

Lifestyle Design: Celebrate Your Family Part I

I have yet to meet anyone that wishes they spent more time in the office or on their career; instead everyone seems to miss time with their families and friends. Family is not limited in this discussion and context to those related only by blood. Many of us have our truest and best family by virtue of lasting friendships and not blood relation at all. Many of us have very dysfunctional families and it is often not comfortable or enjoyable to share time with them and partake in the dysfunction.

I believe that family is whomever you choose it to be whether by birth and blood or by choice and opportunity. It doesn't make sense to sacrifice your precious time off with the inevitable toxic relatives. We all have them; those that just make us crazy on some or every level. The ones that believe they are victims in life and are looking for a rescue; the sister that lives in perpetual crisis and with whom any conversation proves exhausting; the dead beat nephew or niece that just can't get their act together and plays woe is me as their theme song; or the father that never was one and never wanted to be one.

I don't believe in trying to change these folks or even influence them. I respect their limitations but also know that if being around them is not rewarding, I make the choice not to be. My life and time here is my own and too precious to allow the toxic types to rob me of it. I have had the unique privilege of knowing so many that are so wonderfully gracious to be with and give so much that they are who I choose to share my time with and call family.

It is vital to make a truly conscious effort to celebrate our family in fun and rewarding ways often. Here are some tried and true and even a few new ideas for celebrating with your chosen family, be sure to check out Part II of this article for even more easy and fun ideas.

Family Dining Delights

Now this could be any day of the week, that isn't what is important. What is important is that it is an established day that everyone in the family commits to meeting in one place to share a meal together. It is a weekly opportunity to celebrate each family member's triumphs and support them through their challenges. It is a chance to share advice and give feedback when asked. This can be done at one individual's home or perhaps rotated weekly. It could also be at a favorite restaurant so no one has any set up or clean up. Often it is a tradition passed down from generations before or started by your Mother or even Mother-in-law. But regardless if you don't have the tradition, you can create your own.

Celebrate your family with a regularly scheduled weekly dinner together!

Regular Reunions

Often these are held only every five years or so with relatives coming from around the globe to congregate, catch up, and celebrate family time. While these can require a great deal of planning and coordinating, it might also be fun to do it on a smaller scale annually with those in a specific region or proximity. We have the large gatherings every five years, but it seems each time there are more and more folks that I don't know or goodness forbid just don't remember. Five years can be a very long time in this age of instant everything. My aunt does an annual trip with her children and grandchildren for two weeks to some exotic local each year. This seems a wonderful way to bring everyone in her immediate family together. Exotic for them means Africa or Australia, but exotic to you could mean Disney World or Detroit. It isn't so much about where you meet, but that you do get together and share face time.

We are all so accustomed to electronic means of communication we forget that face to face enables communication on a whole different and more integral level. With face to face we get the gift of expression, vocal intonation, gestures and body language. We also get the gift of touch that is so often ignored, repressed, or forgotten in the age of virtual relationships.

It always seems sad to me that too often today we find ourselves seeing long lost family only at weddings with all the attendant pomp and circumstance and funerals or memorial services with the protocols and guidelines as well, there isn't enough time or effort made for family fun connections. Celebrate your family every day!

Celebrate your family with regular reunions!

Family Ties and Technology

Consider the fun in perhaps selecting a day a month and devoting it to catching up with family. The easy part is if you put these on the calendar at the beginning of each year and you have it to look forward to. Delete all the fuss and stress of the holidays and make this a casual get together.

Now this is where technology can really help. If you can't all get to the same city, agree to a conference call, a family circle call (way less business

like!). As much as I advocate face to face, I know sometimes it just isn't possible and using technology to facilitate staying in touch makes sense. Why not create a family exclusive chat room, call it family talk, and have specific times that everyone jumps on to share their news, latest wins, and support in the case of challenges or losses.

Celebrate your family with creative uses of technology!

Family Sport Saturday

Many families have children involved in Saturday sports. What better way to celebrate your family than to extend that invitation to the next game or the playoffs to your extended family. Regardless of win or lose you can share time catching up in the stands and after words with a post game pizza or other festive fare. Too often it seems also that one parent is designated at the games while the other either goes in to the office or takes their other child to another event. Try to occasionally coordinate efforts so that everyone can be at the one game and cheer on that player and then change it to do the same for the other children later.

Include Aunts and Uncles too, particularly single ones, often we love just that kind of time with our families.

Celebrate your family with a Sport Saturday!

Botanical Garden Family Outing

Most major cities have botanical gardens and many smaller ones do as well or at least a wonderful park, well planted and that encourages picnicking or provides an in depth plant education, and play areas for children. It is funny to me to this day that the education my Mother gave us growing up on plants still sticks. Half the time I don't remember how I learned about a certain plant but know that it was likely on a nature hike or botanical garden stroll with Mom. Now, I'm not talking about knowing all the Latin names and roots thereof, but just the delicate beauty of Queen Ann's Lace, the breathtaking aroma of roses and their many varieties, the tender droop of a Lady Slipper, the heady scent of hyacinth, the happy sunshine of daffodils, and the elegance of bearded iris to name but a few.

Even just learning a little about the myriad of evergreens from pine and fir to arbor vitae and the shade loving hostas and ferns can be a lot of fun for kids too often cooped up inside with their attention captured only by a computer screen and keyboard. I actually had what I considered to be a black thumb for many years, only to find that when I took an active interest in gardening and did it for fun that I had really good luck with the range of plants selected and have been able to create a kind of spontaneous jungle of beautiful blooms. It would be easy to include children in the art of planting and then decorating the garden with sculptures, mercury glass and more. Give each a small plot to cultivate and call their own and watch the wonder and joy when they see their plants growing and producing fruits or flowers. If you are in a smaller home without a yard, window box gardens would just as well.

Celebrate your family in the garden.

About the Author

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