



the Hour that
Matters Most

THE SURPRISING POWER OF THE FAMILY MEAL

LES & LESLIE PARROTT
WITH STEPHANIE ALLEN
TINA KUNA



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The Hour That Matters Most: The Surprising Power of the Family Meal

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*Other things may change us,
but we start and end with family.*

ANTHONY BRANDT

A Note from Tina and Stephanie:

Just as we were going to press with this book, we received some news that none of us expected. News that all of us dread to some extent. Especially if you're a woman. If you're a man, you worry about it striking your wife, sister, or daughter. Breast cancer. Within just weeks of wrapping up this project, Tina was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. It's an early-stage diagnosis, thanks to a routine mammogram, but it will require an aggressive treatment in response. Strong and unshaken in her passion to change America, Tina has found that this diagnosis only further galvanizes her reasons for writing this book: to strengthen America from its core—the family.

In this strained economy, at a time when many dual-income families are struggling just to get by, the idea of a 1950's-style, sit-down-at-the-dinner-table meal might seem impossible. Too idealistic. Too unrealistic.

But that's not our message, and we haven't written a book to make you feel guilty. That's the last thing you need. Studies show that 65 percent of teens and young adults spend less than an hour a day unplugged. And that is exactly our call.

Stop.

Unplug.

Postpone that text or conference call.

Have dinner together (or any meal, for that matter). Because as Tina's recent diagnosis reminds us, you never know when your life is going to change. Something might happen that reminds you that the only thing that really matters is your family.

We believe that your dinner hour is truly the hour that matters most. And we need to fight for it.

Introduction

Once upon a Mealtime

Along with getting enough exercise, making your own meals from healthy ingredients is one of the most important things you can do to stay fit and healthy. And sharing those meals at sit-down family dinners models this healthy behavior to your children. They'll carry that valuable nutrition lesson with them for life.

BOB GREENE

I WAS SORTING through old childhood photographs with my husband, Les, when we discovered a long-lost Polaroid taken on my seventh birthday. Though I was sporting a giant smile in my purple paisley birthday outfit, the main character of the photograph was not me, but the cake. For some reason my mom had invited me to decorate my own birthday cake that year, and with a burst of creative energy and flourish, I had arranged everything imaginable on that cake, from porcelain figurines (overwhelmingly large for the cake) to colorful birthday cards pushed right into the frosting, which held them firmly upright. The frosting had become my celebration canvas, and I relished it.

When my husband saw the photo he immediately

commented, “If there is a snapshot that captures your spirit, this is the one.” I love celebrations with my family, and I especially take great pleasure from a chance to be creative with food on special occasions—or even just the more mundane moments of life that need to be remembered.

This is exactly what was weighing on my mind and even aching in my soul as I rushed to get our two little boys set up for dinner at the kitchen island—rather than do what I really wanted, have the whole family sit down at our kitchen table. This mealtime, like so many others, was not sitting right with me.

In fact, as I was preparing what each boy liked (with help from some prepackaged food ready to microwave)—chicken nuggets, fruit, and yogurt for Jackson; mac and cheese, carrots, and yogurt for John—I realized that this was never the picture I had in mind for our family routine. Once I served the boys, I started the risotto simmering on the stove that Les had requested for his dinner while I rummaged through the fridge for random veggies to toss into an oversize salad for me. The boys were already off their counter stools and back to the playroom before Les carried his dish to sit in front of the television to watch the news. Thus concluded another typical “family dinner hour” at our home.

How could it be? This is never what I wanted. My kitchen had turned into a food court and my family members were customers. I always dreamed that we’d have a shared meal together on most nights, just as I did as a kid growing up in my family. I imagined that dinner would be the backdrop to

lively conversations and lots of laughter with my husband and our boys. I envisioned setting the table with a bit of creative flair on occasion, like minichalkboard place cards, or “search and find” place mats, and maybe a cake decorated in a surprising way from time to time!

