

## Loretta's Story – It Takes a Table

One day at Suppers we sat around recalling stories from our childhoods about the dinner scene. We were working on the concept "It Takes a Table" and one of our usually quiet members spoke up first with a vivid memory. Loretta asked me to write it up for her because she's not much of a writer.

Loretta didn't have an easy life. She had an abusive father who made rules for everybody else and followed none himself. He drank like a fish, made his wife's life a chore and generally made the world suffer for his misery. He was a tyrant, and everyone steered clear of him as much as possible.

There was one exception, one time of day when her mother got away with being in charge for a few minutes. At the dinner table. It was the only time and place that he didn't smoke. He wasn't served dinner otherwise. Loretta told us she had few pleasant memories of her childhood and that the table stood out. He still clocked the kids' heads with his spoon, but at least there were no filthy ash trays. And the kids grew up understanding that mom had special powers where the family dinner table was concerned.

The day Loretta told her story, there were seven of us having lunch at Suppers. There were several of us who actually had good memories of the family table and a couple who had none whatsoever. We took inventory of our own experiences and those we were providing for the next generation.

One member recalled that the dinner table was the place where she learned a lot of rules, like don't talk with food in your mouth; never get into a car with a stranger or accept candy from a stranger. Another had a fond memory of putting it over on her parents by pretend coughing her spinach into her paper napkin. One of us had greater recollections of smells, always a roasting chicken on Sundays and cinnamon smells whenever something special was happening. Everybody who grew up with a family table learned you don't get dessert unless you've eaten your meal. Even the one who ate dinner at a TV table in front of the tube every night grew up with that rule.

But the memory that grabbed us all emotionally was the one Loretta shared about the oasis from cigarette smoke and the magic place where her mother had special powers.

That day we bonded over shared memories of family scenes at the table and decided to put more energy into creating good memories for our children and grandchildren to carry into adulthood. These were not conversations we would have had anywhere else. It takes a table.