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Mom, you're not exactly Donna Reed

Friday, February 26, 2021



That 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.



Donna Reed played one of those perfect housewives with the perfect family in those sitcoms of the 1960s. Married to a doctor with 2 beautiful children Donna did everything right.

In the 1980s my son knew the Donna Reed show from "Nick at Night"
In the photo above Donna is folding laundry in her perfect dress even wearing heels.

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. All 3 kids did their own laundry from the age of 10.

Perfection was never on our radar.
Busy, active and fit with no weight problems in sight, we ate like typical Americans with 2 parents with full time jobs balancing family life as well.

Needless to say, fast food and mother's helper, Stouffers Entrees, were commonplace. It may be strange to imagine now, but back then 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?

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I know there were 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.

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. When she asked if her parents could visit for a week, we agreed as long as she told them ahead of time that the "bed" in our guest room was a rather uncomfortable convertible sofa.

Cordelia and her parents on her 18th birthday



Soon after she arrived, she announced she was a vegetarian! A what?? The home cooking that I did do always involved meat – a good amount of meat. 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.

She even wanted to do her own laundry. I could have adopted her.

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 considered myself overweight. Those height/weight charts in the doctor's office allowed a 40 pound range for my height depending on body type. I just decided that the "small" frame of my 20s had now morphed into a "large" frame. However, I did develop an awareness of the obesity epidemic in its early stages.

Fortunately, I didn't add to the 25 extra pounds I was already carrying.
Unfortunately, I carried it for another 20 years.

I'm sorry I wasn't more aware of nutrition when my children were young even though 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 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 now.

What they have learned from me is that it's never too late to make the right choices, but the sooner the better.

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QUILT2FUN

This is one of the best blogs I've read. Congratulations! It's funny, informative and great.

Hugs, Eve

91 days ago



**CHERYLHURT**

My parents fed us healthy meals and packed our school lunches. When I went to college...unlimited desserts available...I gained the dreaded freshman 15! Didn't lose it until I was out on my own.
97 days ago

**GOALCXXV**

What a delightful post. So many memories came floating back. I grew up in the 40's and 50's. My mother always wore dresses at home, but sensible shoes. I don't ever remember her wearing pants or jeans. Our meals were simple but nutritious. Usually meat and potatoes were served with vegetables, but sometimes we had chicken and homemade noodles or other simple foods. There was always dessert. Dinner was served at 5, and we always ate as a family. As an adult I learned about a whole lot of foods that my mother never cooked or served. I think we ate simply because it was less expensive. I don't ever remember going out to eat at a restaurant with my family except on vacations, and we did take a vacation every year. Thanks for the memories
97 days ago

**ELIZACG9**

Well Said! The sooner the better!



97 days ago

**KNEESOCKS1945**

Thanks for a delightful blog!
97 days ago

**SWILSON2347**

Now that I am a widow, I rarely cook. My DH was so fun to make meals for! He always

complimented me and was willing to try new things and he even liked to eat leftovers!



Now my daughter and daughter-in-laws give me some of whatever they are fixing so I rarely have to resort to those Stouffer type frozen dinners.....but they are nice to have in a pinch, even if they aren't the healthiest!



97 days ago

**TOMATOCAFEGAL**

Never did live up to the Donna Reed persona. Sure wish we had understood the healthy plan choices
98 days ago

**WOOFERCOALBOY**

The only Stouffers stuff I remember were spinach souffle, Swedish meatballs, & zucchini lasagna. My mother liked the convenience of frozen vegetables, but otherwise cooked from scratch, & she was "good". Pop had his own specialties - it was he who taught Mom & me to make Eggs Benedict. Mom took me to McDonald's for lunch the first week it opened for the novelty, but I don't remember ever going back to that particular one. Did your exchange daughter teach you all any vege recipes that stayed in your repertoire? Is she still a vegetarian?
98 days ago

**NANCYPAULINE**

My mom was, in a way behind and ahead, of her times: she served us meat and potatoes almost daily with over-cooked vegetables (usually home canned). But, she hated the taste of fatty foods, so the meat was lean, I even remember my dad watching her trim the fat from a t-bone saying, "But Lena, we paid extra to get that fat." I was in high school home ec class planning meals, when I learned that two vegetable side dishes were NOT the norm, "You mean some people eat meat, potatoes and only one cooked vegetable?"

