



Stepping Up and Taking Charge

The next morning, Todd awoke before everyone. He decided to go downstairs to look at the collection of childhood photographs. While bending over to pick up a photo album, he noticed a health magazine with the heading “Pre-teen Obesity: The Downfall of the Next Generation.” Intrigued by the caption, he decided to read the article. The article discussed an alarming increase in the number of overweight kids. It also stated that children are developing chronic conditions like adult onset diabetes, heart disease (high blood pressure and high cholesterol), orthopedic disorders and respiratory disease.

After reading the article, Todd thought about how he had improved his eating habits, but had neglected to transfer those same habits to his kids. *Am I contributing to the slow death of my kids? The information in this article suggests that my kids' lifestyle habits might result in death or long-term suffering, as a result of overindulgence in high fat, high cholesterol, high sodium, high sugar, high carbohydrates, high calorie foods like hamburgers and fries, chicken nuggets, fried foods, cookies, donuts, candies, and sodas. I've cut out these foods to enhance the longevity and quality of my life, but according to this*



article, it's important for my kids, also. If I don't get my kids on track, I'm a detriment to their ability to live long, healthy lives.

"Good morning, son," Todd's mother said, tiptoeing into the room. "What are you reading?"

"Actually, it is one of your health magazines," Todd said. "There are several articles about overweight and obese kids."

"It's really serious. That's why I'm so worried about the girls," she said with a consoling tone. "They're too large for their ages. It's my opinion that girls suffer so much more when they're overweight or obese. They are more likely to be subject to ridicule and discrimination. They tend to avoid public encounters. They often go to one of two extremes. That is, they prefer to be alone and withdrawn, or they try desperately to be accepted by others. And please don't misinterpret what I'm saying... I'm not saying they need to be thin to the point that their bones are visible. I'm saying they need to be following healthier habits — eating healthy foods, participating in exercise, getting plenty of rest, and drinking a sufficient amount of water."

"I know, mom."

"They should be eating foods with nutrients like vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, which help us all to stay healthy — foods that are going to protect their cells from disease and illness. The sooner parents understand the concept of healthier habits, the better off our kids will be. Parents allow too much of the wrong foods into their kids' lives. When I went to our school's football and basketball games, I often remember the procession of parents and kids traveling back and forth to the concession stand with hot dogs drowning in cheese, onions, chili, mustard, and/or relish and pickles... or nachos swimming in cheese, chili and the occasional beans, sour cream, and/or jalapenos... or... chicken fingers, french fries and hush puppies basket... or chili cheese fries with a hot dog or hamburger... all flushed down with a super-sized soda. And that's just one segment of the day. The consumption of high caloric, artery clogging foods at football, basketball, or soccer games doesn't even take into consideration that probable breakfast trip to McDonald's for pancakes, hash browns, and sausage...

or the lunch or dinner at Taco Bell for a burrito supreme. The habits that you're allowing can cause generations of health problems."

"It's all troubling, Mom," Todd said, slumped over at the desk.

"Son, your father and I are here to support you," she said. "Why don't you go and see if the kids are up? I'm going to go ahead and get breakfast started. Your father and I typically eat around nine o'clock most mornings."

Todd folded the corner of the page in the magazine to mark his stopping point. He took a deep breath, anticipating a fresh start with the kids. Walking up the stairs, he heard the sounds of running water in a sink, the flushing of a toilet, and the gurgling of mouthwash. He was relieved to hear signs of movement.

"Hey, guys, your grandma is getting ready to cook breakfast," Todd said, making his presence known from the hallway. "Come downstairs after you finish getting dressed."

The only acknowledgement came from Trey. Back downstairs, Todd offered to help his mother.

"What's for breakfast?"

"I think we're going to have French toast, with some of your father's venison sausage and a medley of fruit."

"I can't believe you're going to cook French toast," Todd said. "That's fattening, isn't it?"

"The one thing you should understand — with kids, you've got to be creative with making foods healthier plus tasty. Although my French toast has been altered from the traditional style to contain healthier products, the kids will not notice the difference. I've prepared the French toast with eggs that are high in Vitamin E, contain Omega-3 fatty acids, and have less than 25% of saturated fat; soy milk that contains a number of vitamins and minerals; and whole grain bread, nutmeg, ground cinnamon, cooked in olive oil, then topped with a low calorie, sugar-free syrup. As far as the venison sausage, it contains far less fat than the sausage from the local grocer, and it has no preservatives. The medley of fruit consists of banana, cantaloupe, and strawberries. It is packed with nutritional benefits."



"I've really gotten into the health stuff since joining the cycling group," Todd said. "One week we received a handout stating that the Omega-3 fatty acids that exist in fish have the good fat to help prevent the formation of bad fat in your blood. What is it exactly?"

