By Jim Langham

Recently at an auction, an old dinner bell was one of the first items to sell and it sold at a hefty price. At first the property owner was amazed at the going price for the old relic, but then we started to reflect on the topic of,“suppertime,” and the realization of its value became more obvious.

At our little country home, suppertime around the old wooden table was absolutely the highlight of our family dynamics for the day. My grandmother would sit on one end and my father on the other. Then my mother and I would fit in between.

While it doesn’t take long to recall the aroma of fresh hamburger gravy over mashed potatoes and home made bread, the alluring smell of hot apple pie and sundry other goodies of our kitchen, the real value of supper at our place was the opportunity to gather as a family to visit.

Spontaneously, we would talk about the events around the place for the day, who visited the neighborhood, events in school, classroom experiences and pranks and labor at the furniture factory where my dad worked.

My grandma would sometimes spin tales from memories about her one room school, what it was like to have 15 people around the supper table and the experiences of walking to school during a storm.

Sometimes the sewing machine beside our supper table would be open because my mother would be making “alike shirts” for my dad and I to wear to church or social events. And, of course, family members would often hear “my side of the story” from the more traumatic moments in school.

Contrast those moments with the present style of evening meal, that of one family member running into the kitchen, slipping something into the microwave and then running back out the door. Others do a quick run-through at a fast-food place while others grab chips and soda on the run. The disheartening part of all of this is that there is no opportunity for family communication that used to give opportunity for expression and understanding of each other's feelings and challenges.

Each knew somewhat what the other was doing at any given time; in our family, that meant that we prayed for other family members at the moment in time that we knew that they were undergoing a certain challenge.

My mind would be in sync with such thoughts as, "9 a.m., mom's doctor's appointment, all day, dad's challenges at work and thoughts of grandma working in the garden in the morning."

We were very family focused, to the extent that we would immediately check on each other's personal events for the day. What a self-esteem builder to have family members remember what my needs were for the day.

Chores surrounding supper were in the flow of life. Upon arrival at home from school, it was the expected thing to chop wood and bring it into the house, bring in coal and go to the neighbor's to get well drinking water (we didn't have a well on our property).

After supper, my little step stool came out so I can stand up to the table and dry dishes and put them away from the evening meal.

Did I regret doing such chores? No, in fact, there was a sense of self-esteem fostered in being made to feel like a part of the family team, a quality I have kept to this day with a strong desire to chip in for the "team effort."

Perhaps some of the most notable memories of the evening meal revolve around certain comments that were made that reflected the times in which we were still living. One in particular occurred when my dad announced to us that he had accomplished a first in his work

place (Smith Brothers Furniture, Berne, Ind.) He always worked hard, as we all did, to assist with our close financial needs.

On this particular situation, he told how he had taken many hours of extra overtime work that reflected on that paycheck.

He looked at my mother and said, “Elnora, you won’t believe it but I made my first $100 check this week,” an accomplishment he was immensely proud of at the time.

To this day, a lump comes to my throat when I reflect on that moment, reflecting our family pride of contributing to our needs, and telling it around the evening meal. It was the nurturing site of much more than the country food that we enjoyed, it represented the fortifying of communication and love that developed the strength of soul that I carry with me to this day.