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EC581 Recreation in the Home

Mignon Quaw Lott

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Nebraska

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

Extension
Circular
581

1924

U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

RECREATION IN THE HOME
By Mrs. Mignon Quaw Lott

What memories do you have of your childhood home? Are they happy memories of work and play intermingled, of wonderful Christmases, birthdays, picnics? Of reading, singing, "dressing up"? Of father the biggest boy of all, playing with the youngsters? Of mother, a gay comrade? Of neighbors coming in for a pleasant evening? This is a wonderful heritage. Money may be lost; land may prove a liability rather than an asset, but good cheer, gaiety, optimism, sociability, self-confidence are qualities that attract success and bring happiness.

The writer knows of a family of seven sons and two daughters, all grown, who were brought up in a Puritan home where gloom and rigid discipline reigned. Those seven sons and those two daughters are fine men and women; they are honest, hard working, conscientious. But, alas, they do not know how to enjoy themselves! They never lost themselves in playing a game and therefore do not know what it means to be unconscious of self; they lack self-confidence because they never assumed leadership in work or play, being dominated by their father and mother; they have no rich imaginations, originality, sense of humor, wide experience because they never read books or magazines; they are stiff and awkward and unsocial because they never played with other children or had any company in their home. In short, all those charming pastimes of play that relax and refresh the body, mind and spirit, never have been theirs, and they are mentally and physically stiff and wieldly.

"The thing I remember most vividly about my father," remarked one man sadly as he told me how he never knew what it was to play, "is one night when we boys were playing base ball after a hard day in the hay field. Father came out and said 'Well, aint had enough work? Get out into that garden and pull some of them weeds.'" What a bleak memory for any man to leave behind!

All great industrial institutions have experts who go about surveying minutely every process, seeing here a false movement on the part of some workman that results in lost energy, there a bit of waste that could be saved. The result is millions saved in time, energy and material. Too bad we home makers cannot have such experts come into our homes, look us over and report; "Mrs. Brown, you have a thrifty, neat home; you are feeding your children to give them good teeth, bones, blood. Your men folks have the right kind of food on which to do heavy manual labor. But, you are starving their minds and souls. There is no music in your home; no reading material except a mail order catalog and an almanac. Your dinner table is as sad as a funeral; I haven't heard three hearty laughs since I entered. I do not see any toys--not even a swing. No wonder your older boys and girls race off to pool halls and public dances and the movies. They are starved to death for amusement and so are you and your husband. You shouldn't look so old and wrinkled at your age."

Such a criticism, coupled with sound advice as to what to introduce into the home in the way of recreation, would do us all good, for we get so close to ourselves, we cannot see what is wrong.

The object of this pamphlet is to suggest ways of injecting more recreation into the home.

Recreation at the Table

Laughter is the best aid to digestion we have. There should be plenty of it at meal times, but too often the table is the scene of criticism of food, of scolding and gloomy forebodings. A little planning will change all of this. Instead of telling how you have never been able to eat strawberries or drink milk or eat carrots (statements your children are listening to and are going to imitate), tell a joke.

Substitute praise for scolding. Praise Johnny for not spilling tomatoes instead of scolding him for the way he holds his knife.

Tell some interesting thing that has happened during the day instead of making a gloomy remark about the price of wheat. Encourage each person to tell some little interesting observation gained from reading, a trip to town, things seen about the farm. Even the baby can tell something about a robin in the yard. This will make the conversation general and prevent one person from doing all the talking. The reason some people are so silent and apparently dumb is that they never had a chance to talk when they were children. Nobody wanted to listen to what they had to say. See who can tell the best joke. Joke telling is a happy art. Get practice in it and you may rejoice some day when you have a funny story at a meeting.

Start a guessing game. They are wit sharpeners and will turn the conversation right away from disagreeable things. The geography of your own state, for instance. Some one says "I am thinking of a town that begins with S and has 7 letters in it," and guess what it is.

Singing at the table is a charming custom. A blessing sung by everyone is more effective than a spoken one, as it gives everybody a chance to say it. Words may be written to any hymn and different members could be encouraged to write blessings. After the meal, try drawing back the chairs and singing for a few moments. One family I know, turns the lights low and sings "Just a song at Twilight" and other old favorites for 10 minutes in the evening after dinner. "Jingle Bells" sung with all the family jingling spoons against glasses, produces a charming effect.

Increasing one's vocabulary may be done at the table. Offer so many points for the person who brings a new word to the table, using it correctly in a sentence. (Matter of prizes etc. see later on).

