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Mom, you're not exactly Donna Reed – An apology to my children

Friday, October 26, 2012

The Donna Reed observation was my teenage son reacting to my news that I had agreed to host a German exchange student. Her host family had backed out at the last minute.

From "Nick at Night," he knew Donna Reed – the 60s sitcom icon of perfect homemaker with a perfect family. Our family of 5 was more along the lines of this. At the end of the work/school day let's make sure everyone is fed, washed, with clean clothes, sports/band practices/music lessons completed, homework done and carpools managed. Perfection was never on our radar.

Needless to say, fast food and mother's helper, Stouffers Entrees, were commonplace. It may be strange to imagine now, but I didn't think there was much difference between the hamburgers and fries at McDs and the ones I made at home. OK, they were "home" fries cooked in butter with onions, not French Fries. Wasn't their "shake" the same thing as I made in the blender with milk and malt? I left out the raw egg my mother used to throw in there to "build me up." I grew up eating Brooklyn pizza so what was wrong with Pizza Hut?

I know there was some who limited their family to specific kinds of food. I even knew one who never watched TV. By choice, they didn't even HAVE a TV. For me and mine that wasn't how we lived. Busy, active and fit with no weight problems in sight, we ate like typical Americans.

Returning now to the German exchange student. She was an attractive blonde that my 14 year old son definitely approved of and welcomed to our home. She arrived and announced she was a vegetarian! A what?? The home cooking that I did do always involved meat – a good amount of meat. Whole chicken or turkey in the oven, baked BBQ chicken, pot roast, pork chops or some ground beef thing in the crock pot. My lasagna and spaghetti always had meat sauce. What on earth would I fill the plate with? Fortunately, SHE liked to cook. What a treasure! My favorite food had always been whatever somebody else made and put in front of me.

Cordelia was living with us as the Berlin Wall fell – the world was changing. By the time she left us, our little world had changed too. It was the beginning of paying attention to what we were eating, although we never became vegetarians.

Did I lose weight as a result of eating healthier? Actually no. First of all, the bad choices didn't disappear overnight and I learned that I was perfectly capable of eating enormous quantities of healthy food too. I was always active and never technically overweight to begin with. However, I do credit my sudden awareness for the fact that as the obesity epidemic grew, I didn't add to the 25 extra pounds I was already carrying.

I'm sorry I wasn't more aware of nutrition when my children were young. Fortunately all three were active, fit and of normal weight. I'm old enough to remember the resistance of companies to listing the nutritional values on grocery labels, let alone posting/publicizing them at restaurants. In pre-Internet days the

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information wouldn't have been easy to find even if I had been so inclined.

Parents want their children to do better than they did in all areas of life. At least in this one area it will be easier for them to make the right choices. Of course, it's still up to them to do it.

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CD11824494

I can only hope that my developing healthy habits and changing our lifestyle now will positively impact the choices my children make. Of course, kids will be kids and usually will want to choose the sweet treats over the apple. They still don't understand why I don't like McDonald's.

3139 days ago



CD12783562

That's funny - my older two laughed at the idea that I was June Cleaver! "You're not June Cleaver, mom!" they said with mirth. I was speaking about the aspect that I was a SAHM. I don't know exactly what they meant and I didn't care to find out. But they always said I did things "perfectly" when it came to food. According to them, that meant having plenty of home-baked treats in the house but plenty of fruits and vegetables to snack on too. I left it up to them to decide what they would have. I felt a kid is a kid, but give them the opportunity to choose wisely. Today, they are both 30ish, slim, and healthy.

Regarding foreign exchange students, we had one from Norway in our little town, and one of the biggest surprises to her is how much packaged and convenience food we eat in this country. They do don't that in her country. She said her mom works full time and bakes their own bread from scratch. It's routine over there for everybody! That was sure food for thought.

3152 days ago

Comment edited on: 10/27/2012 4:18:29 PM



WILSONWR

What a great experience!

I was raised in a large family with few healthy food choices - country ham, pinto beans, cornbread, and fried potatoes were common. It's no wonder that I'm having a time adjusting to healthy eating (but I AM beginning to like it!!)

3153 days ago



SUZYSMOBILE

You've done it again! Another readable, spot-on-Spark-topic blog! Plus, who would've think that a wholesome, cheese-and-bread-fed German frau would transform an all-American family's eating habits?

3153 days ago



MJZHERE

I always enjoy your blogs. Thanks for writing.

3153 days ago



CD12758218

Kids need a "Good enough mother," not a perfect one. And in being good enough, you are perfect to them. :-)

My own mother, who is a fabulous cook and always gave us balanced meals, also baked delicious desserts multiple times a week and even introduced me to one of my favorite meals back in my youth -- a hot dog, cut along the top into which you put strips of cheddar cheese, and wrapped it all in bacon, then broiled in the toaster oven. Served with a marble to insert directly into your heart, LOL. It was the 70's and nutrition was a whole different world than today.

3153 days ago



NELLJONES

I joined WW when my first son was just a couple of months old, and I learned to cook on WW. My kids grew up with home cooked legal food in growing boy quantities. The longer you live on Plan, people other than you will benefit. They now feed their own kids well.

3153 days ago



MISCHAKEO

I also wish I had paid more attention to nutrition for my kids when raising them. I was always on a diet and busy being Donna Reed.





Good blog.
3153 days ago



BOILHAM

I'll give you a pass, Donna Reed is a purty tough benchmark to achieve.



DW always used her as an example of what she was not as well. Peg Bundy, maybe, LOL.
3153 days ago



ELRIDDICK

Thanks for sharing
3153 days ago



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