So, my poorest eating habits developed in the dorm cafeterias where fries were over daily, and as a single working girl who loved a Wendy's grilled chicken sandwich on the way home from work. But that stopped as soon as I joined a gym and became serious about exercise.
98 days ago

**JPPERSELL**

Your family sounds like mine except there was no exchange student and mom was a single parent doing the best she could. I appreciate now how she made us do our own laundry and the meals that she would make. She used alot of stouffer meals and the chicken meals which I can't remember the name of at this time. I appreciate her now more than ever. She was always in good shape and although she was not Donna Reed she was always perfect to me.
98 days ago





_LINDA



blog!

Here is to Mac 'n cheese and Micky D's! I don't apologize for loving my mac n cheese still to this day and made with real butter. I am not interested in fast food though. I favor Asian food and the spicier the better. I prefer being served too.

98 days ago



MARTHA324

Your blogs always make me think! And this one brings to mind my embarrassment over the way my mother dressed...she was slacks and a shirt to clean the house and not a lovely dress, heels, and pearls! What a warped sense we got from those TV shows of the 50's and 60's.

We actually grew up with a pretty healthy diet although my mother was the original portion control queen which I rebelled over when I got out on my own. Looking back her way obviously made a lot of sense & now I'm a real portion control queen. It works.

Guess what really works for me is to pretty much follow Michael Pollen's advice to eat "real food, less of it, more plants." And treats are definitely welcome sometimes!

Have a wonderful day.

98 days ago



MEADSBAY

I'm sorry I raised my kids on sugar cereal, hot dogs, spaghettios and Mac and cheese, too. If we had known we would have done better! I wanted to be like Donna Redd when I grew up.



98 days ago



DONNALEE-53



Loved your blog.
98 days ago



MSLZZY

Just a fun read. I think we all grew up and learned as we went. So many changes from those days until now.

98 days ago



BECAUSEHELIVS

Enjoyed. Thanks for your memories.
98 days ago



BECAUSEHELIVS

Enjoyed. Thanks for your memories.
98 days ago



MJZHERE

We raised our families around the same time. I only had 2 plus those who would adopt me as Mom off and on. Really enjoyed this blog - so nice to visit those memories along with you. Thank you.

99 days ago



TOMATOCAFEGAL

Salad on my nachos, or on my burger, or on my salad!

99 days ago



TOUDLES

I grew up in the 60's, and my mother regularly wore waisted cotton dresses, with flats around the house. She was not Donna Reed, more of life on a house painters salary, but she did her best to provide that post war suburban dream home. Well mannered kids and dinner on the table at 6 every evening. That kind of reality did exist for a whole lot of us.

99 days ago



RACHNACH



99 days ago



JSTETSER

Well-written story. I loved it!
Our parents did their best to teach us healthy eating as best they could.
99 days ago



PATSGIRLY

A great story! Thank you for sharing.
99 days ago



HARRIETT14

I was cooking at the age of 7 and enjoyed it so much. Good thing too since I had to take over the household at 13. I took up my mother's ways with my children, boy or girl they all had to learn household stuff. We went out for pizza for a celebration as a treat.

I do admire you for taking in not only the student but her parents as well. You have a very good heart.
99 days ago



AZMOMXTWO

I have never hosted any students I just never did find the time but we were a busy family all the same and I was always a single mom
99 days ago



THINCPL2004

That was a great blog, loved the story!
99 days ago



LGRIF22

Your blog could have been mine... We hosted several Japanese exchange students when our kids were growing up. It was so fun and helped us learn about other cultures. My only difficult time was when one girl wanted to get an American drivers license. Teaching her while not speaking the same language was a bit trying. She was a fantastic girl, though. We learned to really love her fried rice. What fun memories you've brought back!
99 days ago



MANGO1960


99 days ago




DIANNEMT

I wish I'd known more as a younger mom, too--but we managed!
99 days ago



KITTYHAWK1949


99 days ago



SUSANYOUNGER

Thanks for sharing
99 days ago



PENNYSAVER2

Thanks for sharing. I enjoyed reading your blog.
99 days ago





TERRIJ7

Thanks for telling this story. I enjoyed it.
99 days ago



HOLDINGMYOWN

 I LOVE your son!! 
99 days ago



JUNETTA2002

Thanks for sharing.
99 days ago





GRAMPIAN



Wonderful blog.
99 days ago

THANK YOU!