Beauty at the table is a form of recreation. A single rose in the center of the table can rest and re-create to a remarkable degree. Encourage children to find pretty flowers for the table and arrange them tastefully. Remember not to crowd too many blossoms in a vase. Weeds, leaves, etc., make lovely decorations.

Clearing the table may be made a most interesting game. It is a test of skill and common sense. Let every person see how many things he or she can carry off without spilling or breaking. This clears the table for mother and counts so many points for the winner. Avoid snatching and roughness by giving so many points for orderliness.

Work and Recreation

"I hate to do dishes"; "The thing I hate to do most is washing woodwork"; "Henry, you come and get in your wood or I'll whip you."; "Mary, I've been nagging

you now for an hour to do your dishes. You just wear me out." These are some familiar complaints heard in almost every home. Friction wears out any engine-human as well as mechanical. How can this hating and nagging and scolding business be avoided? First of all by having us grown-ups stop saying we hate to do any kind of work. For children are born imitators and instantly say and think the same thing. Second, by learning how to do a thing well. Ten to one, the thing we hate to do most, is the one we do worst. Third, and very important is to inject some fun into your work. Haven't you known housewives who made everything terrible? Washday was as horrible as a battlefield. Housecleaning was a plague of scolding and confusion. No wonder all the family hated such occasions.

Then there are other women who do things so smoothly and pleasantly, one loves to be near them and wants to be allowed to help. Remember how Tom Sawyer whitewashed the fence for his Aunt Polly when he longed to go swimming? He did it as though he loved it, putting such dainty touches here and there, getting off and surveying his work and taking such an evident enjoyment in it, that all the other boys begged to be allowed to wield the brush just a few swipes.

One of the best labor savers known is to inject fun into household tasks. Then the children do them with no nagging, no spanking, no bawling. How is this to be done? Your attitude first of all. Act as though they were pleasant. Then make contests of them. You know how children will work in school for gold stars? Have some such chart in your kitchen. Give them points for work well done, without telling them to do it, in a certain amount of time, etc. At certain intervals, figure these scores up and then award a prize--it may be ever so small a reward--maybe a stick of candy--better, a ticket to the circus. Maybe it is a ball or a doll. This will work also in a family where there is only one child but, of course, the contest idea is eliminated, unless the grown-ups enter the contest too. Here is a suggestive chart:

On time	Not told to do work	Work well done	No grum- bling	Time it took	New and better ways of doing work.	Remarks
Mon.						
Tues.						
Wed.						
Thurs.						
Fri.						
Sat.						
Sun.						

This merely gives one an idea of how to arrange such a chart. It takes time, of course, but it is well worth while and is really a labor saver. This can also be worked out on a more elaborate scale with other things that need correction in children such as: eating right kinds of food, going to bed early, getting up cheerfully, not eating between meals, not tattling, not crying at every little thing, not teasing to be allowed to do things when refused, good temper, etc., etc.

Such a chart is really helping to build character even though it is in the guise of a game. Little Willie will cure himself of being a cry-baby if good marks are given him for being brave. To play fair, grown-ups should obey the rules of the game, too, and the children will play with much more interest if Mother and Father will enter the contest. Keep a colored pencil with which to mark scores. One last word about work and recreation. Mother, try playing the Victrola when you are doing a particularly disagreeable job. Try having somebody read out loud to you.

Keep a poem above the kitchen sink and try learning a new one each day as you wash dishes. This will work for you as well as for the children.

Bed Time Recreation

Everybody, young and old, should go to bed happy. Parents should not romp with small children just before bedtime for it makes them too nervous and they toss and tumble as a result. Bedtime stories and lullabies are charming for the little ones. The writer knows of two babies who always go to sleep at night to the soothing music of the Victrola. Relaxation exercises are wonderful for the older members of the family. Lie on bed or floor, stretch out perfectly straight; raise arms above head; tense entire body clear to toes, pull down arms to sides as though you were pulling heavy weights; then relax. Do this at least five times. You will sleep much better for it.

Holidays For the Family

How do you celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving, Birthdays, or other anniversaries? How did your parents celebrate these events in your home? You can not give your children a richer memory of home than by making something of these occasions. Not just by stuffing them with food. Christmas, for instance, should be the unselfish time, giving more than receiving. A Christmas tree, if one lives in the land of Christmas trees, should be part of the memory of every child. It doesn't take much money or time to decorate it and the least expense can buy a gift for every member of the family. Thanksgiving should be the thankful time and much fun and good could be had, especially at dinner, by listing things for which one is thankful. A prize might be offered for the person having the longest list. Birthdays should have the time-honored cake, even if it is a wooden cake, brought out only on birthdays. A fine thing for a birthday present is to give just one, and to have each member of the family work on it. Make such a thing as a kodak book with pictures and funny rhymes. Perhaps there are only three pictures in this book, but it is a remembrance. Here, as in the evening's entertainment, the work of planning for such things can be passed around. Uncle Henry can plan the birthday of little Jack. Jack can take father's and mother's anniversary.

