

EDITORIAL: Appreciation, gratitude and thankfulness

Last week I was making dinner for my family ? a highly anticipated dinner which involved Snow Crab as the main protein. Yum!

My youngest, Logan, is a seafood fan and he had been chomping at the bit all week waiting for the promised 'Sunday Snow Crab Dinner'.

The rest of my family ? not big fans of things that roam the bottom of the ocean looking for carnage ? weren't as excited.

All week I had been building them up to the big crab experience.

'It'll be good, you'll see,' I had said. 'Just give it a chance.'

That Sunday there was definitely something 'fishy' in the air, and it wasn't my boiling salt water ready for a big fat crab injection. It was the attitude ? shall we say bad attitude ? of my family members, who were dreading dinner. DREADING dinner?

Unacceptable, was my only thought. Who do you people think you are? There are starving people right here in our own community, and you're worried about having to eat food that costs \$20+ a pound?

As the day wore on, so did my patience. I decided I would also cook green beans and make a salad ? so at least there were choices. I became increasingly annoyed thinking about the potential food waste and at the last minute I also cooked a frozen pizza so that those of us who didn't want the 'hideous, horrible crab' had more than greens to nosh on.

Sitting at the table that night, my family braced themselves for the worst. Sour faces turned into happy smiles, however, when I pulled the grease covered pizza from the oven.

'Pick what you want,' I said, settling into my husband's usual seat so I could sit next to Logan and dive into the steaming bucket of crab.

Of course everyone opted for the pizza but Logan and I, and my middle child, Braedon. He put on his big boy pants and pulled a leg from the bucket. Watching him open it was funny ? he's never eaten crab before, let alone shucked it from its shell. My amusement with his crab opening skills quickly turned into disappointment, as I could see that he didn't like the tender crab meat inside.

'You don't have to eat it,' I told him. 'Save it for the people who like it and grab yourself a slice of pizza.'

'No, that's okay,' he replied.

It quite obviously wasn't 'okay' and the vibe at dinner turned sour fast.

No one was speaking. No one was sharing thoughts about their day. The tension was brutal.

My husband, who always tries to be the mediator, told Braedon to just get pizza and stop pretending to eat the crab. When Braedon refused I blew a gasket.

In our household we eat dinner together EVERY night ? unless we have another commitment, which is seldom at that time of day.

I always set the table using place mats, napkins, knives and forks and even stemmed glasses (for milk or water). Salt and pepper, chili flakes and parmesan cheese occupy our sixth seat, and have become condiment staples of our foodie experience.

I do this (set the table nicely) for many reasons: first, when I was a child, dinner time seemed to be the only time people in my

household ever came together, doing the same thing at the same time (later, in my teenage years, we all ate something different, and we rarely ate together. Why would we? We all had a TV set in our room). Secondly, I do this because we are a blended family and frankly, what better place to 'blend' than in the kitchen. Thirdly, I do this to help the children that I did not bare to grow their palettes and open their minds to tastes and flavours from around the world (I am a foodie, they are Kraft Dinner people). And finally, I do this because it gives my children and my husband (and me) a sense of normalcy. Something predictable to look forward to each day. Something they can commit to. A positive obligation that usually yeilds smiling faces.

Now, on this occasion, my happily family was not so happy. Usually after a meal we all help clean up the kids put away the condiments from the table, rinse their plates and Windex, while Craig and I do dishes, wrap leftovers and make lunches. Last Sunday, after the 'Great Crab Incident of 2014', I sent them all away from the table when they were done. I wanted to be alone and clean in silence. Why did they ruin my most favorite meal? Especially since I cater to their likes/dislikes most of the time.

In my quiet reflection I discovered that I was most annoyed with the fact that they were not grateful for the food that they have, or what goes into this 'normal, 'everyday', 'expected' thing called dinner..

I called a family meeting.

I started by saying, 'I am very disappointed in how tonights dinner went. Not only was it unfair of you to ruin my favorite meal, but your attitude and lack of gratitude sucks.'

I went on to ask them if they knew what was involved in preparing a meal. They through out random things, like grocery shopping and cooking, but they lacked understanding of the other elements required to prepare a meal 'with love'.

I was specific, 'There's the planning; deciding what will I make for dinner. There's the shopping which requires me to get into my car that I make a monthly payment on and also pay for insurance and gas and maintenance. Once at the shop, I must ensure I get all of the required ingredients, and then pay for the items (dinners can run upwards of \$20-\$40 a day in my house five meat eaters). Once back at home, I must then refrigerate the food I paid for in the house that I pay the rent and electricity bills on. I them have to set the table; then cook (sometimes all day on a Sunday); then I serve you, then I clean up after you; and then I carefully wrap the leftovers for your enjoyment the next day.

'It's no easy task,' I said point-blank. 'Could you do that?'

The kids all looked at me like I had three heads. Logan (autistic) said, 'I can!' and the other two looked terrified. Craig, of course, remained silent.

I told them that their punishment for ruining dinner was not a timeout or grounding from electronics (that one usually hits them the hardest) I told them it was to plan; purchase; prepare; serve; clean-up; and package a meal of their choice one day the following week.

The blood drained from their faces. All they heard was 'pay for'.

'We don't have any money,' Brodie, my eldest, said.

'Sure you do, you have your college money,' I replied.

'But, but that's for college,' he said.

'Today, it's for buying groceries,' I said. 'And, you'd better hope that while we're all eating the meal that you bought, prepared and served, that I don't put on a sour face, hide my food in my napkin (and oldie but goodie trick that's used in my household weekly, especially by Brodie) or say things like, 'Yeah, it's okay, but I've had better' (I get that one all the time from Logan), or eat so fast I

don't even chew (Braedon), just to be done with it.?

Since that day, dinners in my house have run smoothly. They still haven't made me dinner, but they sure are using their manners at the table. Taking only what they know they can eat without wasting and cleaning up after dinner without being asked. I don't know if they've developed an 'attitude of gratitude', but I feel heard and respected and they've learned a valuable life lesson: eat what I put in front of you, or you're in big trouble (LOL, just kidding). The lesson is: view the world, especially the things that are right in front of you with open eyes. Stop looking through or past the moments that will shape your future. Live consciously in the moment (or you'll pay for it, one way or another).

Despite the advancement in their attitudes, I don't plan to serve crab again any time soon.

By Wendy Gabrek