

POLITICS AS USUAL: Teach a man to fish...

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Can you cook? Not cordon-bleu cooking, I am asking about basic cooking. Can you make mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables and some oven-baked chicken breasts without poisoning your family or burning the house down?

Can you sew? If the hem on your skirt or pants fell down, could you fix it? Can you sew a button on?

Do you know how to make a menu? A grocery list? A household budget?

I dare say that if you are under the age of 30, chances are your answers to most, if not all, of the questions above are 'no?'. I don't say that with smugness or early stage old fart-ism. I make the statement as an alarming observation about how poorly the next generation has been prepared for life on their own.

Basic life skills have simply not been taught.

Let me restate that. Basics of all sorts have not been taught. Basic numeracy skills, for example, are also lacking. Ask the kid at Starbucks to give you back your change without checking the cash register and you'll know what I mean.

Do you know how kids are taught math today? Discovery math, where they 'discover' how to solve the math problem. Seriously? And they wonder why kids are doing so poorly.

You can't lay the lack of life preparation at the feet of exhausted parents. Yes, parents play a role in teaching their own kids about how to make their way in life. But, they are not wholly responsible. Nor should they be.

Schools, churches, Scouts, Girl Guides and after school programs have always played a direct role in preparing kids for life. But these old systems, the safety nets are frayed and in some cases gone entirely. Long gone.

Home economics 'do you remember that? I do. In high school we were taught how to prepare meals, mend clothes, clean the house, set the table 'basic home keeping skills. It wasn't anything fancy, but it was extremely helpful both to me now and for my family at the time.

Home economics was dropped from most high school curricula over a decade ago. As a result, we have an entire generation of kids who do not have even basic food literacy skills, let alone know how to cook. Or clean. Or sew. Or budget. And that serves no one's best interest.

Today, both parents work in most households. Many households are headed by only one parent 'doubling the amount of work that one parent must do. Kids should be helping out at home 'but they're not. It's not laziness. They don't know how and parents are too tired at the end of the day to teach them.

Both of my parents worked. Consequently, my sisters and I helped out around the house. We made dinners, we did the dishes, we cleaned our own rooms. All of my friends did the same to varying degrees.

Chores were a normal part of life. How did they become a relic of the past? Why do kids 'assuming they aren't engaged in some tightly scripted after school activity 'sit around playing Halo 4, waiting for mom or dad to come home with pizza?

Why aren't they getting dinner ready? I think that if they are old enough to be home by themselves, they are old enough to get dinner ready.

That may sound old-fashioned. So be it. It's true. How are they supposed to learn to cook if they never have to do it for themselves? To quote the proverb, 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'

Youth today need the right tools to build a decent life for themselves. It's in our best interest to ensure that they have those tools.

With youth unemployment rates hovering at 20 '25% for those under 24 years old, it is possible that we will have a generation that will not have the same standard of living as their parents.

They're going to need to know how to live on a budget, how to shop for groceries, how to make food from scratch. In short, they're going to need a course in home economics.

Personally, I think it's time to put it back on the statutory curriculum.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.