

It’s Home Economics 101 – and a lesson for our time

It’s time to bring back those skills that made the kitchen tables the centre of our homes

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I made a quick evening stop at the grocery store while near Edmonton. It was late and cold. Tired moms filled the aisles, getting their shopping done. Men filled baskets with food for the next day. Babies cried. Children were restless. This was not an ideal end to a long working day. I thought about all this in terms of the value of money and time. How many hours do folks spend shopping and what does that experience cost? According to a Dalhousie University study, Canadians go shopping for food (not including separate trips for beverages, dining in, or taking out) 1.29 times per week at an average of 32 minutes each time — or about 35 hours per year. That time was just in the grocery store and does not include getting there, the cost of fuel, other stops, getting home, and the possibility of paying for other expenses while shopping, such as childcare.

In 2017, the cost for a family of four to buy groceries in Canada averaged \$220 per week or \$11,440 per year, according to the Canadian Food Price Report and that is projected to increase to \$12,157 this year. To put this into perspective, in 2017, Canadians spent \$95.8 billion in supermarkets, with the majority of the revenue going to supermarket chains. I admire those who navigate this complex shopping challenge week after week, but they are feeding a pretty big machine. Could they instead be feeding themselves? And it concerns me as food is often the flex part in the family budget. The mortgage and other costs are fixed. When times are tough, nutritional value of the food basket may suffer as parents opt for fillers such as bread to keep little ones fuelled. I understand store dependency as a student living in the city. The situation leaves me feeling very vulnerable in terms of food security. Every few days, like most Canadians, I stock my little fridge. If the ferry did not dock or the airport closed, I might be unable to

access food. This is the reality for the majority of Canadians. This brings to mind my mother. I think of her and the huge garden that fed us. We despised that acre of ground as children — shelling peas by the bushel was our least favourite task. It was, however, a reliable food chain. The freezer was always filled with at least two years’ supply of every imaginable fruit and vegetable. In the basement of the old farmhouse, sitting like coloured gems on rough 2x8 planks were rows of peaches, pears, cinnamon crabapples, jams, jellies, beans, carrots, ketchup — you name it and we had it. And all of it was available by simply walking downstairs. The ingredients were simple and pure, and in terms of the environmental footprint, it was ideal. Peels and waste went out to the animals or back into the soil, jars were reused, fuel was not burned by simply walking into the basement. Food miles were zero unless the fruit came from the B.C. fruit truck. Veggies, potatoes, berries, milk, and meat we had in abun-

dance. No one was enslaved in the processing of the food. Everything came from our land or from within Canadian borders. I was not interested in domestic skills, but now wish I had paid a little more attention in the kitchen. What Mom did was ensure our food security through year-round access to a variety of nutritious foods. My memories are there... on those shelves and around that old kitchen table. The idea of being able to access food is the very thing the world is talking about on a macro scale today. The urban solution is not only rooftop pots and community gardens. The rural solution is not simply more value added. There is a combination of great ideas (such as buying frozen peas grown in Canada). The secret ingredient is for food production (agriculture), home processing and preparation (home economics), and financial literacy to be taught in our schools at every level so the child can build around that knowledge in their community and home.

My mother will wonder when she reads this, but in my out-loud voice I am advocating to “bring back home economics” for boys and girls so they can explore where food comes from and why it is of critical value to be able to access this nutritional bundle at any time. Bring it back because the home is the centre of the plate where all growth and experiences take place, and because food insecurity should never be part of any person’s life, especially that of a child. But most importantly, let’s focus on food economics and food security as individuals, families, teams, and communities. Let’s share the load of local food preservation so we have a little more time at home to prepare and share together the bounty of our harvests, be that from planter or pot, field or forest, bought or butchered, picked, pickled, or preserved. *Brenda Schoepp works as an international mentor and motivational speaker. She can be contacted through her website www.brendaschoepp.com. All rights reserved. Brenda Schoepp 2019*