

GIFTS

from the Hearth

Your Guide to the
Art of Hospitality



Elizabeth R. Skoglund

Gifts from the Hearth

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Interior design by Sherri L. Hoffman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Skoglund, Elizabeth.

Gifts from the hearth : your guide to the art of hospitality / Elizabeth R.
Skoglund.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57293-094-2

1. Hospitality—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Hospitality—Biblical
teaching. 3. Cookery. I. Title.

BV4647.H67 S558 2003

241'.671—dc21

2002152914

Printed in the United States of America

03 04 05 06 07 08 09 / DP / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To Rayne, Lance, and Elizabeth Hannah

with gratitude for their contributions to the hospitality of this home and to the writing of this book. They will, I know, continue these traditions and add to them in their own home, with their family and friends, as well as in ministering to the stranger at the gate.

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 FOREWORD

Ministry to others”—although this phrase does not occur until well into the body of this wonderful book, it is clearly the engine that drives Ms. Skoglund’s commitment to hospitality. For her, hospitality is a “divine command.” Reminiscent of Saint Paul’s description of himself as becoming all things to all men, she very sensitively describes a huge range of approaches to hospitality—from the very formal to the casual—but always the message to the recipients of her hospitality is, “You are loved, you are important to me,” as she seeks to create a “safe place” for her guests, where they and their burdens can be separated. She also shows that hospitality may sometimes be very costly—even to the point of laying down one’s life.

Although many of her forays into hospitality seemed (and, in truth, were) spontaneous, they often worked only because of careful forward planning and organization—having pre-cooked dishes in the freezer, or recipes for apparently complex dishes which were readily assembled at short notice.

Elegance, simplicity, and meticulous thought all come together in her smorgasbord of wise counsel. Those who excel in conversation should not dwell overlong in the kitchen stirring soup! As a recipient of her hospitality on numerous occasions, this reviewer gladly attests to the fact that she practices what she preaches.

A host of wonderful recipes (beyond the competence of this reviewer to assess) accompany this invaluable book, which meets a sore need of life in America of the twenty-first century.

Matthew E. Conolly, M.D., F.A.C.P., F.R.C.P.
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INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is a tradition that is added to and passed down from one generation to another, so writing a book about the comfort of the hearth has involved going back into my own roots, to people and places long gone. My maternal grandparents, Alfred and Carolina Benson, were Swedish immigrants who established a safety zone of hospitality in their home in Wisconsin, where they welcomed and ministered to everyone from Indians who still inhabited the area to itinerant pastors and family members from Chicago. That tradition was passed down to my mother and blended by marriage with the customs my father brought to their newly established home from his own immigrant past. My heritage has been enriched by friends also, forming a curious blend of Swedish, British, Chinese, and American, until my concept of hospitality has emerged as uniquely my own.

Throughout the text you will find certain recipes marked by a special icon, indicating that they can be found in a recipe section at the end of the book, along with practical helps and food facts. Remember, too, that the placement of a recipe in one chapter does not limit its appropriateness to that one type of event. For example, certain cookies can be used for Christmas, but also for picnics and teas. Scones are an example of simplicity, but can be equally effective when served for a tea.

All of the people who influenced this book cannot possibly be specifically recognized. But I am very grateful to have come from a family who offered hospitality to the stranger at the gate as well as their own friends and families, and I appreciate those among my family and friends who even now offer gifts from the hearth.

Special thanks go to my littlest helper, Elizabeth Hannah, and to Rayne and Lance Wilcox, who helped with typing, food tasting—and testing—as well as sorting through ideas for this book. My thanks to to Mitchell Davis of The James Beard Foundation who took time during the holiday season to answer questions in a thoughtful and precise way. Special gratitude goes to Steve Nevens who tested and retested the use of pasteurized eggs and actually introduced me to Davidson's pasteurized eggs. Thanks, too, go to James Sluss, Director of Sales Planning for Pasteurized Eggs Corporation, who shared important current information regarding salmonella and eggs and referred me to available resources.

Few publishers are as pleasant to work with as Discovery House. My thanks go to publisher Carol Holquist for her creative ideas, Judith Markham for her editorial support and organizational skills, Kim Collins for her insight into promotion, and Beth Koops, who is a valuable resource for various types of information. Thanks also to Tim Gustafson who was there at the start and once again at the end.

The gifts from the hearth that we offer to each other on this earth are just a foretaste of the abundant hearth we shall share someday in eternity, where our Lord will preside and we shall partake together in that place of comfort and safety.



The wayfarers come to us continually, and they do not come by chance. God sends them. And as they come . . . they are our judges. Not merely by whether we give, but by how we give and by what we give, they judge us. . . . Thank God there are some men and women here and there, full of the power of the Gospel, who cannot rest satisfied till they have opened their very hearts and given the poor way-faring men the only thing which really is their own, themselves, their faith, their energy, their hope in God.

PHILLIPS BROOKS

That Means She Loves Us

A little girl was visiting her grandmother. Accustomed to fast food and hastily eaten dinners served on TV trays or in the back seat of a car, she stood mesmerized, looking at the sparkling crystal, the colorful china, and the silver cutlery.

Turning to her father, who was sitting across the room, she whispered loudly: “Come and look at this, Daddy.”

Her father came. A little confused at the interruption for what seemed to him to be nothing, he asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Look,” she repeated, pointing proudly at the shiny silver cutlery and the sparkling cut-glass serving dish. “That means she loves us,” she declared with certainty.

Later, as I watched the child eating contentedly, with a formality of manners consistent with the importance of the occasion in her mind, I realized even more completely how much the extra details of hospitality can communicate love.

