

## **Our Kitchen Table**

**By**

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When my wife and I moved into our first—unfurnished—parsonage forty years ago, we'd been married less than a year. Among the many things we did not yet own was a kitchen table. A couple in the church offered us an old table they claimed was just taking up space in their basement. The price was right: free.

The somewhat battered drop-leaf table was solid mahogany. It had been manufactured in the 1930s in the Duncan Phyfe style. My wife freshened it up with one of those antiquing kits that was popular in the late sixties, painting it bayberry green.

Remarkably, this “temporary” solution to our table-less predicament has remained at the center of our kitchens—in New York, Maryland, and Virginia—for the past four decades. We've learned to cope with its wobbly leaves, and the “antiqued” surface of 1969 has worn into a genuinely antique patina.

A few years ago my wife and I discussed the possibility of having the paint stripped off the table and asking a professional to repair its worn hinges and restore the original mahogany finish. What we didn't expect was a loud howl of protest from our adult daughters.

These young women, who now have their own homes and their own kitchen tables, were outraged that their parents would tamper with an icon of their growing-up years. “We did our homework on that table,” they protested. Indeed, their well-sharpened pencils had left tracks upon tracks in the green paint. But more was involved than the fact they had done their homework at this table. It was for them a symbol of the life we had shared—and continue to share—as a family.

Despite the sometimes hectic pace of life in the parsonage, we made a point of gathering together around that table for dinner every night. At that table we had offered our thanks to God for his providence. Upon that table my wife had placed meals that were both nutritious and delicious. Around that table we had enjoyed much laughter and shared occasional tears. As the altar or communion table in a church stands at the center of its worshipping community, this old green table symbolized the center of our family life.

Needless to say, the table remains green and its leaves still are wobbly. Our grandchildren now sit around it on their visits to West Point. There is no power, of course, in the table itself, but there is power in the memories it brings to mind—memories that now are being impressed upon the minds of a new generation.

Families who gather for regular mealtimes around their kitchen or dining room tables are empowered in many ways. Consistency in mealtimes, bedtimes, and the practice of reading to children every day pay remarkable dividends for families willing to adopt such disciplines.

What kinds of stories might your kitchen table tell?

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