



HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

Home Renaissance Foundation

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Professionalism begins at Home

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I. Introduction

I studied law and finished off with a Masters degree. After my studies I worked for some time before I got married and started a family. From that time onwards, bringing up my family was my profession. I raised four children and the youngest is now 12 years old.

Even though I studied law, I strongly believed that if I ever had a family that this would be my priority in life.

All the work and the skills done and taught within the family, all the values we live up to and we teach the children become a part of their every day make-up in a very natural way. Things that children do not experience at home are not naturally acquired and they will be less aware of them later on. The children have difficulties in believing these values and seeing no sense in passing them on. Our children are the future professionals, educators, teachers, etc., who are responsible for the rules in our society and will set the standards of our culture. Within the home the foundations of our adult lives are learnt. Over a longer period of time it's been observed that there is less and less appreciation of home economics. If we want to improve this, we have to change the attitude of anybody involved in the child's education, especially the mothers and the fathers, and put more emphasis on this work.

II. Professional standards begin at home

Mothers are the ones mostly responsible for the care of the child and the work done at home. Statistics show that women still do most of the work at home, even if both follow a professional career outside the home. Mothers educate their children in various fields involving home economics, nutrition, hospitality or other related themes through their daily work. They can pass on all the practical skills. If the mother's work is done with dedication, commitment and pleasure in her caring responsibilities, it becomes professional work. I refer to James B. Stenson, an American pedagogue, who says: "professionalism isn't just a set of appearances – neatness, good grooming, "shop talk" and the like. Nor is it just technical skill; ... Professionalism is, rather, a set of internalized character strengths and values directed towards high quality service to others through one's work." He then specifies the professional attitude: sound judgement, know-how, business savvy, mature responsibility, problem solving, perseverance and ingenuity... The home making skills achieved in such a professional attitude will surely be well appreciated by all family members. This is the starting point for following a professional carrier in this field, if a child has the needed capabilities.

III. The perception of home economics in the society

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The Swiss federal department for Statistics quoted in 2004 that they had not yet done any important research and statistical evaluation of volunteer work or non paid work. Among the non paid work, the household represents by far the biggest part. It amounts to 8 billion hours a year compared to 6.7 billion hours a year for paid work. The federal department calculated that the non paid work in the Swiss households would amount to 172 billion of Swiss Franks a year. The Department continues to record that there is an outdated but still widespread opinion that house and family work is recreational and enjoyable or considered as being a consumer function. The work experience that mothers accumulate over the years should be taken into account in a later entrance in the professional world.

Why is housework looked upon as inferior to other professions? Is it due to the fact of it being an unpaid occupation, which has no immediate results? To answer this question would go beyond the scope of my short statement. What I would like to do is to list the most important values and skills, which mothers pass on to their children in the domain of preparing food, cooking and everything related to it.

IV. Values – Skills

1. Healthy, well balanced nutrition

Obesity is a worldwide phenomenon in the industrialised countries. Over the last twenty years the number of obese children has tripled in Switzerland. In the UK a third of all children are overweight. Prof Colin Waine, the chairman of the National Obesity Forum, said they revealed a public health time bomb. "This is serious news because obesity in adolescence is associated with Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases." Barbara Harpham, the director of the charity Heart Research UK, said: "Parents need to wake up to the fact that it is up to them to make sure their children eat properly and lay down a foundation for good health." The public is aware of it and there are a lot of proposals for changing eating habits or doing more exercise. But where should we tackle the problem first?

The answer is as Mrs. Harpham proposed: at home. We must produce healthy food. The children get used to the taste. Whatever tastes like Mums kitchen is usually loved. If youngsters are not acquainted with healthy food, they will not try and will continue to eat junk food. At home we can give them the chance to help prepare meals and learn how to cook and develop a concept of nutritional values.

When a family sits down to eat around the table, everybody gets served an appropriate portion and what you eat is in a way controlled. This does not happen when every member grabs his TV-dinner and eats it by himself with or without company.

2. Planning, Organising

As mothers we are managers of a little enterprise: cooking, bringing children to all their extra school activities, preparing a nice dinner for guests, keeping the house clean, helping children with their homework, caring for the sick children etc... Sometimes we are expected to do everything

together. If we want to complete it calmly, without stress and for everybody in a relaxed atmosphere, we have to be well organised. We have to plan our meals ahead, we have to write lists of what we want to buy, we have to organise our day to find time to go to the supermarket plus all the other tasks. At the end we need to allot enough time for preparing the meal. That is the only way of having relaxed family meals at a set hour of the day, on which everybody can rely.