But somewhere in the fray of raising our busy boys and managing fast-paced schedules and catering to different taste buds, I lost sight of that vision for dinner. Or maybe I was simply letting it go. Reluctantly. Almost unconsciously. After all, I still had the vision and wanted it realized—that’s why I still felt a pang of guilt and an uneasiness in my spirit each night. At first, I’d say to myself, *I’ll get us all around the table for a common meal tomorrow*. But that “tomorrow” kept getting put off. My dream of a happy and healthy family dinner hour was becoming a distant memory. It had all but dried up—until I met Stephanie Allen and Tina Kuna.

You’ll meet them, too, in the following chapter. But before we get to Stephanie and Tina, Les and I thought it might be helpful to give you a quick picture of why so many of us have left our mothers’ kitchens and why the common family meal too often seems like a forgotten fairy tale.

THE DECADE THAT CHANGED OUR DINNERS

“Can I take your order please?” The voice comes from a small scratchy speaker just outside the driver’s side window. You tell the lighted menu board what you want and then you “pull around to the pickup window” where your food, wrapped in colored paper and cardboard, is ready to go in a paper bag. Lickety-split.

Before fast food ruled the world, people used to sit around the dinner table, leisurely eating home-cooked meals and enjoying good discussions, laughter, debate, and uninterrupted conversation. After all, there weren't many options. But that all changed beginning in the 1950s when a few self-made men in Southern California defied conventional opinion and began setting up stands where people could buy food on the go. From their cars. Fast. It wasn't long before the fast-food industry transformed not only our diet but our landscape, economy, workforce, and culture.

Today, the McDonald's Corporation is the nation's largest purchaser of beef, pork, and potatoes. It spends more money on advertising and marketing than any other brand. As Eric Schlosser, author of the disturbing *Fast Food Nation*, writes, "The impact of McDonald's on the way we live today is hard to overstate. The Golden Arches are now more widely recognized than the Christian cross." And McDonald's is just one of the hundreds of companies that make up the fast-food industry.

Fast food's impact on families enjoying a slow-paced, home-cooked meal around the dinner table almost goes without saying. In America over the past twenty-five years, dinners at home have dropped 33 percent.¹ In just one generation, at least a third of us have all but lost the meaning of a meal in which the family shares the experience.

Dinnertime is no longer expected. Meals have become fast-food pit stops to keep us going as we move from one activity to another. We often eat solo while doing something else, such as working, driving, reading, or surfing online. And even when we eat at home, it's often a

nutritionally questionable, heat-and-eat meal substitute from the supermarket that's nuked in the microwave.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over the last few decades, fast food has infiltrated every nook and cranny of American society. In 1970, Americans spent about \$6 billion on fast food; today they spend more than \$110 billion. Americans now spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music—combined.

GOBBLE-GULP-AND-GO IS NO WAY TO LIVE

About the same time the drive-through was being born in Southern California, Swanson unveiled the first TV dinner—a highly processed, all-in-one platter containing turkey with cornbread dressing and gravy, sweet potatoes, and buttered peas. And not long after that, another culinary time-saver made its debut: instant rice. Uncle Ben got in on the idea by promising housewives “Long grain rice that's ready in . . . five minutes!”

In the 1970s, cooking at home moved from being measured in minutes to being timed in seconds. With the introduction of the microwave oven, the original Swanson's TV dinner that took twenty-five minutes to cook in a conventional oven now seemed painfully slow.

Somewhere in the mid 1950s, food became less about its flavor and nutritional value and more about how little time it took to be ready to eat. Cooking, it was decided, was a chore that didn't deserve our time. And in the rush to speed through the kitchen or bypass it altogether, the intrinsic

relational value of a home-cooked meal was unwittingly lost. The humble ritual of hanging out in the kitchen on a regular basis with family members was pushed aside, never recognized for how critically important it is for strengthening family ties and giving kids an unparalleled advantage.

