



AWARENESS & REFLECTION IS POWER

Around the Kitchen Island

By Alexandra Browne-Hill

There was a time when my children would gather at the table for our meals and discussions. There was a scrabble of seat grabbing before waiting for each other to eat. I remember creating a contract of behaviour with one of my teenagers at a wayward stage and we successfully negotiated more acceptable outcomes around the same table.

Do you recall the family meals around the dining room table where mashed potato sat creamily in a presentation bowl and a pile of chicken legs steamed their delightful smells? If you are old enough you may remember Grandma in her apron calling out a ready dinner with demands to wash hands before sitting together to eat. For many of us it was a time to say Grace before eating to give thanks for our food.

While the enjoyment was about plates of nutritious farm supplied food, homemade jams and breads, the focus was on catching up on each other's news. We shared daily information and talked about our lives. We listened to the dilemmas and joys of each other, understanding each family member that much better. Advice was given, rules imparted, manners learnt, support offered, debriefing and various arguments experienced. It was a time of teasing with humour tossed around. In short, a full community gathering around the family table was nourishment for the soul, mind and the body in a package deal.

These were simple things with exponential benefits which I tried to continue but which eased away into the past as society changed. My husband's car accident which left him long-term in a lounge chair did not help. We shifted our meals onto our laps to keep him company. Noticeably the television gradually took over and the family magic was broken.

As it happened, it was another disaster which reversed the disconnection between us. Our house endured a major flood and the entire building required renovation. Despite the trauma of the long clean up and repair, the gift was in the new kitchen. It came with a huge kitchen island.

Our guests and family seem to drift into the kitchen and take a stool around the island bench. With its concrete urban look in our fresh expansive space, I found the community gathering once again. With the arrival of Christmas, came family from far away. I took a moment with tears filling my eyes, to observe the extended family all busy dicing, stirring, baking and generally filling the kitchen with creation. The chatter, laughter, and sticky fingers had filled my house and with it a new type of Kitchen Table evolution. Only this time around, it was even better. Where once the matriarchal Cook had been the centre of food creativity, now everyone was involved in making culinary dishes or beautifying the surrounds with attractive glassware and serviettes. Once again my heart swelled happily with the togetherness and this time the work was shared. With equal importance we gathered as we do, around the family kitchen island.

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*RN, SRM, Health Facilitator, Medical Intuitive,
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