

The Dish Ran Away With The Spoon

Written by L.A. Plume

Tuesday, 10 November 2009 07:51

Well, here it is again, that approaching time of year euphemistically and optimistically known as 'the holidays.'



According to Wikipedia: "Holiday originally referred only to special religious days. In modern use, it means any special day of rest or relaxation, as opposed to normal days off work or school."

For many people a holiday means anything but rest and relaxation. For some, it is simply a challenging time at best. Perhaps our family is not what it used to be, or that picture perfect memory we had as a child, or read about, or watch on television. A holiday can be a minefield of control, expectation, and disappointment. The act of celebrating is designed to elevate our spirits, so formulate your coping strategies to maximize your enjoyment.

What do you do when you're setting the table for Thanksgiving and you can't find your turkey platter? Did you leave it at the cousin's house last Thanksgiving? Your stuffing spoon isn't in the drawer, is that the one your sister-in-law borrowed and never returned?

I've never been able to sort out the dilemma of party dish etiquette. You bring something to my party on a nice platter. You leave, the platter stays. Should you come back to retrieve it or should I deliver it back to you? What if, the next morning, I'm simply left with dishes I don't recognize?

When queried, people had a spectrum of sentiments:

1. I put them out with food on them the next time I entertain and see if they are claimed.

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2. I return them in the next few days with something on them.
3. I let everyone know they'll be on my front porch the next day for them to come by and get.
4. I put everything on an extra shelf in my pantry and remind people to have a look.

One November, a friend came by with a box of dishes from her pot-luck Thanksgiving dinner the previous year, and asked which might be mine. I chose the obvious, but let's face it – Pyrex is Pyrex; it's a bit difficult to recognize exactly which one is yours a year later unless you've put your name on it somewhere. And this, by the way, is a solution for those of you who don't heed my advice – there are china markers which you can use to put your name on the bottom of your glass or china dishes if you insist upon taking them to the party.

Remember this – if you are the guest, your job is relatively easy; you buy or prepare something to take, get dressed, and go. Your house may be a mess, you may only have a few spoons that do not have garbage disposal blade marks on them, your silver and crystal may not be polished, but none of this matters because no one is coming to your house for dinner that night. Think ahead and be mindful of the hostess. No matter how simple, there is generally some stress involved in entertaining, and that escalates when we are faced with the anticipated perfection of holidays and their attendant memories. Your host/ess will have, presumably, planned, shopped, prepared, cleaned (the house, the silver, the spots off the wine glasses), decorated, set the table, served, and will have to clean up and put away after the party is over. Don't add your dirty dish, which then has to find its way back to you, to her list. Face it - we are busy, we can be forgetful. No matter how well intentioned we are, dishes get left behind and disappear, just like socks in the dryer.

Take your contribution on something the host/ess can keep, or dispose of, or pass on. This does not mean a paper plate unless you're going to a picnic. Silver plastic trays are a good choice, or buy something at the discount or thrift store. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it does need to be attractive. Do check for chips or cracks. The host/ess can transfer your offering to a dish of her own, she can return it to you, she can do with it what she pleases, but let that be her choice. Then, maybe, when you go looking for that certain bowl in your cupboard, you might just find it is still there and you won't have to ask Aunt Martha if the candy bowl on the front hall table really belongs to her.

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