

PARENT-CHILD ACTIVITY: TELL ME A STORY!

Tell me a story. Stories of all kinds command our interest. The natural curiosity of young children makes them especially attentive to stories that parents and grandparents can tell them.

Let me recommend to all of you parents and grandparents: Make it your personal goal to recall and gather your stories. Gather them and tell them to your children and grandchildren. There are few better ways to spend the hours you have together with children on car rides, waiting times, dinner times, campfires, snuggle times, times for comforting and bedtimes than to share with children your personal stories. These are all perfect times for stories.

You do not have to be a great storyteller!



I came from a large family. We had lots of growing-up adventures. I was the second oldest of 18 children and my older sister Patricia and I had lots of ideas. We had great nature hikes out of town to Jack Creek, where we collected dead snapping turtles so we could save the shells (for

something???), we conducted neighborhood plays and carnivals, held neighborhood bat and ball games and kick the can, night games. We raised a raccoon, a duck, hatched turtles, had pet pigeons –of course, we have stories about them all. We have many especially fantastic stories about our legendary, incredible dog, Rex. (You should hear about Rex!) My next oldest brother, Michael had even more ideas, in fact, his ideas were more daring, wild and more adventuresome. We built tree houses and forts and hideouts, animal cages and cook stoves. We made one cook stove out of a Wisk can which started on fire and in great fear, we called my Dad home from work (Yikes!) to put it out, he was a volunteer firefighter, of course. We were faith-filled: every morning we walked across town to Mass and picked wild violets in the yards on the way home. We were creative, artistic and hard-working—getting up in the middle of the night to surprise our parents when they woke to find a clean kitchen, organized cupboards or a clean basement. We did many good deeds and some not so good, like stealing cherries from our neighbor’s cherry tree- it had to be okay though, because otherwise, only the birds got them.

We began by relating our “Trishie and Joanne Stories” to our younger siblings and then we told them to our own children. They were golden. We never tired of telling them and they

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never tired of hearing them. They asked to hear them again and again. My own grandchildren know some of them now. Our stories tell them something of ourselves, our family and something of who they are too.

My husband used to teach lessons to our children with stories. He used to start them out with “One time I knew this kid, you know...” and the kid in the “made-up story” just happened to have the same situation that was going on with the son or daughter to whom he was talking. Only, the made-up story had consequences that were silly, fantastically dire and fun. His stories made life situations easier to deal with, lighter and even funny. But they were lessons.

Now when I am listening to my youngest daughter talk about the challenges she has in her relationships, I find myself telling her the story about a time when I had a similar problem and how I failed or struggled with or resolved the difficulty. She listens. She may only learn what not to do, but it is something. And it bonds our own relationship.

Our son Jake has become a legendary storyteller to his children. Sometimes they give him a few nouns and he will develop a fantastic and entertaining bedtime story. Sometimes he recalls his own childhood, remembering the wonder of his own experiences and troubles. Remembering the warmth and presence of his special times with his own Grandparents and his adventures with Ben and Jonny in their little southwestern Minnesota town. His colorful and



recurring characters, Collagio the goat and Giuseppe the peacock teach their own little messages. Collagio is adventuresome and gets in trouble. Giuseppe the peacock is conservative and did not like to leave his house. Jake will stop his story and ask his children to fill in the dialogue when he says, “Collagio the goat would say...” so that his kids would have to take up the character and complete part of the story themselves. His stories trigger wonderful imagination, demonstrate problem-solving and fosters logical—and sometimes, illogical thinking—just for the fun of it! He also turns ordinary, everyday life situations, like a simple fishing trip into epic, novel-like events—entertainment at its finest! His children will never forget the fun, the sense of warmth, the closeness of family, the sense of belonging and the value their Dad placed on sharing special hours together with them when they listened to -and participated in those incredible story times with their Dad.

Stories tell us about ourselves and the world. They tell about family. They tell the listener about the challenges of life and the unique strengths of family, now we often hear our son

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Jesse tell his children, “Foleys never give up!” Stories are encouraging. They give meaning. They help children learn their identity. They bond us together.

My sister-in-law Madonna Carlson has perfected even more beautifully the everyday games and interactions or events that she had with her own children by recording them in the form of precious hand-written, personally illustrated books. She now does it for her grandchildren. My personal favorite of her children’s books is “Willis Waits for Christmas”, the story of her son Willis, repeatedly asking “Is it Christmas yet?” “Soon but not yet”, says his Mom. Then each page recalls the many activities they do together to fill the time. Just as wonderful are the stories recalling the toddler play of her granddaughter recorded in “Lilly Plays and Plays All Day” and “Lilly and the Zoo”, both recalling the simple, playful, loving interactions they had together. Can you imagine the joy of Lilly when she listens and remembers the special times she had?

Finally, what is more important and impactful than sharing the stories of our faith? I recall my Dad crying only one time. He was at the funeral of a friend’s newborn infant. He was on his knees in front of the casket. He had many healthy children of his own. He knew the pain and difficulty of this loss for his friend. At that moment, we, his children, were able to see the depth of his love for family, the sorrow he felt for his friend and what he did in his grief—he took his grief to the feet of Jesus.

Our family said the rosary every night after supper for many years. We always knelt down on the living room floor, even the little kids. It became our tradition to say the rosary after Christmas Mass, after the Christmas meal, after cleaning up the Christmas meal. All of this before opening Christmas presents. It was a painful waiting for everyone.

One Christmas, my Dad, to keep us waiting even longer, he kept praying more ‘Hail Mary’s’ on the last decade. One by one, the older kids began to see that the decade was lasting too long, until even the little kids became aware and objected. After that, everyone paid close attention to the number of Hail Mary’s in every decade of the rosary! We still follow that Christmas tradition when we gather with my siblings and every Christmas gathering with our own children and grandchildren. In fact, they insist on it and look forward to it. But faith stories are another topic—for another newsletter.

Be sure to gather your stories and tell them. You will be eternally glad you did.