**THERE'S A BETTER WAY—AND IT'S EASIER
THAN YOU THINK**

When you allow the fast-food mentality to infiltrate the majority of your meals, you are missing out on one of the very best means of building the kind of family you long for. Why? Because a meal prepared at home, where the family gathers around a table, nourishes the core of who we are and who our children become.

Think about it. What happens in your family when you collectively step off the treadmill to actually sit down without a scheduled appointment nipping at your heels or a smartphone begging for attention? A meal where you don't hear or say things like, "We've got to order fast" or "We don't have time for dessert" or "We've got to eat quickly." Maybe, like so many, you can't remember the last time you enjoyed slowly eating food together. Maybe you've missed out on the magical rewards of this modest mealtime. Or maybe you haven't learned to leverage it for all it's worth.

No matter—this book is devoted to helping you reclaim your family dinnertime and reap the surprising rewards it has to offer. And it's easier than you think. No guilt required. In dozens of practical ways, we're going to show you how. The chapters that follow are little treasure troves

of information to help you. Each chapter includes a stand-alone recipe you can whip up with little effort. We're not going to bog you down with weighty chapters to make a case you already believe in. We're jumping straight into the practice of enjoying family meals, which until now, you may have only imagined. And we're confident you will see the benefits of this practice around your own table.

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

As a psychologist (Les) and a marriage and family therapist (Leslie) who specialize in relationships, we have devoted our professional lives to finding out what works and what doesn't when it comes to building healthy connections. It's our business to know what research is showing us about what strategies truly make a difference. And in our research we keep running into the same surprising and unavoidable fact: families that share a dinnertime ritual together—regardless of their stage, class, or race—enjoy innumerable benefits.

When we got out of our rut and found our groove of a routine family meal together, life got easier. It may not seem possible, but it did. Each member of our family has benefited, and the benefits, techniques, and strategies we were implementing around our own dinner table were just too powerful not to share with other parents like you. Truth be told, however, it wasn't until we met Stephanie Allen and Tina Kuna, with their ingenious ideas for maximizing time around the dinner table, that our method began to take shape. Stephanie and Tina, as you are about to see in the first chapter, have their finger on the pulse of family

dinnertime like nobody else in the country, and their story is one we're eager to share.

When the four of us began comparing notes, the energy became palpable and we felt more than a mere desire to get this message out. It became a collective calling.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

