As a parent, I have come across some perplexing challenges. Encouraging my children (Joseph, Josiah, and JoLin) to develop healthier eating habits was one such challenge. In our single wide mobile home, mealtime had become more of a chore than a special family time. This problem required a creative and unusual solution that I never could have imagined would go as far as it did. It was then that I met “Chef Lightgreen” and “Nancy.”

As best as I can recall, it was the beginning of fall, 1998. The children had cleaned up for dinner and were curious, as they always were, about what was on the menu. As hard as I tried to raise them with a well-rounded appetite, I sometimes fell short because they didn’t always like my choices. Lately, it seemed like I was falling shorter and shorter. Reaching into the deepest recesses of my mind, I devised a plan that I was sure would please and delight my children who were ages seven, five, and two.

One thing I knew for certain was that my children loved to go out to eat. As far back as I can remember, going out to eat was always a very special event. We always dressed in our Sunday best, and the evening was always quite memorable. As a general rule, going out to eat meant a sit-down restaurant. The establishments where we had to be seated and the napkins were cloth were our preferred places of choice. Unfortunately, going out to eat isn’t free of charge.
One evening, we found an extra special place for just the right price. The children were sent to change their clothes. While they were getting ready, I anxiously awaited their return. I had met someone very special I wanted them to meet. Spirits were high and joyous as the children prepared for an evening of good food, fun conversation and family togetherness. We could hardly wait to get to the restaurant. Upon entering the restaurant we could immediately feel the mysterious charm of the place. The classical music that played in the background was soothing, the aestheticism of the architectural design was fascinating not only to me, but to the children, as well. The statues and fountains aroused Joseph’s, Josiah’s, and JoLin’s curiosity, prompting question after question, some of which I could not answer, but I knew who could. After I placed our order, I would see that all of their questions were answered.

Much to my surprise, I convinced Joseph, Josiah, and JoLin to sample some new foods. I think it was the allure of being in the restaurant, but whatever it was: I was delighted that this mealtime, this evening, was going along smoothly. Finally, it was time for the children to meet my special friend. So far, the evening had been full of laughter, conversation, delectable appetizers, and “what-if” scenarios. We had been enjoying ourselves immensely. It was finally time for part two of my plan. It had been prearranged that when it was time for us to place our order, the chef was to appear personally and take our order. They had never met a chef before, nor had they seen one in person, only on television.

Chef Lightgreen was the owner of the restaurant that we were in. Her energy was contagious; it resonated through her very being. The children were overjoyed to meet a chef in real life, especially after my “what-if” scenario involved us meeting a chef who wore a puffy hat and spoke with an accent. (I may have taken advantage of the facts that I already knew could actually come true but there had not been any rules stating otherwise). Aside from being a great
chef, Chef Lightgreen had a comical side where she liked telling jokes. She had a motto that she was known for quoting, “Life is too short to be serious all the time; live, laugh, and love.” Chef Lightgreen met the children and told them how delighted she was to meet them. Chef Lightgreen did what she always did: she filled us with euphoria. As Chef Lightgreen tickled our funny bone, a sort of magic seemed to be taking over.

She spoke with a Russian or German accent with a shrill volume. She carried herself with a self-assured confidence. She was a renowned chef but made the children feel like they were movie stars. They were receiving five star treatment. I was impressed; I was thrilled the children were having a good time.

As the children basked in their moment of stardom, they suddenly realized there was supposed to be a waitress to bring their food, not the chef. Instead of accepting this change of venue to what they were normally used to seeing, they suddenly started inquiring where the waitress was. At first, Chef Lightgreen tried to tell them they were her very special guests and because of that she was going to personally serve them. Strangely enough, the children just didn’t seem to be pacified without seeing a waitress. It never dawned on me that Joseph, Josiah, and JoLin would really care that they had a waitress.

Therefore, Chef Lightgreen arranged for “Nancy,” her top waitress, to be our personal server for the evening. The children were completely smitten with Nancy (the boys more than my daughter). Nancy was very soft-spoken, gentle, and kind. She seemed to bond instantly with the children. Somewhere in the midst of the introductions, platters, beverages, and dessert, I came to the realization that the restaurant dining experience was a key component to my children’s happiness.
When it was time for the evening to end, Joseph, Josiah, and JoLin put up some resistance. They had had so much fun they didn’t want it to end. I have to admit, I didn’t want it to end either, but all good things must come to an end. I rounded up the children and reflected on the evening with the children as we returned home.

I learned how powerful the mind can be if exercised with care. My mind had taken the children on an awesome restaurant adventure that I would never have dreamed I could have pulled off. Desperation led to the impromptu decision to eat out, which ultimately led to our spontaneous surprise guests. I was wearing a light green shirt, so Chef Lightgreen was born. Nancy’s appearance was due to the children’s persistence of having a waitress. After all, who goes to a restaurant without a waitress? I am pleased to say, Chef Lightgreen’s Restaurant became a nightly occurrence. A year later, Nancy opened Nancy’s Place, which became an even bigger hit with our family because at Nancy’s, breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served. The children no longer wanted to eat at home for any of their meals. It was too much fun eating out, so we ate out every night at Chef Lightgreen’s fine gourmet restaurant, better known as our own kitchen.