

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Meals together—what a novelty!

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 6, 2010)

How many of us every week, maybe every day, grab something to eat on our way out the door or through a drive-up window? How about eating our lunch while driving down the freeway? Then add any number of cups of coffee for the day. What do you think this does to your digestion let alone your attitude toward mealtime? And when you get home, tired and hungry, what kind of routine mealtime do you experience?

Consider this statement: ***MEALS THAT ARE SHARED, TOUCH HEARTS THAT CARE!***

Yes, this phrase may sound a bite corny for some but nonetheless true for us all. “Touching Hearts” with meals . . . You’ve got to be joking?!” Does anyone sit down for a meal any more . . . we mean . . . together? Sadly, the first impression for most who would read this statement wish it was true for them. The second thing most of us would probably agree on is the fact that everything in our world has one word invisibly stamped across it—***HURRY!***

There are things to do, people to see, and deadlines to meet. So, where can we cut corners to cram more in? Who was it that determined getting “more in” is the desired goal? Undoubtedly the rise of fast food in the mid 1950s introduced us all to the “eat as you go” mindset. My hope is not to bring on any guilt trips here, but to challenge each of

us to examine the lost art of using mealtime as a valuable together time. Being together at the same place, at the same time around the same table is the goal. Contrary to logic this is not a simple task to carry off.

Here is another slightly poetic and true statement: ***EACH TIME YOUR FAMILY SITS DOWN TO A MEAL, A COVENANT OF LOVE & COMMITMENT IS CAREFULLY SEALED!*** What are your mealtimes like? Take a moment right now to write down your mealtime scenarios—breakfast, lunch, dinner. Describe what you consider a typical week day of meals for you and your family.

While most of us frequent the local restaurants, even have business lunch meetings, some parents just hand their kids lunch money to do whatever they want or assume their school cafeteria is going to supply reasonably healthy meals. For the average school, one only has to visit on any particular day to see what their kids have for choices. You may have the opportunity to make healthier choices at your local restaurant, but it is unfortunately not so at most schools in our nation.

During the infant and toddler years you may be able to control what they eat—until their eighth birthday (even sooner maybe)! Then the food fights begin in all earnest. From then on, the food of preference more likely will be whatever their friend's parents fix! Certainly not what is served at home!

Are the descriptive words you hear at meal time sound something like “Yuck”, or “Oh, Mom, not this again!” When will all your effort and care be appreciated? Well, the possibility is never; but it always feels better to be ever hopeful. Whether Mom and/or Dad do the meal planning and cooking, we all know we should provide the healthiest, nutritional meals possible for ourselves and throughout their growing years. But how

would you like to make it much more fun and appetizing for everyone? How do you want to change your mealtime routine? Reflect on the scenario you wrote down. Then try out in the next couple weeks two ways to enhance your mealtime together, making it more enjoyable for everyone. If you have already made mealtime a priority in your life, by all means tell me about it.

There are some hopeful signs of a mealtime together comeback that is moving family mealtime from being a novelty to a nurturing part of daily life. Now that's you have heard my perspective on mealtime, next time we will cruise through what experts say and some tips along the way.

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life wellness coach-consultant, specializing in life skills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

From the Heart. . .

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Meals together—what the experts say

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 13, 2010)

Over the decades, mealtime together has often been relegated to the “doing your own thing” category. Between long hours at work, running the kids to soccer, bringing the briefcase home for another hour of work to meet some deadline, the evening is pretty much gone. Spouse and kids are left to their own to figure out what to eat for dinner—and even seem to like it that way while watching TV or texting friends.

Yet, there are some hopeful comeback signs of a mealtime together, moving from being a novelty to a nurturing part of daily life. Let’s see what the experts say. Kim Leon, PhD and Leanne Spengler, *Missouri Families* Human Development Specialist with the University of Missouri Extension Division (<http://missourifamilies.org/>) encourage family meals to **foster togetherness, positive communication, meal preparation, and learning social skills.**

You may be asking the same question Leon and Spengler offer. “How can busy families find the time to have meals together?” Here are their answers:

- **Focus on being together** rather than creating an elaborate meal.
- **Start small** - try to find time to have one or two meals a week together at first.

- **Choose a meal that will fit with everyone's schedule** and occurs when children are calm and in a good mood. If evenings are the most difficult time, try breakfast, lunch, or brunch on the weekends as a regular family mealtime.
- **Have each family member be responsible for a task** (sharing the tasks—i.e. one person sets the table, one person cooks, one person prepares beverages, one person clears the table).

