing their recollection as they saw it. With an open heart and mind, you will be amazed at what you hear. Their recollection may just spark a desire for you to make some changes for the better and reaffirm those happier memories with your next mealtime gathering.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Time Use Survey (2010), Americans spend just under two hours per day in eating, drinking, including food preparation & clean up. Let's keep in mind Wizenberg's words. "Food is never just food. It's also a way of getting at something else: who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be." Within that short span of time, you and your family have an opportunity to be together to make mealtime memories that demonstrate your love and care for one another. Whether at breakfast, lunch, or dinner . . . at home or restaurant, begin to capture special moments to be forever remembered and cherished.

May those memories be held near today and through the years when a smile is given, a safe haven offered, and forgiveness is needed. As J.R.R. Tolkien's Hobbit story describes, may your home be a pleasant mixture of them all—"His house was perfect, whether you liked food, or sleep, or work, or story-telling, or singing, or just sitting and thinking, best, or a pleasant mixture of them all."

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### **Mealtimes that Mend Fences**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 12, 2011)

For any of us who sit down to a meal when angry, we all know what it does to not just our digestion but our relationships of those sitting next to us. So, how can mealtime actually be a way to restore relationships? Whether mending fences involves simply a splitter or two, or a major reconstruction, sharing a meal can go a long way to resolve many a disagreement.

Throughout history meals have been an integral part of welcoming strangers and sustaining relationships within families, friends, and nations. And for many cultures, sharing meals is a sacred gathering. According to an ancient Buddha saying, “If you knew what I know about the power of giving, you would not let a single meal pass without sharing it in some way.” For the Hebrew and early Christian, offering a meal to a stranger or even a supposed enemy was encouraged under many circumstances—such as with Hebrews 13:2 (ampl). “Do not forget or neglect or refuse to extend hospitality to strangers [. . . being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously], for through it some have entertained angels without knowing it.” What a meal that would be—knowing you entertained angels!

So, in all your daily routines at work and home, who do you feel needs some hospitality and meal offering to help mend fences in your relationship? And what about

your motive for the invite? Are you just trying to win them over to your side or fix them? If your attitude is one of humility and hospitality with a listening heart, then the invite might just be accepted.

Give some thought about what environment your guest(s) may feel most comfortable. What are their favorite foods? And keep in mind to be upfront about the invite so your prospective guest(s) won't feel ganged up on with some hidden agenda. Be willing to relax and go with the flow. There is always a way to disagree agreeably while learning to enjoy each other's company. You might end up with a friend for life. You never know until you try.

Just as with the family meal, your meal offering is an opportunity for sharing, generosity, thoughtfulness, and a talent for civilized conversation. Even if the conversation becomes more serious, with a sustained humble and open attitude, the meal will be not only enjoyable but memorable for both host and guest(s). So, the next time you have a battle with the boss or end up gnashing your teeth about your neighbor, consider the possibility of inviting them to a peace offering meal together. But make sure you leave behind your "I'm right, your wrong, and I'm going to fix you" mindset. Your mealtime together will then have the greatest chance to not only mend fences but also bear sweet, surprising fruit instead of sore grapes for everyone.

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# *From the Heart...*

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## **Kids in the Kitchen...who's teaching them?**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 19, 2011)

Remember back when you were about six years old or close to that age. What favorite food did you help Mom or Dad prepare? Or was the kitchen a taboo place for you? Were your parents too busy to have you join in?

With our fast paced world we live in giving time for cooking at home seems to be a rare moment today. With fast food just around the corner and frozen meals available at your local grocery store, why even try. You may say, "My life is so hectic at work and home, I don't have time to involve my kids. I just want to get the food on the table, eat, and clean up before the night is over."

Are you also one of those parents who doesn't realize that your kids can help with the cooking from a very young age? The USDA and other experts offer a number of benefits for the whole family preparing meals together as you have your kids join in. They emphasize that kids in the kitchen doesn't create a recipe for disaster. There are many good reasons for involving your children in food preparation:

- Provides quality bonding time with our children
- Gives opportunity for kids to learn about and develop an appreciation for cooking
- More likely to eat new foods that they helped prepare
- Learn how to follow directions for recipes

- Develop math skills
- Encourages healthier eating habits
- Builds positive self image
- Rewards hard work and diligence
- Promotes eye-hand coordination
- Promotes a love for learning
- Fosters cooperation with others
- Encourages their imagination

The list goes on and on with all the wonderful benefits when cooking with your children. What other benefits can you think of you experienced as a child? With your own kids?

From toddlers just being allowed to stir or add items to the bowl to teens cooking a whole meal, every kid can help you in a variety of ways. With this weekend, begin to have your children join in on preparing a meal, with age appropriate activities of course. Make sure you let them offer ideas of their own that will be fun and healthy for all. Bring out one of your recipe books with lots of picture. Have your kids go through the book to see what recipes they would like to try with you.