I remembered a scene many years earlier, when I was a small child seated at another table and another meal, this time breakfast. It was early 1942. Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The United States was officially at war. There was talk about Japanese planes sighted off the coast of California, where we lived. As a result, windows were blacked out at night, and sirens often caught us unaware on the street.

There were economic restrictions, too. My parents were issued small books of food coupons that allowed them to buy only limited quantities of rationed items like meat, sugar, and coffee. Gasoline was rationed, but for the moment that didn't matter to us because we didn't have a car yet. We had just moved to California the year before so that my father could design planes for Lockheed Aircraft. Now, with the declaration of war between us and Germany as well as Japan, his work carried more personal significance, which also made all of us more acutely aware of the war than we might have been otherwise.

On this particular Monday morning, the discussion around the breakfast table was not focused on war, or the car my father was soon to buy, or even the house to which we were shortly to move. On this spring morning the topic was sugar, and at the moment it seemed all-important. Breakfast turned into a democratic caucus convened to decide one vital question: How should the week's small allotment of sugar be used? The choice basically came down to two possibilities: a week of sugar with coffee for the adults—or a cake at the end of the week, which could be shared with us children.

I remember the debate. I remember the decision: cake at the end of the week. And I remember feeling loved; for even at that age I knew that in any good Swedish household, coffee—with its cream and sugar—was valued above any cake. But that week my parents showed their love for my sister and me by giving up the sugar in their coffee. Like the significance of crystal, china, and silver to the five-year-old at her grandmother's house, the adult decision to give up sugar, some fifty years ago, meant to two other children, born in a different time, that we, too, were loved.

In a world threatened by the horrors of world war, the “safety zone” of a home that offered hospitality, first to its own family and

then to others, buffered the coldness and danger in the world outside. It provided an antidote for loneliness. Cake for Sunday dinner was something to look forward to; and as such, it was a small symbol of permanence that could be counted on in the middle of a world of impermanence.

Well over half a century later the world is threatened by another war, a new kind of war: international terrorism. Unfortunately, terrorism has existed for years in many parts of the world, but since September 11, 2001, it has become a vivid reality here in America. For all of us, life has changed in many ways, large and small. We have terrorist alerts, rated on an imminent danger scale; endless searches in airports; school “lock downs,” just in case; irradiated mail; and the news is filled daily with reports on “weapons of mass destruction,” anthrax, biological and chemical warfare, and suicide bombers.

In the midst of this, all of us—children and adults—need to feel just a little more special than usual, just a little safer. Hospitality and home are important again, not so much as showcases of affluence, but as places of safety and love. Family is important. “Home-cooked food” and “comfort food” are terms we hear more often now. We cling to the good memories of the past, which are often connected with food, and we talk about “making memories” for our children. Cozy and intimate are “in” for people of all ages.

WHAT IS HOSPITALITY?

One of the most elaborate dinner parties I ever went to was served in a lovely, large, formal dining room. The food was exotic and was perfectly arranged on striking black-and-white plates. The table was decorated in black and white, with an emphasis on

geometric shapes for the napkin rings, candleholders, and centerpiece of white flowers.

In the background played some rather monotonous music. At the table itself a stiff, awkward conversation started and stopped at regular intervals. I put in my time until it was appropriate to leave. Once outside in the cool night air, I felt as though I had regained my freedom. I would have traded that dinner party in a minute for porridge by someone's warm, friendly fire!

In contrast, true hospitality has the feeling of the hearth. It stands in opposition to the coldness and depersonalization of the world outside. It provides a temporary respite that remains in the memory and refurbishes long after it is past. True hospitality is so important that the writer to the Hebrews warns us, "Never forget to be hospitable, for by hospitality some have entertained angels unawares."¹ H. C. G. Moule said of this passage:

Dear to the heart of the believing Church for ages have been these precepts to love the brethren, to love the stranger, to remember Abraham at Mamre and Gideon at Ophrah with their angel-guests, and to see a possible angel-visitor in every needing stranger at the door. . . . The call . . . to remember the captive, and the sufferer of every sort, comes with solemn power from this paragraph, as it presses home the law of sympathetic fellowship.

Hospitality is a gift. It is a gift that says to the person to whom it is given, "I care about you."

After leading the courageous rescue of 100,000 Jews in Budapest at the end of World War II, Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg was captured by the Russians. One day another prisoner was put into Wallenberg's cell in the Gulag. Wallenberg was

in solitary confinement, so the placement was a mistake and lasted for only a few hours.

Years later, when the prisoner was questioned in Stockholm regarding Wallenberg (who is still missing), he told the story about that day when he had been put in the prison cell. They had “talked” for the few hours they had, using prison sign language. But first Wallenberg had offered him half of his day’s bread ration. When he was asked how he could be so sure of his memory after so many years, he replied that it was the only time in all of his years in the Gulag when someone had offered him part of his daily bread ration. Such love he could not forget. It was an act of the truest hospitality.

A hamburger given to a bag lady on a bus bench; an elaborate wedding dinner; a gift of firewood late at night from an innkeeper to someone just checking into a motel; a cool, wet towel given to someone at the scene of a car accident; a midnight snack shared with someone who needs to talk: all of these are acts of hospitality. They are gifts of love, freely given by one person to another. They are each a gift from the hearth. Each of these echoes the sentiment of the small child who said, “That means she loves us.”

The place of hospitality will often be quite literally the welcoming hearth of one’s home. But more fundamentally, it will always be the welcoming hearth of the heart. For while hospitality requires a physical place, it is even more essentially a place in the heart. Hospitality is the gift of oneself that says, “You are important; you are loved.” ❁