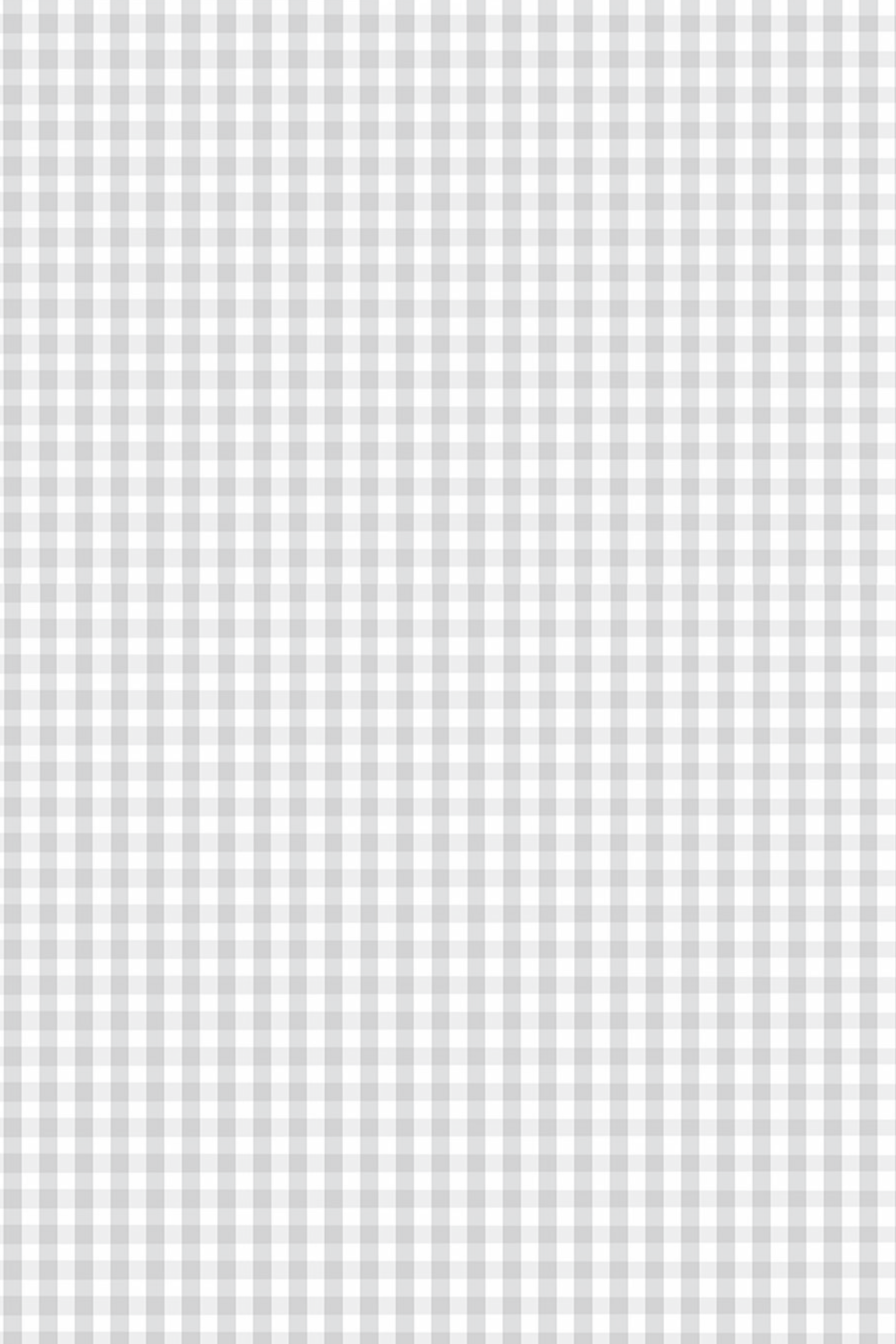
We have written every word of this book with you in mind. And we'll be up front about some assumptions we're making. We assume, for example, that you are extremely busy and you don't need anything on your to-do list that doesn't have a significant payoff. In fact, we assume you're looking for ways to recoup more time—quality time—in your home. We also assume you don't need more guilt. We connect with enough household managers to know that you're likely weighed down with things you wish you were already doing but can't seem to pull off when it comes to your kids.

Our biggest assumption about you is that you'd do most anything to make your home a comforting refuge for your family. You want a home that is anchored in connection, buoyed by support, and filled with laughter. In short, you want your family to thrive.

With this in mind, we promise to give you practical and proven tools for making this happen. We will give you sensible takeaways in each chapter of this book. No platitudes. No banal advice. And no shame. Just tried-and-true methods for busy households that are building strong families.

Les and Leslie Parrott







1

Creating the Safest Place on Earth

*Home is an invention on which
no one has yet improved.*

ANN DOUGLAS

FROM STEPHANIE

It was a typical November day in the Pacific Northwest: gray and damp outside, and cozy inside. My daughter, Karlene, was home for the first time since leaving for college. We drove up to Anacortes, Washington, on Fidalgo Island, the largest of the San Juan Islands, where my parents live. Along the way we picked up Karlene's "grammy," my mom's mom.

There we were, four generations together, in the kitchen making dinner. With a tea towel over my shoulder and the palms of my hands covered in flour from rolling the dough that would soon become flaky biscuits, I peered into the living room to spy Dad building a crackling fire in the fireplace.