If you want some extra help getting used to having kids in the kitchen, by all means visit your local businesses that specialize in teaching parents and kids how to cook. Boerne has two great resources, *Boerne Cooking Cottage*, and *Kiss the Cook*. Be sure to visit them both soon to get some great tips and helps. Take a class or two with your kids and on your own to add to the fun adventure with kids in the kitchen.

I leave you with these resources to check out. Have fun Mom and Dad stirring up all kinds of delight with your young ones. Time flies before you know it, and they are all

grown up and far away. Start today to build kids in the kitchen memories never to be forgotten.

Resources:

USDA, <http://snap.nal.usda.gov>, Tips for Involving Children in the Kitchen

Boerne Cooking Cottage, <http://boernecookingcottage.com>

Kiss the Cook, <http://www.kissthecooktx.com>

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## **Veggie Mealtime Camouflage**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 26, 2011)

Your kids come to dinner. You have slaved over the stove fixing them a fabulously healthy meal. What is set before them includes all the necessary food groups to keep them strong and healthy. But what you hear first thing is, “Oh Mom, not broccoli. I hate broccoli and won’t eat it!”

Well, there is hope. I recently interviewed Rose Mery, owner and home cooking instructor for Rose of Bella Rose. Rose’s passion embodies helping families, together, regain the art of home cooking and experience the wonderful benefits of healthy eating, and sharing the culinary adventure with their children.

One of her many talents is helping families create recipes that are not only healthy and wholesome, but also recipes their kids will love to help make and actually end up eating with gusto. I asked Rose to offer some tips for my readers to not only get the kids enthusiastically in the kitchen with them but end up immediately wanting to eat the very dish they helped create, and it even has broccoli in it!

As an expert for camouflaging those “avoid at all cost” cruciferous veggies such as cauliflower, cabbage, cress, bok choy, broccoli and green leafy vegetables here are some clever ways to bring both kids and parents back in the kitchen together and your kids first at the dinner table. My first question posed to Rose was—

1. What is the first thing you do when you step into your client's kitchen?

“I evaluate the work space and make sure it is fully functional for fast and easy cooking. I take inventory of unnecessary "dead foods". These are foods that are processed, boxed, canned, full of preservatives, and additives. I work alongside the family to help establish better eating habits, healthier food choices, and whenever possible to incorporate a variety of living foods. Such as fresh fruits, veggies, meats, etc. I then make sure the kitchen is well organized in order to establish a cooking friendly environment.”

2. How do you encourage your client to involve their child(ren)?

“I encourage my clients to make mealtime fun and, as much as possible, choose recipes that are kid friendly. Let the children take turns choosing recipes from magazines and cookbooks that they would like to try. My belief is the more the children are involved with the food preparation, the more apt they are to eat it. If my clients have more than two children, an assembly line can be helpful in putting together casseroles and lasagnas!”

3. What are your clients' favorite dishes that are wholesome and their kids love them as well.

“I Love this one! My clients’ favorite thing to learn to make is Middle Eastern Food. I have been making this since I was eleven and my recipes are from my grandmother who came over from Lebanon, and between her and my Mother they made sure that I learned how to cook at a very young age. Very recently, I was invited by a girl scout troop to come and introduce them to the Art Of Middle Eastern Cuisine and believe it or not, they gobbled this food right off their plates. Some of the children were a little

skeptical about eating the stuffed grape leaves when they found out they grew on a vine. It is always such a joy to see family and children gathered around the table eating healthy food together.”

4. What are the most common responses after teaching the parents and kids your home cooking techniques and recipes? Parents? Kids?

“Since all the food is made from scratch, The most common responses from the parents are that they can hardly believe how much their children are eating, the fact that they are actually eating fresh veggies, and how inexpensive it was to prepare. The children usually are excited and can hardly wait for their Mom to pull it out of the oven, knowing that they have had a hand in preparing it, and always say it is delicious! Most recently, a five year old was digging through her Chicken alfredo lasagna, looking for the fresh spinach she had put in just so she could taste it. Her mother was amazed!”

5. What would be your advice to my readers as parents on how to get started with healthy home cooking and having their kids loving it, together?

“I encourage parents to incorporate cooking ideas in their home. Talk to their children while grocery shopping about better food selections and choices. Setting out fruit in bowls is a great visual for kids to see while heading to the fridge. My friends that know me understand the minute I walk into a home, I want the cooking channel on. This is a standing joke whenever I show up! In their free time, I encourage children to cut out pictures of food from magazines in order to inspire them with ideas for cooking. The most important thing is to take the time to allow your children to be interested in helping you cook in the kitchen. Although it might take a little more time, in the long run it will pay off!”

You may contact Rose at [roseofbellarose@gmail.com](mailto:roseofbellarose@gmail.com) to learn more about her services and how she can help you and your family regain the gift of Mealttime together. Your family will actually have loads of fun learning how to cook healthy for a lifetime together, as you camouflage those "special" veggies your kids and even you have refused to eat. That is . . . until Rose shares the enchantment of seeing you and your kids loving those veggies!

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