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NF00-443 Creating a Strong Family: Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories

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Nebraska Cooperative Extension NF00-443

NebFact

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Creating a Strong Family
Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories

John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

"Relax now. Close your eyes. And think back to when you were a child. Picture in your mind's eye a really good time you had as a kid. A really happy time. Go through several of these happy times until you come to the most memorable one of all. What was happening? Who were you with? Try to see it, hear it, touch it, taste it. When you open your eyes in a few minutes, I'm going to ask you to describe this picture to everyone in the room."

The room gets very quiet. Some faces are lost in thought. Other faces have big smiles on them. After sufficient time, I ask the group to open their eyes.

"Now, let's have several people stand up, one by one, and tell us all what they saw. What were these happy memories from childhood that you remember today, years later?"

We've done this exercise with literally thousands of people over the years, and their responses have been most instructive to us:

> "I saw my father and me. I was sitting on his lap before bedtime. He was a busy man, working hard to support our family, but he always had time in the evening to read me a story. I loved the smell of his aftershave, and he always made me feel so safe and protected and we had fun laughing together."
>
> * * * * *
>
> "Every Saturday morning my mom and I would scrub the kitchen floor together. We would get all sudsy and wet and laugh and tease each

This is one of a series of eight NebFacts, including two publications which introduce the series and provide a broader perspective.

- What Is a Strong Family, Anyway?, NF00-439
- Qualities of Strong Families, NF00-446
- Appreciation and Affection: Developing an Emotional Bond, NF00-440
- Commitment:

other and talk girl talk."

* * * * *

"Thanksgiving was always so much fun. All the aunts and uncles and cousins would come to our house and we had an old pretty-much beat-up piano, and Mom would play and we would sing. But when the kids got tired of singing, we'd chase each other around the house and have fun giggling and running until the grown-ups sent us outside to run some more. It was great!"

* * * * *

"We would go camping at the same lake year after year. It was like an old friend. Money was pretty tight for Mom after Dad left, but she still figured out a way for us to go camping. I think she borrowed a tent from a neighbor and off we'd go. We'd swim and laugh and read grizzly bear stories at night and eat s'mores. I never wanted it to end."

* * * * *

"Grandpa would play checkers with me. Game after game after game. I was only 7 or 8 and he'd never let me win. I think he wanted me to try harder and harder to get good, and so he would play hard, also, and I never won. But he had a way of not discouraging me by saying, 'Good playing, Paulie! You almost did it! Let's try again.' With my own kids, I let them win some today, and sometimes they even beat me legitimately. But the main thing is that we're together enjoying each other."

The Family Comes First, NF00-441

- Positive Communication: Smoothing Out the Bumps in Family Life, NF00-442
- Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories, NF00-443
- Spiritual Well-Being: Sacred Connections, NF00-444
- Successful Management of Stress and Crisis, NF00-445

After listening to about a dozen stories of happy childhood memories, we ask the audience to work together to construct a Theory of Enjoyable Time Together. "What did you hear in these stories? What themes?"

First, the group concludes, happy childhood memories most commonly center on activities that are shared as a family. Simply being together and delighting in each other's company is the key. Second, pleasurable time together almost always focuses on activities that don't cost a lot of money. We like to call these serendipitous good times that occur when you're simply hanging out together, looking for ways to have fun together, and the creative genius of the family members becomes the catalyst for enjoyment.

The list of popular family activities that help cement the bonds of togetherness is a long one and includes: meals together, spending time outdoors in nature together, house and yard chores, attending sporting events, long quiet chats, board games and cards, and outdoor recreation, including camping, playing catch and other yard games, canoeing, hiking and picnicking. The particular activity isn't as important as the fact that the activity is a vehicle for human contact.

Go on a "journey of happy memories" yourself. What do you see?

File NF443 under FAMILY LIFE

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