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Theme: A seat at the table



I grew up in a large family and dinner time was always lively! Before the meal ended, you could count on hearing plenty of stories, laughter, being constantly interrupted, someone getting mad or being sent to their room, and the ever popular race for the coveted second helpings.

People often tell me that their biggest fear is public speaking. My biggest fear was that someone would beat me to that last scoop of mashed potatoes!

One meal in particular stands out. Throughout dinner, my brother, John, continually asked for more *corn & lima beans*. To his dismay, no one heard him over the loud volume. Finally, in desperation, he took matters into his own hands. He stood, reached across the table and retrieved his beloved vegetables since it did not appear that anyone was going to stop long enough to comply. In doing so, he wiped out several glasses, spilling iced tea over the table and into my dad's lap. Instinctively Dad leaped into the air in an attempt to avoid being flooded by the wayward beverages. Upon seeing the patriarch of our family in such a comical fashion, we all burst into laughter, which angered my dad.

"Why don't you act like you have some manners???" he said sternly to my brother. We continued to laugh. *(Let me just preface this next sentence by saying that I grew up in an era when a spanking was a commonly accepted form of discipline.)* Dad reached for my brother saying, "here's your corn.... *(spank spank spank)*, "...and here's your lima beans." *(spank spank spank)*.

Needless to say, as John was sent to his room, the rest of us were *very* well behaved throughout the remainder of the evening.

To this day, whenever succotash is served at a family gathering, that story gets told and retold (getting more outrageous every year) and makes us all laugh out loud.



When we share a meal with others, we experience a sense of *community*. Lives are shared, stories told, values affirmed, and relationships are formed which forever connect us to one another. *When we are invited to take a seat at the table*, we begin to understand and acknowledge our value and worth to others.

Our *family* need not be those we *are related to* but rather those we *relate to*. They are the people in our lives who lift us up and help us define who we are and what's important. For some, family is the community of people whom we work with every day. For others, family encompasses a much broader spectrum.

"The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life."

During a recent class sponsored by *Leadership Washington County*, I, along with my fellow classmates, shared a meal with the men, women, and children who frequent the Salvation Army. I was touched and inspired by the man who trusted me enough to share his story. The memory of the food we ate that day will soon fade, but I will forever be changed because of the humility and courage of the people I met.

As the holiday season approaches, may we never forget that everyone deserves a seat at the table. Let's commit to finding meaningful ways to share a renewed spirit of community.

Happy Holidays!

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