

“What’s for dinner?”

The hour is 5 p.m. and the empty dinner menu has been tickling the hunger pains since the morning shower. Thinking of an appetizing meal 12 hours before the sit-down meal gnaws at the mind while I dry my just washed hair. Again, I am in charge of mixing the ingredients for yet another dinner. As Scarlet in “Gone with the Wind” says, “I’ll think about it later.” I complete morning tasks and go right into quilting the afternoon away. Sometimes thoughts of the past slip in and nibble away memories.

“What do you want for dinner?” I ask any number of family members staying around for the final repast of the day. “Ahhh,” comes a reply way back then. “Don’t know.”

“How about a bowl of cold cereal and two slices of toast?” I enquire. Faces wrinkle, eyes roll and tongues lick lips. “Not that,” comes the answer. No suggestions follow. Middle schoolers are the same the world around. Rolling eyes, shrugging shoulders and monosyllable sounds define the age. I sigh, then moan and then punch the washing machine button to start ‘er up. Mama’s rolling eyes and deep sighs defines the age. That was then.

Planning meals still is not a happy item on the list of things to do. I hope inspiration will happen before the sound of the dinner gong. Cookbooks from those olden days now hiding in my kitchen cupboards offer menus on back pages. I sigh, thinking that leafing through those now torn and “scratch and sniff” pages are too much work. Family now is just the two of us opening and closing the refrigerator door hoping good eats will fly out and land in our arms. Cooking a meal every night is never fulfilling.

In the 1970s parents got away with fixing hot dogs and a can of beans in a pinch. Nowadays, that meal is way down on the menu. The rolling eyes have moved on, but the “Don’t know,” somehow echoes from the vastness of the empty bedrooms. Those middle schoolers now have rolling eyes to deal with in their own families.

“We order out,” says a daughter. When her two children, now in high school, were babies, she would call in an order, put the two babies in the car, buckle them in for safety and drive the eight minutes to the restaurant. Upon arrival she would call again on her cell phone and ask them to deliver to her van while she waited in their parking lot. That was 15 years ago. Now, texting the order which includes payment is key and a person with “Uber” or the like or restaurant driver delivers.

Still, there is the question. “What’s for dinner?” Who decides what to order following work and school and activities? And then what to drink with the meal order? Most nights, though, there is a hot meal around 9 p.m. Sometimes food is ordered on-line and delivered so that the “chef of the night” can cook up the meal before bedtime and dreams.

Whatever the method there is the question...Who is on Clean-up?

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