As we gathered around the table that evening, all seemed right with the world. I was home—the safest place on earth. And I realized this feeling is what family is all about.



When you're home, you want to breathe deeply, lower your shoulders, and relax. There's a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and contentment. At least there should be. Healthy homes—homes that function as they should—refresh, recharge, and renew. They become places where children's identities find flight and values take root.

For Stephanie Allen, her own home was none of these things. As a busy working mom of two active kids, it was all Stephanie could do to keep up with the demands of the daily schedule. Church youth group, soccer practice, and school activities meant lots of time in the car, and very little time for real interaction among family members.

Stephanie longed for the kinds of relationships she remembered with her own parents and sibling when she was growing up: relationships built on conversation and connection—often forged around the dinner table. She remembered the way her family would linger after a meal just to talk and catch up, and she wished her own family could do the same. But after a long day at work and a couple of hours shuttling kids from one activity to the next, who had time for making elaborate meals? Some days it was all she could do to keep up with everything *and* get a meal on the table for her family. She realized that she needed a game plan.

Stephanie started meeting with a friend once a month to assemble meals for their families. “It was a great time for us to talk and laugh,” Stephanie remembers. “And at the end of the day, we each had a month’s worth of meals in our freezers, ready to pull out when we needed them. One less thing to stress about.” Those monthly “assembly days” provided a sense of liberation from the dreaded daily chore of scrambling home after work to pull together a wholesome dinner for the family.

This practice continued for seven years, and before long, other friends were asking for tips to help them do the same. In 2002, Stephanie decided to host a “monthly meal-prep night” with a group of friends. The response was overwhelming, and it didn’t take long for Stephanie to see that she wasn’t alone in her desire to share home-cooked meals with her family. After that first night, friends started talking to friends, and e-mail requests for more events started pouring in.

“So many moms are working hard and trying to keep up, but it’s really difficult,” she says. “The bottom line is that we just want to raise great kids.” As it was turning out, the practical solution to getting a regular meal on the dinner table was helping Stephanie and her friends to do just that. “Suddenly, we were having conversations with our kids like never before. They were opening up and lingering around the table. The dinner hour was quickly becoming the hub of our home.” And Stephanie was hearing similar stories of building stronger family connections from the other women in the group too.

Without knowing it, Stephanie and her band of “sisters”

had stumbled onto the power of an age-old practice that has been slowly slipping into extinction. Like so many

Food is
the most
primitive
form of
comfort.

SHEILA GRAHAM

other women in twenty-first-century families, Stephanie had all but given up on having a regular dinnertime with her family before she tried her assemble-and-freeze method. But getting a meal on the table without undue stress wasn't the biggest discovery. No, Stephanie and her friends had tapped into a power that gets to the heart of a healthy home—a power that creates the safest place on earth.

CREATING COMFORT

Chicken noodle soup, meat loaf, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes and gravy, bread pudding, brownies, doughnuts, apple pie. These are commonly referred to as “comfort food,” and with good reason. Most of us find great comfort in a tasty meal we've grown up with, a meal that doesn't have to be explained by *Gourmet* or *Saveur* magazines.

But true comfort, the kind that heals emotional hurts and turns around bad days, involves far more than our palates. One dictionary defines the word *comfort* as “a feeling of relief or encouragement,” or “contented well-being.”¹ A quick review of the word's origin, though, uncovers a deeper meaning. We get the verb *to comfort* from the Latin *com-* + *fortis*, meaning “to make strong” (that is, like a fortress).

So to comfort literally means to make someone stronger. And that's exactly what you do for your children. Comfort fortifies their spirits. Whenever you encourage your children with uplifting words, console them with a tender touch, relieve their sorrow with your mere presence, support them with heartfelt praise, or provide a wholesome meal and the love that's served with it, you are helping to make your children strong.

WHAT WOULD STRENGTHEN YOUR HOME?

