

A Mother. A Leader.



When I was a teenager, I was involved in an organization called The Leaders Club. The Club was headquartered at the local YMCA. Gil was our adult supervisor.

The Club was designed to give good kids an environment where they could grow and give back. We'd do things like raise money by selling popcorn at the swim meet. We'd supervise the dances held at the Y. We'd clean up the summer camp before the younger campers arrived for the season. Truth be told, it was really just a group of us kids who liked hanging around together and it gave us something constructive to do with our spare time.

One Spring, as the school year-end drew closer, we discussed how we were going to handle Prom. Prom took place at the school but there was the question of what all the attendees would do after the dance. No one wanted to go home that early, but we didn't have any other organized venue we could go to, and blow off the rest of our steam. And of course, the adults worried about alcohol and drug consumption. They always worried about that. This occasion just increased their worries.

So we all talked as a group of Leaders about what we could do. We decided to offer up a party at the YMCA. It was a perfect

location. Smack dab in the middle of downtown. It was a perfect venue for something like that. We could have a 'dance-after-the-dance' but there was more. We had the swimming pool. We had a gym where the boys could blow off their steam playing basketball. We had volleyball. We had arcade games. It seemed like the perfect idea. We went for it.

In order to cut down on the risks of alcohol and drug activity, we decided the doors would be locked. You had to be in by a certain hour and then you were not allowed to leave and come back. You could leave if you wanted to go home, but no coming back in. That cut the risk that someone would go off and get drunk or high and try to come back in. The party could go on all night. The parents would know their kids were in a safe environment and they'd have memories to cherish for a lifetime.

One small detail. If they actually stayed in all night, how do we feed them? Teenagers get hungry! There were snacks for during the evening. That was easy, but we decided they'd need breakfast before we let them go early in the morning. Staying up all night playing and dancing was going to assure that everyone needed food.

I decided to take the lead on this one and offered up my mom. My mother taught me never to be intimidated by a crowd when it came to cooking. Our holiday meals could feed a small army. What's a few hundred kids for breakfast? Piece of cake right? (coffee cake!).

I asked my mom if she would help, but truthfully, if she didn't step up I didn't have a clue what we could do besides order a lot of donuts.

My mother never shied away from a challenge. She said yes. She had never cooked for hundreds of kids before. She'd never produced a meal over the hours that spanned the middle of the

night. She'd never even figured out how to order the quantities needed to feed that many kids but she'd worked as a volunteer in the school cafeteria, so how hard could it be?

Well, some 40 years later I now know how hard that challenge was but my mother never let it be known that she was in virgin cooking territory; even for her.

My mom set about this project like a true Leader.

First thing she did was call in her buddies. A few ladies from the neighborhood said they'd drop their lives for that overnight gig too. She had her crew.

We set a menu. My mom would make sure we didn't eat just donuts. She wanted us to have a healthy meal. We had juices and milk on the menu. We had fruit salad. We had eggs and breakfast meat. No one was going to go hungry. Oh, yeah, we had some pastries too; including donuts. The teenage-dream breakfast.

During the night, all of us in the Leader's Club had our assignments. Some were in charge of setting up games. Some cleaned up the little messes that got left around the various locations throughout the Y. I was one of the ones in charge of snacks and supervising the dance. We just had to monitor behavior a bit and report if we saw that maybe a fight was going to break out or if anyone seemed to be participating in other unauthorized behavior. Our supervisor Gil and a few other adults were on staff that evening too, so we had plenty of back up.

I kept checking on my mom every chance I got. I kept asking her if I could help but she shooed me away every time. Although I was observing a flurry of activity; everyone as busy as bees in a hive, she deemed me un-needed. "Go have fun," she'd say.

I knew she was under pressure, but she seemed to be having fun

too. These ladies were giggling as they prepared a breakfast to be served at 6AM. They pulled an all-nighter. There was no infighting in the kitchen. No tired faces. Just giggles. I knew that was because my mother was organized, gave them tasks they could easily handle and she supervised them like a well-oiled machine.

As 6AM approached I went to the YMCA cafeteria to check on progress. I could not believe my eyes. They had taken the whole serving line and filled it with food. The fruits were colorful. The pans were sitting in their warming trays with their tops on. All the food was inside, ready to serve. The ladies put on clean aprons and were ready to serve. All we had to do was call the kids to breakfast.

As the call went out, the lids were opened. A gasp went up amongst the ladies. There was a problem. A big problem. The scrambled eggs were green!

How in blazes that did happen? And what happened!

Panic arose. What do we do now? Start the eggs over? How do you instantly make eggs for hundreds of kids? There were no spare eggs and this was before the days of 24 hour grocery stores.

What to do?

My mother calmly walked up and said, "Let's taste 'em." They tasted fine! They tasted just like regular scrambled eggs.

They figured out that some kind of chemical reaction took place because the eggs had been sitting, warming in the metal pans, hovering over the water-filled warming bins. The metal reaction must have turned the eggs green.

Too late now. Here come the kids, so my mother handed the helper a spoon and instructed her to serve the kids. The worst thing

they could do was turn down the eggs as they went through the line. They'd get plenty to eat with all the other stuff anyway. Too late to do anything else.

As the kids came through in the first wave, one of the first of them shouted, "Hey look! Green Eggs and Ham! Just like Dr. Seuss!

Word quickly spread through the line that these ladies had surprised them with Green Eggs and Ham. Every kid always wanted to eat green eggs and ham but had never had it. Now they had their chance.

They ALL took the eggs. They all loved the eggs and they fulfilled one of those little childhood dreams. The eggs, and all of the rest of the food was wiped out. Huge success.

All of the ladies just went with it. Of course they came up with green eggs and ham. Of course they did it on purpose. They all smiled. The giggles continued and my mother beamed as she breathed a huge sigh of relief.

My mother was asked to supervise that breakfast the next year as my brother came up the ranks, and even a few years after that, as I recall. My mother was presented with an honorary award. Gil, the Leader of the Leaders Club had a silver tray engraved to mark the occasion and it was presented to her in thanks for her service to the teenage community.

My mother has passed, but I have that silver tray. I also have my memories of a humble mother who possessed and shared her leadership skills for all to see. Thanks Mom.

Cheers,