Our organised way of daily life is an example for the children and they will adopt it to other domains too.

A lot of families have to draw up a detailed budget and need to dispose accurately of their income. Setting up a budget is a good example to your children of how to deal with money, when they have to live on their own.

3. The power of family meals

In autumn 2005 Miriam Weinstein published a book with the title "the surprising power of family meals". She writes about her family meals when she was a child, but also about researches accumulated in very disparate fields showing "that eating ordinary, average everyday supper with your family is linked to lower incidence of bad outcomes, such as teenage drug and alcohol use and to good qualities like emotional stability and stress resistance." There is also a well known field study made at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, undertaken with adolescents. The research results in the fact, that young people whose families routinely eat meals together spend more time on homework and reading pleasure... they have a better nutritional intake and a decreased risk of obesity and misuse of drugs and alcohol. Concluding, they are emotionally and physically healthier. I think that we do not need such a vivid imagination to understand the consequences of regular family meals: it means being able to exchange opinions and the development of the awareness of each others emotional needs. There should be ideally one common meal a day for the family, even if it creates problems of planning with older children. Regular meals at the same time of the day give stability to the family. The social scientists call it a ritual. Rituals give a feeling of togetherness and strength.

4. Helpfulness, Teamwork

The easiest way to raise helpful persons, who are concerned about giving a hand and not just being served, is to involve your children in the work in the home, especially in the kitchen. There are so many tasks to hand out: setting the table, washing the dishes, preparing meals, helping to peel carrots, potatoes, stirring the ingredients for cakes etc... These everyday tasks carried out together give a spirit of teamwork required later in every profession. I would like to point out the husband's cooperation, as a helpful example for the children.

5. Manners

Eating together is the best place to teach the children good manners and civilized behaviour. Parents should make a conscientious and sustained effort to practice etiquette at home. Table manners are much more than social forms without content. One learns personal restraint and respect for one another. Later in life, the good manners enhance the children's social and

professional lives. The knowledge of the right behaviour gives them self-assurance to interact in any social group as well as in professional situations.

Manners also include practice of hygiene; washing hands before eating, using serviettes, blowing ones nose... As the manners have declined over the past years, the courses in learning good behaviour for adults and even for kids have increased immensely. Why pay for expensive courses, when all this can be acquired at home?

6. Hospitality

Eating with friends demands getting to know them, widening our horizon, having to deal with other opinions and lifestyles. It is always enriching and extends our individualism. Inviting friends to your home is a personal way to show who you are. The way you live, cook and present the dishes, gives a good insight into your personality and your family. Friendships have to be cultivated and nurtured. If the children are used to guests at the table and to different conversations, they feel confident and at ease at parties and later on in any professional environment.

7. Celebrating

A family has a lot of occasions to celebrate: birthdays, a First Communion, coming of age and all the religious feasts such as Easter, Christmas etc. The nicest and most personal way to do it is at home with a special meal, maybe the favourite dish of the special person. These celebrations are part of the family tradition every member likes to remember and wants to get prepared for. In our faceless and fast changing society these traditions give us stability. Celebrating somebody is also a sign of respect and love for this person.

8. Creativity

The majority of housework can be done in a very creative way. I want to mention only some examples: cooking, preparing a meal for guests, decorating the table for an invitation or for a birthday party, decorating the house for Christmas, arranging flowers etc. We can also involve the children in doing little handicrafts for special occasions. There is no limit to ones fantasy. These little things often give a special touch to a meal.

9. Clothes, Outlook

Finally, I would like to touch briefly on the theme of clothing: it makes a difference to how the person is dressed. The household done by somebody, who has a pride in how she looks, portrays her esteem for the work.

V. How to build up positive perception of the work done at home

The first place to build up a positive perception is through the example of the parents at home. The appreciation of the father, who comes home and gets a well cooked dinner on a nicely set table, is important for the children to get a positive attitude. A little thank you or compliment helps the children to see that the commitment is not taken for granted.

The work done with care and love for details, not in stress and a haphazard way shows that every job has the equal importance.

If every family member has his own tasks, they know what it means and start to appreciate the work done at home. Furthermore they are able to judge the value of the home economics done outside of the family: in the hospitals, hotels, old people's homes, schools etc...

The excellence in home economics and nutrition begins at home through achieving the work in an excellent and professional way, with the support of all the family members.