Another question is “How can families increase positive interaction and feelings about family meals?” First, ***gradually eliminate distractions, such as TV and answering machine; keep discussion on positive or neutral topics; and create a physical environment conducive to a positive dining experience (i.e. light candles, flowers on the table, playing soft music).***

The Texas AgriLife Extension summarizes the following tips with . . . ***cook together, eat together, talk together and make mealtime a family time!*** When planning meals, it is the parent’s responsibility to:

- Provide a selection of healthful foods
- Pick times for meals and snacks
- Offer a new food up to 10 or 11 times
- Be a good role model
- Create a positive atmosphere

The child’s responsibility is to:

- Pick which foods they want to eat
- Decide how much to eat

To make it fun, try one of these suggestions:

- Pick a color and offer foods of that color.
- Choose a letter and offer foods that begin with that letter.
- Cut food, such as sandwiches and cheese into fun shapes with cookie cutters.

Children need a snack between meals. But busy lifestyles can make it hard to ensure adults and children are eating healthful snacks. Texas AgriLife advises to be prepared to offer healthful snacks.

- Always take water with you. For flavor, add a slice of fruit or a splash of juice.
- Fill an insulated lunch box with fresh fruit, carrots, celery sticks, walnuts, yogurt or peanut butter on whole-wheat bread for snacks throughout the day.
- Keep snack-size bags of nuts or raisins on hand to satisfy hunger.
- If you must visit a fast-food restaurant, choose a grilled chicken sandwich with a side salad or a fruit cup instead of French fries.
- Snack ideas that combine two or more of the food groups: Yogurt topped with diced peaches or berries; whole grain bread spread with peanut butter and sliced bananas; graham crackers with yogurt; homemade trail mix of whole-grain cereal and dried fruit.

Check out a wealth of recommendations and resources for families through their Dinner Tonight! Program (<http://healthyliving.tamu.edu/>). In today's fast-paced world, the food budget of an average family is strained by eating out as well as the increase in proportion and calories when dining out. Texas AgriLife Dinner Tonight! Program encourages family mealtime to not only reduce the budget strain but also the waistline, and increase overall health of family members. This program also helps families who

may feel overwhelmed with the prospects of menu planning and trying to prepare healthy, cost-effective meals.

Kathleen Cuneo, PhD, founder/director of Dinner Together (www.dinnertogether.com), determines “family meals have been consistently demonstrated to be a robust protective factor for a number of health and mental health variables. Children and adolescents who eat meals regularly with their families have been shown to have better nutrition (Gillman et al., 2000), lower risk for depression and suicide (Eisenberg, et al., 2004), lower risk for disordered eating (Neumark-Sztainer, et al., 2008) and lower risk for substance abuse (CASA, 2007).” Despite these findings, today’s families face many obstacles to organizing family meals—from sports, music lessons, martial arts programs, working overtime. Then add picky eating habits (which are normal for children, even some adults) and poor table manners. Yet, when mealtime becomes a healthy, regular, and positive family experience, teens are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, or use marijuana and other drugs, and are more likely to have healthier diets as adults.

Children are curious and learn by watching you. So the USDA, in *Maximizing the Message: Helping Moms and Kids Make Healthier Food Choices*, offers a load of tips for starting them out young learning healthy eating habits from you and adopting family mealtime as adults. Check out the resources listed below and on my website to begin your family mealtime journey together.

And if you want to get some hands-on help right in the beautiful Texas hill country, visit the *Boerne Cooking Cottage* for children and adult classes, birthday parties, and more. Inspired by her young daughter, Chef Lauren Moore’s *Boerne*

Cooking Cottage provides a place where children can learn the joy of cooking and mealtime together. They will also learn the necessary sanitary, safety, math, science, and etiquette skills to make cooking and mealtime healthy and fun for the whole family. In the next article, I will be interviewing Lauren about her culinary journey and passion for helping bring back the art and heart of mealtime.

Resources:

Boerne Cooking Cottage, 140 East Bandera Rd. Boerne, TX 78006 (210) 838-6150,
www.boernecookingcottage.com.

Kids Health, http://kidshealth.org/parent/food/general/family_meals.html.

Texas AgriLife, Dinner Tonight! Program, <http://healthyliving.tamu.edu/>.

The Surprising Power of Family Meals, Mariam Weinstein. Steerforth Press. 2005.

USDA, Maximizing the Message: Helping Moms and Kids Make Healthier Food Choices. www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/Files/Guidebook.pdf.

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From the Heart. . .

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Mealtime with Lauren at Boerne Cooking Cottage

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, August 20, 2010)

This month's lifeskill, Meals, has focused on the value of mealtime together with family and friends. At a recent Wine Share Boerne!, sponsored by Hill Country Council for the Arts (www.HCCArts.org), I met Lauren Moore, owner and visionary of *Boerne Cooking Cottage*. I thought you would enjoy hearing from Lauren about her culinary journey and passion for helping bring back the art and heart of mealtime.