LINDA!



We also hosted a German exchange student in 1995. She was from Munich. We still keep in touch with her and she has visited us many times through the years. What a treasure. I also was thin as a young woman. Bad eating definitely put weight on me. I do love to exercise and eating better. Yet, for me, weight may always be a struggle for me.
99 days ago



THOMS1



Good blog. Brings back a lot of memories of growing up in our house. Thanks for that.
99 days ago



SUSMANNIE



And she was always smiling, no bad hair day ever. Sounds like you have some lovely family memories.
99 days ago



WANT2BTRIM



Agreed
99 days ago



UPTOIT59



I love reading your blogs- they bring back a lot of memories of my childhood and that of my children. My mom's mom died when she was young and her very GERMAN grandmother never taught her how to cook so I was raised on Potato Buds, Shake and Bake and anything else that came in a box. Swanson TV dinners were a staple for me too. I don't remember why I got the TV dinner (I had three older siblings). Anyway like most things the pendulum swung in the opposite direction and with my kids we were in a natural food co-op and ate organic until the reality of

having 5 kids 10 and under led me to Mickey D's...so many memories! Thanks again!



PS I loved the Donna Reed show when I was a kid! My mother was anything but her....
99 days ago

Comment edited on: 2/27/2021 9:50:34 AM



DEE797



How cool that you had an exchange student. I can totally relate to the way you ate. I grew up on Long Island and had NY pizza and White Castle which were both treats about once a month or so. Going for drives out further on the Island would stop at hot dog stands/trucks and get Sabrett (so ?) hot dogs with onions in a red sauce. Stopping at an A&W for a root beer was also a treat. Memories.
99 days ago



SAMMILESSACH



Funny my husband and I always talk about it we are like we did when we were young..we would on that 600lbs show.

We are more of We are of nutrition now a days of the food labels are factual...you know they find ways to lie on those too!

I tried being vegan twice....not gonna happen. This was even after the horrid documentaries of how animals are "treated" on farms. And how science proves I can live off plants. I like beef, chicken and pork.

I have tried me to diet that only works for me for a few weeks....I like balanced meals.



AlwAys enjoy your blogs, you have a great way to spread a message thank you
99 days ago



RHOOK20047



That show was a blast. I remember it from my childhood. I can hear my mom saying "Who would dress like that to clean house. And with heels no less."
99 days ago



THROOPER62



your blogs



99 days ago



ETHELMERZ

Donna Reed tv show was another fable we chuckled at, was a sit com, so you knew it was not true. Just something to pass the time. Those days were so unrealistic, Father Knows Best, Leave It To Beaver. Now, of course, they are ridiculous.

99 days ago



FRITZYS_MAMA

So many of my close friends worry about being perfect moms, but yet they cook really unhealthy meals for their families. I am not nearly as strict as a mom with my discipline and rules, but yet I am super healthy with my cooking and such. So every mom is different!

99 days ago



HOLLYM48

What, you don't look like Donna Reed while doing laundry??? I thought we all dressed like that on laundry day!LOL!!! Those commercials were some of those most unrealistic things ever! We grew up with a clean your plate mentality, which was not a good one. Fast food wasn't part of my younger years, but it sure became part of my life later on, and it was good, well at the time. Now it makes me feel sick to see those commercials! Oh well, we learned at some point that eating healthy for life is vital, I know for me it was the day I joined sparks and really thought about what and how much I could eat each meal. It was a life saver in addition to a life changer!

So glad we are on the spark journey together! Have a fantastic Saturday!

99 days ago



PHATPAT18

Can you imagine cooking and cleaning in a dress and heels. Just the trips up and down the stairs would have killed me.

99 days ago



PATTYSPENCER

I grew up in the Donna Reed era - my mother who passed away in 1982 never once wore pants - not ever a skirt and blouse - always dresses - to cook in - to clean in - to go grocery shopping in - and yes heels as well (she didn't own 1 pair of flats)

99 days ago



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