

Food the basis for humanity

by Mark Pavilons

You can learn a lot about someone by sharing a meal with them.

Food, in itself, is marvellous. Sharing food creates memories, and that warm fuzzy feeling after a really good meal is unbeatable.

When I think of Irish potato farls, German roladen or Guyanese roti, I think of family. I think of tradition. I think of home.

I enjoy cooking and my BBQ kills continue to improve each season. When I carry in the steak, chicken or sausages hot off the grill, I really enjoy watching my family eat. I love seeing my son close his eyes and soak up every morsel of my offerings. He has become quite the meat-atarian!

There is so much love in food that it's amazing to be human sometimes.

I believe most of our adventures and journeys abroad include food.

You don't go to the Bahamas to eat hamburgers. You try conch fritters. I've tried to find them here and surprise my wife, but it just wasn't the same.

In the Caribbean, you eat fresh mango, seafood and traditional rice dishes. When you're away, there's always something new on the menu!

In retrospect, I think some of the best times with my wife were in the Caribbean, enjoying the sea breeze on the patio at breakfast, or sampling a couple Bahama Mamas!

Anthropologist Gillian Crowther stresses that "commensality" - sharing a meal with someone, eating and drinking together at the same table - is one of the most important social aspects in all cultures.

Eating together confirms the sense of belonging, and being part of a community.

Offering food to friends and strangers is fundamental hospitality.

I remember that we found a young boy begging for money in Cartagena and we took him out for pizza. In the Dominican, our mission team created a massive meal and we dished it out to desperate Haitian families.

It's been said that dinners together can not only create relationships and memories, but they can recreate them, too.

I've been lucky to share some amazing meals with friends and family here in King, including Hey Paesano, Cappuccino Bakery, Raffaele's, In This Corner, Rockford's, Hogan's, Port Soiree and Locale to name a few.

We humans are special in the big picture. Our love of food and how we create culinary masterpieces sets us apart from all other species. Our sense of taste is much better than many of our mammal counterparts.

Sharing food has always been part of history. Creating sustainable agriculture and establishing the first villages launched our modern civilization just over 10,000 years ago. Here, our social growth centred around food.

For millennia, family gatherings, community events and various feasts brought people together "... because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry." Ecclesiastes 8:15

Socials and church picnics were integral in all small communities. To some extent, they still are.

We still celebrate food in all of its glory. A mainstay of our social interaction involves eating out and entire communities are planned and promoted for their proximity to restaurants.

Our love of food hasn't waned one iota, but there are aspects of our lives where we're neglecting this important family tradition.

A recent national survey found that 66 per cent of working Canadians eat lunch alone at least three times in the work week. This has become the new normal, perhaps out of necessity in some environments. We're too busy to take an hour off in the middle of the day. We eat standing up or in our cars.

I've made a lot of strong ties and relationships in King and I jump at the chance for lunch out. It's a bit of business, but it's mostly about connecting with other people, talking about current events, life, family and everything human.

Surveys also indicate that employees actually perform better when they take breaks and eat together.

Our research shows that we build better relationships with our coworkers when we take time to disconnect from technology and enjoy lunch together. What a simple solution to fostering better relationships and creating a happier workplace ... eating together just makes sense," said Sarah Davis, president of Loblaw.

Maybe your work environment involves some sort of social food gatherings.

We're also getting a bit lazy when it comes to sitting down together as a family at the dinner table. Sure, with jobs, part-time jobs, school work and running errands, setting aside the time isn't always easy.

We make a point of sharing big family breakfasts on weekends. Sometimes they're healthy, and sometimes we throw the meal plan out the window and cook up bacon, home fries, hash browns and a mountain of bagels and scrambled eggs. Many a good day have started over a hearty breakfast!

Dinners are another matter. During the summer BBQ season, we do manage to gather on the patio and enjoy the bounty. Celebrations and pool parties draw family members together and we share in good food and good conversation. If you can't enjoy a meal with your spouse in Paris, I say live vicariously through food! Experiment and try different dishes there's a world of tastes out there!