

Filling the 'poise void' in kids

'An etiquette class is part of telling (children) you don't have to act like an orangutan to be accepted in your peer group.'

—Ann Krilanovich, etiquette student's mom

By Katherine Seligman
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

APIECE of buttered bread can and will stick to your sleeve if you reach across the table. Ice chunks splash when spit back into your water glass. A discussion of bodily functions inevitably leads a dinner conversation downhill.

A dozen young ladies and gentlemen in training from around the Bay Area sat attentively, feet on floor, backs straight, learning these and other truths last week. It was not exactly how they wanted to spend a Saturday, but there they were in sports coats and velveteen dresses at a "children's etiquette and training luncheon" at the Clift Hotel, soaking up what their parents

believed they needed more than another afternoon of soccer: good manners.

For decades, the term was almost a dirty word. Mention it, and the immediate association was snooty people in white gloves sipping tea with their little fingers assiduously in the

Michael Van Meter, 10, left, and Alex Hamilton, 11, both of Woodside, practice continental-style dining at an etiquette training luncheon at the Clift Hotel, part of a class offered by Advanced Etiquette, a Bay Area business founded in 1991 to promote better manners.

EXAMINER/CRAIG LEE



air. But times have changed. Etiquette lessons, now taught routinely in some large corporations, business and graduate schools, are once again appealing to parents.

"All our children are brought up in this California. (See ETIQUETTE, D-8)"



Etiquette luncheon trainees Michele Forristall, left, Alexandra Baldwin and Kelly Loerakker practice

their silverware skills on make-believe pork chops during etiquette training at the Clift Hotel.

EXAMINER PHOTOS BY CRAIG LEE

◆ **ETIQUETTE** from D-1

Children learn how to dine with poise

ifornia culture," said Ann Krilanovich, who recently sent her daughter to an etiquette class offered by another parent at Rooftop School. "It's like being brought up on a pirate ship. ... We've taken this individualism and Montessori do-what-you-want, just-be-yourself to the extreme. I really think our kids are adrift."

Syndi Seid has seen the void of poise in adults, who have been the bulk of her business, Advanced Etiquette, since she founded it in 1991. They come to her from places like Hewlett-Packard and McKesson Corp. for help in an increasingly competitive world where they need social graces to get ahead. The same is true for their kids, she reasoned.

So she came up with compact holiday training sessions, long enough to teach the seasonal basics — handshakes, posture, proper introductions, thank-you notes and how to eat like you belong at a table instead of at a trough. Response is so strong she has planned more classes for children, she said.

The holiday class for nine to 13-year-olds, which costs \$45 for a 2½-hour lesson, convened in a chandelier-laden room where the walls were covered with sayings of diverse thinkers from Confucius to Dale Carnegie and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Seid, meticulously dressed in a brown suit and high lace collar, stood in front oozing confidence. After all, she studied at the Protocol School in Washington, D.C. where they really know manners.

Personally, Seid told the youngsters, she has broken the habit of crossing her legs while she sits. She recommended the same to her students. Ditto on slouching in your seat or hunching over the table.

Then it was on to introductions, party conversations ("Start building a series of questions so you'll have something to talk about —



Joel Pactor, 14, of Moraga shows off his continental dining style.

bles set with blue water goblets and napkins folded like a crown. For some it became a crown. Spoons briefly, precariously hung from the noses of a few boys.

"Is there a rule against that?" asked one boy.

"There is a rule against that," said Seid, perhaps more politely than a parent might respond.

Kids sauntered through the buffet line, loading up on chicken, pasta, salad and bread. Seid, believing they were up for a challenge, asked them to eat Continental style, fork in left hand, knife in right.

She roved the room, giving pointers. One of the boys grabbed bites furtively with his fingers. A girl reached across the table. Let it be known the genders were about equal in their skills.

When it came to dining conversation, they seemed to have a grip on topics to avoid.

"Like the time a dog started chasing you," said Michael Van Meter, 10, from Woodside.

"And certain things the dog may make you say," finished his

friend Alex Haimson, also 10, from Woodside.

"Or an unpleasant topic, like if you got scraped and started to bleed," said a 9-year-old girl at the next table.

As the meal ended, some of the diners reflected on why they'd come. Jessica Whitney, 14, of Kensington, said she wanted to learn about party invitations and, frankly, her mother wanted her to go. So did Alex's mother, he said, though it's his grandmother who moans about his dining pécadillos.

"Mom didn't want to tell me what I was going to or I wouldn't come," Alex said. "She only told me today."

Greeting her son after class, Katherine Haimson asked what graces he'd gleaned.

"I learned not to hold your fork like a pencil," said Alex, who along with Michael, said he'd had a tolerable time. Michael's father, Dwight Van Meter, looked relieved.

"I don't think Michael knew what he was getting into," he said. "He said, 'An etiquette class? That sounds fun.' Then the next day, he said, 'What's etiquette?'"

Krilanovich's daughter didn't have a choice either. Her mother bid on a class offered by parent Angela Snead at a school auction. Snead recently had five middle school students over for the first of two lessons. Before Christmas she'll take them to the Sheraton Palace for a final dining test.

To prepare, she served "challenging" food — crab, artichokes and beverages in coffee cups.

Krilanovich considers the lessons money well spent. "Something like an etiquette class is part of telling them you don't have to act like an orangutan to be accepted in your peer group," she said. "I know it sounds hokey, but I think our kids need more of that."

While most etiquette classes are taught to adolescents from middle-class and affluent families, some are now being offered to the youngest and most disadvantaged children as well.

Shirley Willey, owner of Etiquette & Company in Carmichael, has taught social graces to kids as

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