"Omega-3 fatty acids are a form of polyunsaturated fats, one of four basic types of fat that the body receives from food. You're probably more familiar with the fats most commonly referred to... cholesterol, saturated fat and monounsaturated fat. Omega-3 is critical for good health. The only way you can get it is through food. It has been published that Omega 3 helps to protect us from health threats. Research has shown that it boosts our immune system. And you know the immune system fights off foreign invaders that try to enter our bodies. There are also claims that Omega-3 lowers cholesterol, reduces blood pressure, improves autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, improves insulin sensitivity, and eases menstrual pain."

"What foods does it exist in?"

"It is more abundant in Atlantic salmon and other fatty, cold-water fish like sardines, Atlantic halibut, bluefish, tuna, and Atlantic mackerel... venison and buffalo are both good sources. Other sources include canola oil, broccoli, cantaloupe, kidney beans, spinach, grape leaves, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, and walnuts... and my Omega-3 enriched eggs."

"I heard something about mercury and fish on the news the other day. What's that all about?"

"I remember hearing a recommendation the other day that fish consumption should be limited to two to three servings weekly because so many fish are polluted with mercury and other contaminants. The fish I've mentioned have relatively low levels of mercury. Fish with high levels include shark, swordfish, tilefish, and king mackerel... red snapper also has a high level. As long as you stay away from the fish with high levels of mercury, and eat fish in moderation, you'll be okay," his mother stated, while she stacked the French toast on a platter. "Todd, your children must become your priority. They have a radar detector inside of them that signals their priority level in your life. Right now, they know

that priority level is low. They need a nurturing and supportive father. A father who cares about what they eat. A father who cares about their whereabouts. A father who's excited about spending time with them. A father who's front and center for the important moments in their lives. Believe me, if you don't make some necessary changes, your life will be full of regrets when you realize what you missed out on. Plus, a supportive and nurturing parent helps to keep a kid from going down the wrong path."

"I know you're right, Mom. I think Tarrynn is smoking marijuana."

"Why would you think that?"

"When she came in yesterday afternoon, she smelled like it."

"Did you ask her about it?"

"Yes... she said her friend was smoking it."

"Do you believe her?"

"I don't know, Mom. I've been out of touch for so long. I don't know what to believe."

"When you were growing up, I wanted more than anything to trust you. But kids will be kids. I was a kid once. And there were a lot of acts I hid from my parents. I always kept those memories in the back of my mind while raising you and your sisters. My goal was to establish a foundation of right and wrong for my children. I wanted my children to know and understand bad choices and their consequences. You can do everything you deem possible to shape the mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual foundation for your child. But, no parent ever knows if and when outside influences will infiltrate and crack the foundation. My best bet was to implement a strategy of distraction... involvement in church activities... involvement in extra-curricular activities. We spent quality time with you and your sisters. You all didn't come and go as you pleased. Your whereabouts were tracked and monitored. We had discussions with you all about drugs, drug dealers, gangs, and sexual relations. We had discussions about your futures. We supported your dreams and created every opportunity for them to become a reality. We set boundaries... and when you all



deviated from those boundaries, there were consequences. Disciplinary actions. Above all, I prayed for my children.”

Just as their grandma was finishing up, the kids dragged into the kitchen with Grandpa Holder leading the way.

“Kids, help your grandma set the table,” Grandpa Holder said. “The dishes are in the top cabinet. Trey, look in the drawer near the sink and give me some knives, forks, and spoons, please.”

One by one, the kids carried out their grandparents’ instructions. They weren’t accustomed to eating from real dinnerware, having grown accustomed to cardboard boxes and plastic containers.

Seated at the table, Grandpa Holder began to bless the food. “Bow your heads.” Everyone sat quietly, waiting for Grandpa Holder to proceed. “Lord, thank you for this day. Thank you for family. Thank you for the food we’re about to eat for the nourishment and strengthening of our bodies. We thank you for the hands that prepared the food. Amen.”

Todd watched for the kids’ reaction to the food. As usual, his mother was right. They didn’t notice that the French toast was made from whole grain bread or that it was topped with sugar-free syrup. Trinity mentioned that the sausage tasted differently, but she liked it. After finishing their breakfast, Grandma Holder directed the kids to clear the table and wash the dishes. After everything was put back in its proper place, Grandma Holder prompted her husband to take the children into the pasture to explore country living.

“Grandpa, take the fishing gear and show the children some country fun,” Grandma Holder said.

The gleam in his mother’s eyes as she watched the kids trot off with their grandpa triggered a peaceful emotion inside Todd. Visions of her singing and reading to him as a child warmed his heart. She had that natural instinct when it came to caring for him. She knew when he was hungry, tired, not feeling well. And when he was troubled and needed to be held. Todd wanted to have those same instincts toward his kids. And most of all, he wanted to