The Unsolicited Opinions of The Alabama Housewife

One of my favorite Southerners is the late, great Dixie Carter, whom you may remember as Julia Sugarbaker on the 80s sitcom Designing Women. In reality, she was every bit as much of a lady as her character.

I once read an article she wrote about growing up in the South and how she had been raised to know the importance of etiquette. One part of the piece that has stuck with me through the years is that when she was growing up, her family kept their telephone in a drawer. As I recall, her mother insisted on the practice for fear that someone might see the phone sitting out in their home and believe the family to be ill-mannered. How easy to betray! Can you even imagine? I can remember taking the phone off the hook before sitting down to eat supper, but, sadly, times like those seem to be long gone. These days, we are rarely able to take even one bite without testing our friends first about how great the meal is.

Only last week, as my husband and I were out for supper, we were seated next to a family who allowed their young child to watch cartoons on a tablet throughout the entire meal. I was horrified and, if given the option, I would have put those parents in a drawer. Of course, we've all been in a situation where we would do whatever it took to make our child stop crying—that's life. However, if under normal circumstances your child can't sit politely at a table during a meal without a television in their reach, they should be left at home with a babysitter. Children need to grow up learning how to behave properly in all situations, and they look to us to teach them. Crayons, peg solitaire, and a good round of twenty questions are perfectly acceptable forms of table entertainment, but electronic devices should never be used to appease children in a nice restaurant. They also shouldn't be used to appease adults!

Truth be told, we are the ones to blame for this problem. The grown ups. The parents. It's a shame to admit, but far too many of us can't even drink a latte without first taking a photo and posting it on social media for all the world to see. And the eyes of our little ones are watching every move we make—and they want to mimic everything we do. We all need to be much more conscious of this and set better examples for the next generation of folks we are raising. We should know better than to have our phones out during a meal—or at church or the doctor's office. We should also know not to sit phones out on the table or to take private phone calls in public settings. Even if you don't care about the example you are setting for others, you should at least have respect for those around you.

The easiest thing is to remember: The Golden Rule. It's always a sure-fire way to help you make the right decision. Do you want to go out for a nice evening of good food, good friends, and good times—only to look across your table and feel as though you're at a drive-in movie? I don't. So be conscious of your surroundings and of those who surround you. If you're at Chick-fil-A and want to share pictures of your new puppy or let your child play a (quiet) game of memory on your phone while you wait with a friend, I'll give you a pass. But if you're at Hot and Hot Fish Club on Saturday night—no phones allowed.

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The Unsolicited Opinions of The Alabama Housewife is a recurring column by Mary Alayne B. Long. For more from this author visit thealabamahousewife.com.