Vacations and Picnics for the Family

Fishing trips, camping trips, picnics away from home, auto trips, are all fine things for any family. When father goes fishing, why shouldn't all the family go along? Make this work easy. Simplify the food. Give each person on the trip something to do. The writer went on a week's trip where there were six people. Two were delegated to a meal and took their turn regularly. They also washed up the dishes after that meal. Then they were through. This made the work of camp much easier, and everything was fair so there was no possibility of rows. In the summer time the family should try to eat out of doors, even if it is under a tree at the back door, once a week. This varies the monotony of life. Right here emphasis should be laid on giving mother a vacation. School teachers require three months rest from their association with youngsters. Mother is with her children and home 365 days out of the year. Father and the children get away from home every day so they have variety and a change of scene. Why not plan a vacation for mother? Even if it is just relief from some of the duties of the home, make her go visiting; see that she takes a book and goes off down by the stream; give her a change. The writer was at a recent camp for Farm Women in Pullman, Washington where there was one woman who hadn't been away from home for twenty years! No vacation in twenty years! She was surely making up for lost time at this camp. A little planning will enable mother to take a rest from at least a part of her duties.

Recreation in The Evenings

A recent survey of the attendance of school children at movies in a small western town, showed quite a number of them going as often as six times a week. Something must be wrong with the social atmosphere of the homes of these children that they rush off every evening. A very good movement for any community would be a social night at home once a week at least, in which the entire family participates. The following are some of the things that might be done:

A reading circle night in which each member of the family contributes about a 10-minute reading, followed by discussion. The nature of this could be varied from fairy stories to an article on summer tillage. Even if some members of the family are poor readers, give them this chance to improve with practice.

A story telling night in which each one tells a short story. Limit them so nobody will monopolize all the time, for people might just as well learn, early as late, not to bore others with too long a talk.

A night of games. A contest could be arranged for these and much excitement result. Such things could be done as sewing for the boys, sawing for the girls, throwing potatoes from a distance into a kettle with five points for every potato thrown in, etc.

"Dressing up" night, in which all take part in some improvised play or act out characters. Nothing provides more fun than this. Bits of Uncle Tom's Cabin, fairy tales, etc., can be acted out.

Dancing night. Big brother teach the rest to fox trot. He can have even the smallest ones doing it. Chorus dancing is a fine pastime for families. In this they all line up as they would do for military exercises and do simple dance steps to music. A little planning will secure fine results. Such a simple step as, hop eight times on right toe, hop eight times on left, etc., makes a very pretty exercise.

Singing nights. Have one evening of Scotch songs, one of Irish melodies, one of Negro, etc. All manner of parodies may be introduced with much fun and many hits on members of the family can be written to such choruses as Barney Google. "Our dear mother, she's the best of all the gang, Our dear mother, Oh how she hates our slang! She cooks the best food ever seen, she scours our ears to make them clean, Our dear mother, she's the best of all the gang." On warm moonlight evenings what could be nicer than a bonfire out of doors and singing beside it, especially if some of the family can play a ukulele or banjo.

(Why not delegate one evening a week to some member of the family and encourage them to plan it, being careful to see to it that they do not make it too elaborate or too hard to do.)

Getting A Hobby

Hobbies have saved many a boy and girl from going wrong. If a boy is busy making a collection of postage stamps, or butterflies, or specimens of rock and studying about them, he has less time to hang around pool halls or loaf about with bad associates. If your daughter loves to press flowers and make dainty place cards and gifts of them, she has less time to follow the frivolous notions of the girls about her in regard to dances, extravagant clothes and boys. A wise mother should not destroy these collections. Never mind the mess they make; try to encourage your boy or girl to see how well they can arrange their specimens and thank heaven that something has put such an urge into them.