Sharon: Lauren, welcome to *From the Heart*. ***Please tell my readers a little about yourself and what brought you to Boerne and the Texas Hill Country.***

Lauren: I am a native Texan, born in Refugio. I lived there until I was 18 where I graduated Refugio High School. I attended University of Texas, Arlington, where I pledged Zeta Tau Alpha sorority and studied business marketing. I also cheered for the Dallas Cowboys for two years, 1991-1993. I worked in Corporate America as a sales representative for a Dallas Information Technology Consulting Firm for seven years with a San Antonio territory, and that's how my husband, Tommy, and I found Boerne.

The project manager lived in Boerne and told us how lovely it was. Tommy and I took a road trip through the Hill Country and fell in love with it, especially Boerne. So Tommy got a job working with Abbott Laboratories in San Antonio, I left Corporate

America, and we moved to Boerne in 2002. We love the schools; we love the people and beautiful scenery! Shortly after moving here, we became pregnant with our daughter, Ashlyn, who will be turning seven soon and attends Kendall Elementary.

Regarding my culinary passion, I come from a long line of great cooks. My mother is a personal chef in Fort Worth and passed on her love for cooking. I read cookbooks like reading an intense novel! I truly enjoy cooking, entertaining and sharing my love for cooking with my young daughter. Ashlyn loves to help me in the kitchen, mixing, stirring, kneading...anything to get her hands dirty! In late 2009, inspired by her eagerness to learn to cook, I opened Boerne Cooking Cottage to teach children to cook and also the joys that go along with cooking together!

Sharon: What key life experience sparked your passion for cooking and the culinary arts?

Lauren: Well, I can remember at about seven years old taking flower buds off our ornamental pomegranate shrub in our backyard and using an electric skillet in our garage to cook up a concoction only the bravest of brave would dare to try, but I'm not sure if that was my spark of interest! Seriously, my Mom did not want us to grow up food-illiterate; so every Sunday she would prepare gourmet meals so we could experience a broader palate.

Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter were HUGE cooking events. My Mom would work tirelessly on a menu and then from dusk to dawn put together a fabulous meal...these are fond memories on which I reflect. Also in my late teens/early twenties, I had a wonderful opportunity to travel to unique and foreign places where I was exposed to many different cuisines and fine dining.

I believe then I realized an interest and passion for cooking. I didn't really explore those interest and passions until I was newly married and wanted to provide my husband, family and friends that same "experience" my Mom had given us. I also found preparing a meal is truly my creative outlet.

Sharon: Besides gaining invaluable hands-on experience from your personal chef “Mom”, what direction did your culinary education and experience take you in starting Boerne Cooking Cottage?

Lauren: When my daughter was about seven months old, I wanted to work; but I was not interested in returning to Corporate America where the required traveling was not conducive to raising a young child. I thought..."what is it that I really enjoy doing?" Well, "cooking" was my answer. So I joined the Personal Chefs Network and began working at something I love to do.

I attended the annual meetings and received education from other personal chefs regarding culinary techniques and cuisines along with ways to help grow my business. I recently received my nutrition certification. This is one area where I excelled, providing nutritious (but delicious) meals to help lose weight, maintain weight, eat healthier, and pass my nutrition knowledge along to children. Obesity is a growing concern with our youth. I do not want to just teach cooking, but teach wholesome cooking. I believe the artificial ingredients found in so many processed foods are a leading cause in our declining health as a society.

Sharon: How does the Cooking Cottage fulfill your personal and business philosophy and practice?

Lauren: As I think in any new venture, there are so many apprehensions and doubts that enter one's mind when taking on something so new. But I must say, I never dreamed how fulfilling this venture would be for me personally! I have thoroughly enjoyed reaching out to our young community and teaching them about cooking.

It is so rewarding to see their little eyes light up as they learn how easy it is to make fresh pasta dough; and see them amazed at trying new things and actually like them! My cup runneth over with fulfillment in promoting our young futures wellbeing and providing a place where people can come together around a table and relish in the joys of cooking together. Our business philosophy is not only about feeding the body but also the soul.

You can read more about Lauren's journey at Boerne Star Online, http://www.boernestar.com/news/business/article_9b81068b-45ec-5635-ad7e-8f7bc8adb6ad.html. Contact Lauren at 140 East Bandera Rd. Boerne, TX 78006, www.boernecookingcottage.com. And add a Boerne Star RSS feed to your News Reader or homepage to stay connected with what's happening in the Texas Hill Country.

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From the Heart...

... Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Mealtime with Janet & Bren at Kiss the Cook

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To finish off this month lifeskill, Meals, let's visit with another local business that has added much to our mealtime experience. Janet Galloway and Bren Isgitt opened *Kiss the Cook* in Boerne, 2006. Since this month focus has been on the value of mealtime together with family and friends, let's learn about their own culinary journey and passion for helping bring back the art and heart of mealtime with what they offer.

My first question to both Janet and Bren was *"Please tell my readers about your life and culinary background; and what brought you to Boerne and the Texas Hill Country."* Janet shared she graduated from Baylor with a Speech Pathology degree. Bren graduated from Texas Tech with a Business Administration degree. Both Janet and Bren put their families first. It was not until their kids were grown that they were able to pursue their dreams of owning and operating a cooking store.

Janet and Bren have very different culinary styles, but they both share a love for cooking and good food that paved the way for an enduring friendship and business partnership. "We are kind of like the old story of the Country Mouse and the City Mouse," says Bren, referring to the classic children's tale. Bren grew up on a dairy farm in Colorado City, Texas, where she practiced hearty country cooking with fresh

ingredients. Janet grew up in Dallas, Texas, where she watched gourmet cooking shows on television, then started replicating the featured dishes at home.

As best friends, they used to cook together for their church supper. They took that desire and considered catering, but wanted something more full time and consistent. Purchasing *Kiss The Cook* in 1998, a cooking utensil store in Abilene, they realized their dream and continued on until they outgrew their location. Realizing they could move the store anywhere, they started thinking outside the "box", traveling first to Boerne to look for opportunities.

The time was not right, yet, for Boerne, because a building meeting their requirements was not available. They traveled next to Gruene, but were disappointed again. Upon arriving in Wimberley, they found the exact building that even exceeded their expectations. They remodeled and opened in Oct, 2001. After finding success and getting established in Wimberley, they decided to pursue the dream of owning a second store. A customer from Boerne told them that a building behind Bear Moon bakery was for sale that would be perfect for a kitchen store and "why didn't they come open a store in Boerne?"

They went immediately to check it out and put a contract on the building. After remodeling the beautiful historical location, they opened Boerne's *Kiss The Cook* July, 2006 and added the Teaching Kitchen in 2007. Their dream of having fun teaching others to cook was realized at the Boerne store.

I then asked "*What key life experience sparked their interest and passion for cooking and the culinary arts?*" For Janet it was cooking with her grandmother and

watching gourmet cooking shows like Julia Childs. For Bren it was growing up in 4H Club participating in county fair events, taking Home Economics in high school.

When I asked them *“In what direction did their interest, education, and professional experience take them?”*, both Janet and Bren were able to draw on their ability to run a business because of their experiences helping run family businesses. Bren's background in Business Administration at Texas Tech may not have been fresh, but it was retained and put into practice. Janet's family background was in building and developing. She was then able to use all her talents and expertise in remodeling the two properties.

Both Janet and Bren shared how their *Kiss The Cook* business fulfilled their personal and business philosophies. “We believe in hospitality, honesty, fairness and integrity. . .giving our customers a choice of products in good, better, best at competitive prices.” Hanging in the kitchen window of Boerne’s *Kiss The Cook* is a stained glass script that says "Let me be a little kinder, let me be a little blinder, to the faults of those about me. Let me praise a little more; Let me be, when I am weary, just a little bit more cheery; Let me serve a little better those that I am striving for. . .”

This glass script sums up the fulfillment of their personal and business philosophy. Janet and Bren have both experienced satisfaction in achieving their goals. When they first bought the little 800 sq.ft., *Kiss The Cook* store in Abilene, many friends and family didn't think they could make it last. It has taken them 12 ½ years of hard work, sweat, and some tears building their business. They both know that never saying "we can't", but saying "we can do this with God's help" put them where they are today.

Wimberley's *Kiss The Cook* was written up in Southern Living magazine as one of their "50 Top Shops" in Nov. 2006. Recently, they were listed in Terry Thompson Anderson's "Texas Hill Country: A Food & Wine Lover's Paradise" as a must visit culinary store. Customers also walk out the door saying, "I love this store!"

Ever since opening day, my husband, John, has found all kinds of kitchen gadgets for his toolkit and gleans many tips from their culinary talents. He even found an oriental cooking wok and was amazed at how easy it was to evenly cook a variety of foods without under- or overcooking the vegetables. Our problem wasn't the stove after all, just the pan we were using.

So, by all means drop in at their Boerne store at 113 E. Theissen or in Wimberly, and enjoy your own culinary adventure with family and friends. And visit them on their website www.kissthecooktx.com to find what's cookin' in your neighborhood.

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