

FROM MY *Kitchen Table*

I love my job with **WHERE WOMEN COOK**. I love everything about it ... but I especially cherish my time on the photo shoots with the women we feature among the pages of our magazine. During the photo shoots, I have the opportunity to sit down and get to know each of these inspiring women personally ... at least a tiny bit. And, as it should be, our conversations about them, their journey, the women they call “friends,” and the magazine always seem to take place around their kitchen table.

We share tea from lovely china cups or sip water served from footed goblets filled with fresh fruit. There is always something amazing served to us while we chat ... everything from the decadent cinnamon rolls their grandmother taught them to bake to an exotic rice dish they were served during their travels in the Far East. But more than the setting or the food, in conversing with the many women among these pages and at each of these photo shoots, I am challenged to consider what matters most to those of us who love our homes and our kitchens. We know that the food we prepare can

bring us together and that the simple breaking of bread among friends and family is that which nourishes the soul, more than simply a meal to sustain us.

In September, I was fortunate to meet Laurie David, children's advocate, champion of healthy school lunches, and author of the new cookbook, *The Family Dinner*. We went to photograph Laurie in her kitchen for an upcoming issue of **WHERE WOMEN COOK** and during the shoot we began talking about her passion to bring back “the family dinner.” Laurie is fascinating, and I think I could actually write for pages about what our conversation included: cooking, friends, social media, designers that she would like to meet, friends that I would be honored to feature on our pages, and most of all, her advocacy for healthy food and the family dinner. All of it, every word she shared, is held close in my memory. As I sat in her kitchen, what came to me was the waterfall of memories of my own family dinners.

My mom and dad were hardworking, honest, middle class parents. We lived in a modest house that looked a lot like all the other modest houses on the block. We couldn't afford to



take vacations, my mom made my clothes, there were no dance lessons or soccer games or tumbling events every night after school, and somehow we learned how to entertain ourselves. We were pretty happy and content — at least as content as children and teenagers will ever admit to being. But all of us, my family and my friends' families, sat down every night and had dinner together. It wasn't a big deal really; it was just what we did. And there are no pictures to remember any of these evenings, they were just ordinary everyday dinners, but oh how I wish I had an album filled with the three of us on a Tuesday night sharing a meal at the kitchen table.

At my house you had to be there at exactly 5:30 p.m. Dinner was not postponed for even 15 minutes if you were late, and we were never late, we just weren't. The dinner my mom prepared was neither fancy nor memorable; it was simply meat and potatoes, a green salad, rolls of some kind, and a small dessert. I can't even really remember what we talked about all of those nights, but I am certain it was about school, and cheerleading, and the dance that was coming up. I don't ever remember asking Mom and Dad about their day, but I do know that they would tell me about Grandma and Grandpa and what it was like when they were young.

It was not until the final years of my parents' lives that the three of us would sit around the dinner table, every night at 5:30, and they would tell me about themselves, and their life, and how they met. In the last year before Mom's final stroke, we had dinner three or four times a week together, and she would repeat her favorite stories over and over again. At the time I thought I would lose my mind if she told me the story one more time of her and her cousin Evelyn and their girlfriend trips to Las Vegas or the night she met Dad, again, after he had been to war, and they continued where they had left off as high school sweethearts. But now I am so thankful that she did ... because they were important to her, and because I heard them so many times, I can remember each of the details with vivid clarity.

After my mom passed away, my dad and I had dinner every night that I was in town for five years. When I would arrive the table would be set with my mom's damask tablecloth and her pink dishes, and Daddy would be sitting in his chair waiting for me. Over supper we would talk about Mom. And he would always ask me about the magazine, and if I was OK. There isn't a day that goes by that I am not thankful for the many mealtimes spent with Mom and Daddy ... what a treasure that is for me to keep now that they are both gone.

After speaking with Laurie during the photo shoot and remembering the years and years around the dinner table with my mom and dad, it made me wonder why we don't do that any more. Why is it such a big deal to find the time to sit down and share the day with our family? And why do we have such a difficult time preparing good food for those we love





the most? Not quick and easy processed food from a box or a can, not pizza that is frozen or delivered, but fresh vegetables, a green salad, and whatever main dish is of your choosing? This has to be one of the most basic, one of the simplest, and one of the most important tasks that we can do for those we love and cherish about all else. It sounds fairly dramatic,

but each of us, if asked, would vow without hesitation to give our lives for our children ... yet, we cannot seem to find the time to fix them dinner and sit down at the table to share it with them.

Can you remember what you talked about around the dinner table when you were young? How unimportant it seemed at the time, yet what a quiet and enormous impact it has had on the rest of your life? What do you talk about at dinner with your family today?

In Laurie's book she talks about "one conversation", and that is the one that takes place between everyone at the table. Not a mom and dad asking the kids how their day was and them answering, "Fine," so Mom and Dad begin to carry on their own conversation while the kids continue texting to their friends on their iPhones. It is the conversation with questions and answers between all of you.

If you had but four more hours, in one more day, in one more favorite place, wouldn't you choose to spend it at the kitchen table having dinner with those that mean the most to you?

I ask that each of you simply find the time to share meals together ... making this a priority and collecting your own memories of simple suppers and table talk: the stories of the day, the memories of the past, and the dreams for the future.

Much love,

A stylized, handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'Jo'.

FROM A WOMAN'S SOUL
THROUGH A WOMAN'S EYES
BY A WOMAN'S HANDS™