If you could press a magic button to instantly strengthen your home, what would it do? We don't mean the physical house. We mean the feeling, the chemistry, and the climate of the relationships within it. We're talking about the spirit of your home.

Would you want it to include more laughter? Meaningful and engaging conversations? Vulnerability and respect? Mutual support? These are the things most parents mention. And if you're like the hundreds of parents we've surveyed, you're likely to sum up the desire you have for your home by saying you want it to be the safest place on earth.

THE SECRETS OF A HEALTHY HOME

Thriving families don't just happen. Merely going with the flow or taking what comes is fatal to the heart of a home. Healthy and happy families are the result of deliberate intention, determination, and practice. Every family expert will tell you that a healthy home is the result of a proactive parent.

The largest study ever done on family life was conceived on Interstate 40 where it runs through the rolling hills of Oklahoma and the prairies of western Texas. That's where University of Alabama professor Nick Stinnett was driving with his wife, Nancy, when, in the midst of their discussion on families, he determined to find out what healthy homes were doing right. Up to that point, family researchers were focused exclusively on dysfunctional and fragmenting families. Dr. Stinnett wanted to take a different approach. He wanted to know how people in healthy homes handled conflict and power struggles. He wanted to know how they communicated, and so on. In short, he wanted to know the secrets of healthy families.

That was in 1974, and his study took more than twenty-five years and involved more than fourteen thousand families who were ethnically diverse, had many kinds of religious beliefs, and came from all fifty states and twenty-four countries around the world. The one thing these families had in common was a thriving, successful, and strong family unit.

What did the world's largest, longest, and most comprehensive study on family life teach us? First, that thriving families are not immune to trouble. They suffer financial setbacks, chronic illnesses, and all the rest. But in spite of the strain and stress of daily life, they create pleasant, positive places to live where family members can count on one another for support, love, and loyalty. They unite to meet challenges and solve problems. They pull together. They feel good about themselves as a family and have a deep sense of belonging with each other, a

sense of “*we-ness*.” At the same time, they encourage each person’s uniqueness and potential.

In practical terms, the study found that thriving families share six qualities. These are the “secrets” of creating the safest place on earth:

1. **Commitment:** Members of strong families are dedicated to promoting one another’s welfare and happiness. They prize their family and value the relationships.
2. **Appreciation and Affection:** Members of strong families are thankful for each other. They don’t take their special relationships with one another for granted.
3. **Positive Communication:** Members of strong families spend a lot of time talking freely with one another, doing their best to be understood and to understand.
4. **Time Together:** Members of strong families spend generous amounts of time with one another—quality time—creating memories and building bonds.
5. **Spiritual Well-Being:** Strong families, whether they attend formal religious services or not, have a sense of a greater good that gives them strength and purpose as a unit.
6. **The Ability to Cope with Stress and Crises:** Members of strong families are not fragmented by tension and trouble. They use those experiences to learn and grow together.²

There you have it. Six qualities that healthy homes and thriving families all have in common. Look back over the list. Those qualities seem profoundly simple, don't they? But that can be misleading because the fact is, *understanding* what makes a healthy home is not the same as building one. That requires being proactive. And in the pressure cooker of our busy daily lives, being proactive is where most of us get bogged down. When emotions are frazzled, bills are mounting, and time is in short supply, doing something proactive can be the last thing on our minds.

But what if that *doing* were actually easier than you imagined? What if it took less time and were simpler than you could even believe?

That's where *the hour that matters most* comes in. Countless studies have shown that if parents could take only one proactive and practical step to engender family commitment, appreciation, affection, positive communication, time together, and all the rest, it would be to establish a regular dinnertime around a common table without distraction. One hour a few times a week. That's it.

KEEPING THE LIGHT ON

Have you ever given your children "the blessing"? Blessing someone says that you love and accept that person unconditionally. And that's exactly what you give your children when you tune in to their world over a family dinner or any other time. Similar to building them a campfire on a dark night, you draw them toward the warmth of genuine concern and love. And because of it, they'll be drawn to you years down the road.