And if you grown-ups are wise, you'll follow their example and go and get a hobby for yourselves if you haven't one already. Birds, bees, butterflies, rocks, trees, moths, flowers, all have untold wonders for any person who takes an interest in them. The writer knows of a barber who has the hobby of collecting specimens of stones. He has a remarkable assortment, gathered from the South Seas to Alaska. Mineralogy is his hobby and nothing delights him more than to stump College professors who bring their students to look at his collection. Appreciation of Nature and her wonders can be instilled into every child by calling his attention to sunsets, sunrises, clouds on the mountains, songs of birds, storms on the prairies, nests of wild things or lovely flowers. "There is no such thing as an uninteresting person" says Gilbert K. Chesterton, the famous English writer. "But there is such a thing as an Uninterested Person". Teach yourself and your children to be interested--in everything about them. Isaac Newton was interested in such a small thing as the falling of an apple which most of us take for granted--and from that he discovered the law of gravitation.

Toys and Games

There are two kinds of toys--constructive and non-constructive. Constructive toys are those with which you can do many things. Balls, hammers, wagons, strong dolls, ropes, boards, paper and scissors, are constructive. They afford no end of opportunity to any child to develop his originality and power of creation. Mechanical toys you wind up and run across the floor, seldom satisfy a child very long because he can do only one thing with them. A wonderful French Doll with every garment complete never satisfies a little girl half so much as the plainer dolls that she can make garments for to suit herself, and any mother that keeps a doll away from her little girl because it is too fine to play with, is doing a very foolish thing. This does not mean that children should not be taught care of their playthings. They can learn lessons of careful treatment, of neatness and thrift from their toys better than any other way.

Fortunately on the farm there are many wonderful things to play with. Old boxes can be made into play houses; old auto casings make fine swings and circus hoops; bottles are wonderful for animals on bottle farms--sand and mud are there in abundance for many games; old rings from harness and old rope are the beginnings of splendid games; berries can be strung for necklaces; corn cobs make good dolls; and then there are the live pets that every child is entitled to. Encourage your children to invent toys; see how many games they can play with old auto casings; water wheels; windmills; kites; old wagon wheels; bird houses; these should blossom about every farm where there are children. If your child is nervous

and not developing as he should, encourage the toys that take lifting, jumping, running, walking or sliding. He'd much better be digging in a sand pile than straining eyes and fingers tinkering at the tiny wheels of a watch.

Suggestions for Raising the Standard of Home Recreation for Entire Community

Plumbers, Doctors, Bankers, Grocers get together to discuss methods of doing business. They discuss the latest, most up-to-date schemes and thus are continually raising the standard. Plumbing has advanced far over what it was ten years ago. What about Home Life? Has it advanced at an equal rate? Mothers and home makers, should get together more often to discuss their business and get all the outside help they can.

The social problems of the home can be solved by getting together. Study methods and schemes for improving them just as the plumber does his business. Set a definite goal of accomplishment, not making it too difficult. Perhaps the crying need of your community is keeping the young folks at home in the evenings. What can Mrs. Brown do about making her children go to bed at eight if all the other mothers in the community let theirs roam about till ten? Mothers should get together and strike some sort of agreement on the biggest problems that concern them. How can you find out what these problems are? By getting together once or twice and just expressing yourselves. First thing you know, up will pop some one thing more insistent than anything else. Perhaps it is the matter of going to bed early--or refusing to eat certain kinds of food--of not wanting to work--of racing to the movies every night--of extravagance in older children--of lack of resourcefulness in play which makes younger ones hang on their mothers, wanting to be played with, etc. Very well. Pick out the most important. Find out how some of the most progressive women handle these things. Link them up with recreation. Draw up terms for a contest. Maybe make it inter-home contest. Agree on some kind of a reward; set a goal and go to it. If it is a contest between homes (and this will work very well, providing parents play fair) have the terms all exactly the same, the charts identical and every point clearly understood. Give this contest publicity, keep up interest in it by constantly referring to it; telephone scores from one house to another, etc., etc. In the form of a game, a great work of reformation is being accomplished.

Don't attempt too much. Maybe the goal set for the first three months is just to improve the social tone of meals. When this is accomplished, go on to the next which might be making work more agreeable. Keep at this for another three months, giving reports at meetings on the progress of the recreational project. You need not organize separate groups for such an undertaking. Use the organization you already have--Ladies Aid--Parent-Teachers--Farm Bureau, Etc. Etc. A few minutes given to reports will suffice to keep the interest up.

The question may be asked here, "Where can we find material on recreation. A complete bibliography is issued by the Nebraska Extension Service containing all kinds of books on every recreational activity. Have your librarian (if you live in a town) buy some of these books and keep them on hand in the library, along with her other reference books. But there are some other books of games, entertainments that would be a most valuable addition to any private library.

Also see excellent references in Extension Circulars #514 and #1139.