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FIND THE TIME TO ENJOY FRIENDS, SIMPLE PLEASURES OF DAILY LIFE

AMY E. MORGAN -

Almost 20 years ago, we inherited a silver tea service. It came in a beautiful velvet-lined box and the pieces shone brilliantly. I took it out of the box and never put it back. I use it every day, a gentle reminder of where and whom it came from. It's also my reminder not to hold things for "special occasions," or to save things for "company."

Too often, we wait for just the right time to use something. We want to spend time with the people we care about, yet never quite get around to doing it. We love and appreciate family and friends, yet don't tell them how much on a regular basis.

I love a good cup of tea. I love to cook and entertain, and I feel blessed with a great family and a few really close friends. It seemed a natural course to combine all those recently, so I sent out invitations to a tea party. One Wednesday afternoon at 1 p.m., my mother, two sisters, sister-in-law and three dear friends got together for a delightful afternoon of conversation and edible delights.

I had never had a tea party. Never even been to one. I pored over books at the library about the dos and don'ts of a tea party. I read about proper tea etiquette and all manner of recipes for sandwiches, desserts and beverages. Deciding that we weren't the "formal" tea types, I planned what I'll call a "modified" tea party that suited our special group.

I set the food table with a delicately embroidered linen tablecloth and matching napkins. Wineglasses were set out for punch and the china and silverware were arranged. A cozy summer room in the back of the house was set up with chairs for us all to sit comfortably in the round. An array of fresh flowers decorated end tables and covered the doilies.

Our lunch consisted of crustless sandwiches of tuna and egg salad. Alas, cucumber sandwiches weren't our style, so the cucumbers were served in slices alongside the sandwiches. Fresh raspberries and grapes and an assortment of muffins, breads and scones rounded out our meal. Not everyone drank tea, so we enjoyed a light and refreshing punch.

As everyone arrived, the smiles on their faces were well worth any effort I had put into the day. The hours flew by as we ate and drank. The conversation was funny and serious; ranging the gamut from work, to family life, to the joys we feel blessed with. Laughter, even giggles, often filled the room.

The day hadn't just happened. Each one of us made our own special effort to be there. We didn't just have the time, we made the time. We are a wonderfully diversified group. Our ages range from 36 to 70. Some are married and some divorced; some with children and some without. Most have either full- or part-time jobs that we had arranged the day around. Kids and husbands alike had been sent off to occupy themselves.

Occasionally, someone would stop in the middle of the conversation and just smile and comment, "This is so nice." Without a doubt, every one of us felt pampered and special. We joked about how we deserved this, as if we needed to justify to ourselves that it was all right to simply be sitting at a tea party on a Wednesday afternoon.

It takes surprisingly little effort to have the simple joys of our daily life multiply into something that we never expected. My love for a cup of tea, a beautiful tea service and the blessings of good family and friends turned into a delightful day that I will never forget. It may have been my first tea party, but it won't be my last.

AMY E. MORGAN lives and writes on Grand Island.

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