TWO WAYS TO KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

Keeping the lights on when an older child is out for the evening sends a message that you care about your child, that you are waiting for him or her to return, and that your home is a welcoming and safe place. In the same way, a healthy home “leaves the lights on” by providing a safe place for the family to speak honestly and express their feelings without fear of condemnation. There are two ways a parent can keep the emotional lights on. Let’s look at them briefly.

1. Stay Cool

Let’s say your seven-year-old blurts out a few shocking words. Or your teenager starts talking about getting a tattoo. Or your twelve-year-old tells you of a plan to stay overnight with a friend you disapprove of. Whatever your child’s shocking statement is, your job is to play it cool. Muster your inner strength, stay calm, and give yourself some time by saying something like “That’s interesting” or “Tell me more about that.” You may be cringing inside, but do your best not to show it. Giving yourself time helps to keep the situation from becoming a major argument or escalating into a shouting match.

The idea is to create a safe place—a place where your child feels free to say whatever is on his or her mind. You can probe, clarify, and explore, but the moment you pass judgment without listening is the moment your child begins to clam up. Of course, this doesn’t mean you don’t set rules and boundaries. It just means you let your child be heard before you lay down the law. It keeps tears and

tantrums to a minimum and, in the process, earns your child's respect.

2. Keep a Confidence

What happens at the dinner table stays at the table—or in the car or wherever you have heart-to-heart conversations with your children. You may think that only adults prize the confidence of others, but it holds true for kids, too. All that needs to happen is for them to hear you talking about them to a friend, saying something that may seem harmless to you but is embarrassing to your chil-

The light is
what guides
you home,
the warmth
is what keeps
you there.

ELLIE RODRIGUEZ

dren, and you have instantly lost trustworthiness in your kids' eyes.

Let's say your son tells you about feeling lonely on the playground or inadequate in art class. You're talking to your girlfriend about whatever comes to mind and you mention your son's name. He pricks up his ears even though he's on the other side of the room watching television.

You don't give it a second thought as you tell your girlfriend how your heart is breaking for him during school recess. Your son immediately turns off the tube, goes to his room, and closes the door. *What just happened?* you wonder. He might tell you at some point. Then again, he might not. He may just decide then and there not to talk to you about his feelings again. Like everyone else, he wants to know that

his confessions are held in confidence. If they're not, home doesn't feel so safe anymore.

Did You Know?

*The majority of teens in America—67 percent—
want to spend more time with their parents.*

MORE THAN JUST A WHOLESOME MEAL

Without knowing it, Stephanie and her band of “sisters” had stumbled onto the power of an age-old practice that has been slowly slipping into extinction. Before trying her fix-and-freeze method, Stephanie, like so many other women in twenty-first-century families, had all but given up on having a regular family dinnertime. Darting in and out of fast-food joints between work, school plays, and soccer practices, Stephanie didn't realize that she was forfeiting more than just a wholesome meal. However, as she began practicing the fix-and-freeze method, it dawned on her that she was beginning to gain the most treasured sixty minutes of her day.

Late one night, after a group of moms had gone, Stephanie and longtime friend Tina Kuna were up to their elbows in soapsuds. They began talking about the positive difference their little system was proving to make and wondering where it might go. After all, neither felt right turning anyone away. Yet they were getting more requests than they could handle. As it turned out, what began as an attempt to draw their own families together around the

table eventually led to a partnership with each other and the founding of a business they call Dream Dinners, a fix-and-freeze company reaching more than one million families each year.

THE DREAM OF DREAM DINNERS

Dream Dinners was founded with a mission of bringing families together around the dinner table. Food and families are at the heart of everything Dream Dinners does as they provide guests who visit their locations with all the ingredients they need for a great meal. Dream Dinners offers freedom from the hassles surrounding the planning and preparation of meals night after night and allows families to come together at the end of the day to eat a delicious, healthy meal. Little could Stephanie and Tina have known just how powerful that one hour around the table would be—both for their own families and for so many others.

In fact, the surprising benefits of this simple ritual are so astounding that even experts on the family are stunned by the findings of recent research. Why? Because the evidence is on the table: if you want a healthy home, a family that gives your children every advantage, and a place where lasting memories are made and feelings of comfort are a given, you can't afford to neglect the hour that matters most.

FROM STEPHANIE

Macaroni and cheese is true comfort food. My son Mitchel loved it (from the blue box). When he was six, I taught him how to make it himself. It was the first really independent thing he could do, and he had a real sense of

accomplishment when he made it by himself and ate it for lunch. Sometimes he would ask to make it for friends who were playing at our house. One of my treasured memories is secretly watching him show his friends how to “make” mac and cheese and then serve it with such pride. One year for his birthday dinner he asked if I would make mac and cheese for his party. I got out my cookbooks and created a wonderful, homemade macaroni and cheese in honor of the occasion. What a mistake! When I served it, he cried, “That’s not real mac and cheese!” We still laugh about that every time we make Mama’s Macaroni and Cheese.

Mama's Macaroni and Cheese (serves 6)

- 5 cups cooked elbow macaroni (about 1 pound dry)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups 2% milk
- 1 cup cubed American cheese
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup seasoned bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 325°. Spray 9 x 13 baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Boil pasta as directed on package. Drain. Melt butter in heavy sauté pan, and whisk in flour and salt, just until golden brown. Add pepper to taste. Whisk in milk and bring to simmer. Add cubed American cheese, blending until melted. Add shredded cheddar, and blend until melted. Add cooked macaroni and toss to coat. Spread mixture into prepared baking dish and sprinkle top with bread crumbs. Freeze if desired. Before baking, thaw completely. Bake uncovered for 1 hour or until knife comes out clean when inserted.



About the Authors

LES AND LESLIE PARROTT, PHDS, are codirectors of the Center for Relationship Development on the campus of Seattle Pacific University and the bestselling authors of the award-winning book *Saving Your Marriage before It Starts*. They have also written *Love Talk*, *Trading Places*, *The Parent You Want to Be*, *High-Maintenance Relationships* (Les), and with John C. Maxwell, *25 Ways to Win with People* (Les). The Parrotts are sought-after speakers and hold an average of forty relationship seminars across North America annually. They have been featured in *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*. Their many television appearances include *The View*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *CNN*, *Good Morning America*, and *Oprah*. Les and Leslie live in Seattle with their two sons. To learn more, visit their website at www.RealRelationships.com.

STEPHANIE ALLEN is a recognized pioneer in the meal-assembly industry. She brings an extensive background in the food industry, including eighteen years of recipe development and catering. Stephanie first began making fix-and-freeze meals for her own family in 1986 and gradually began developing a collection of specialized “dream dinners” recipes. She soon became deluged with requests

to expand her time-saving meal assembly solutions with others. When the demand became overwhelming, she enlisted the help of longtime friend and experienced business manager Tina Kuna, and in 2002, they hosted the first series of large-scale meal assembly sessions, which became the catalyst for opening the first Dream Dinners store.

A popular speaker and educator, Stephanie spreads her vision to make people's lives easier and restore the tradition of family dinners.

TINA KUNA, a recognized innovative leader in the meal-assembly industry, was instrumental in creating the groundbreaking Dream Dinners business model, which has become the industry standard.

A working mother of three, Kuna adopted the assemble-and-freeze method for her family in 1996, taught by eventual business partner Stephanie Allen. A strong advocate of families eating together, Tina plays a key role in bringing the Dream Dinners solution to communities across the nation.

In 2006, Tina and Stephanie received the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur Of The Year award in the Pacific Northwest.

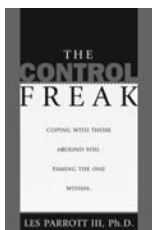


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