

There are Stories to be Told: Start a Family Tradition

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By Debbie Rodgers

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One of the most rewarding ways to use your outdoor living space is to gather your family members for a reunion. Perhaps it's a small group that gets together annually, or a large one whose far-flung members attend every two or five or even 10 years. Whether large or small, a reunion is a wonderful opportunity to knit families closer together through shared stories.

In the much-underrated 1990 film Avalon, a Russian immigrant to 1940s America relates the disintegration of his family ties. In his young manhood, his children gathered at the feet of older relatives during family gatherings and listened to tales of their heritage and history. As television took hold of society in the late '50s, children and adults alike opted for the entertainment of television personalities, instead of the stories of their roots.

But just as the art of listening to stories has gone by the wayside, so has the art of telling them. Here's how to re-start a tradition of storytelling at your family reunion.

Advise all who will be attending that there will be an opportunity to tell some stories about the family, and let them know you'd love to hear them share something. Especially encourage older ones to think about their children when they were young, their own childhood, or even stories they may remember from their parents. With only a little effort, you can be hearing about things that happened over a century ago.

Have some questions prepared to start the ball rolling. "Where did your family go on vacation when your children were small?" "How did you and Grandpa meet?" "What's the funniest thing one of your children ever did?" "How did you manage through tough times?"

Encourage storytellers to use descriptions that will engage all of the senses. Was the thunder rolling in the distance just before the downpour when Grandma and Grandpa bumped into each other running for cover? Did the scent of the lilacs in Aunt Ellen's garden waft in through her kitchen window? Was

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there a cool breeze on the beach near the family vacation campsite? Did the sun sparkle off the snow on the mid-winter drive to Uncle Max's? Was the strawberry jam your mom made the sweetest you ever tasted? Use touch, smell and taste as well as sight and sound to bring the scene to life for listeners.

The best stories have a point. "That's when I first learned how important it is to be on time." "If it hadn't rained that day, we might never have met, and most of you would never have been born!" It doesn't have to be profound, but be prepared to help your tellers wrap up their stories with a short statement of its significance.

Get the younger ones involved too — perhaps you can encourage them to be official family historians who will record the stories. If there's a group, give them papers and drawing materials and ask them to make pictures of the scenes they will hear unfold. You can have the older ones label the drawings and then gather them together with ribbon. Each family can take home their personal family album.

If there are old photographs that support an account, or a time period, mount these in archive quality materials and display them in a shady spot or pass them around while the story is being told. Use other mementos as well. Your great-grandfather's railroad watch that he wore to work every day for 45 years, or a playbill from your first date will help bring life to the accounts of those special times.

So gather your loved ones on your porch or patio and make some memories while you start a storytelling tradition

Debbie Rodgers, the haven maven, owns and operates Paradise Porch, and is dedicated to helping people create outdoor living spaces that nurture and enrich them. Her latest how-to guide "Attracting Butterflies to Your Home and Garden" is now available on her web site. Visit her at

and get a free report on "Eight easy ways to create privacy in your outdoor space". Mail to

Need To Recapture The Magic Of Christmas? Try Inspirational Christmas Stories!

By Bernadette Dimitrov

Everyone knows that life today is more hectic than ever before. Families are often very busy and family fun time is at a premium. This is never more apparent than at Christmas. Everyone wants Christmas to be magical and special, but many of us feel that it has become commercial and impersonal. The solution, though, is so simple that many families are surprised. Inspirational Christmas stories can help you recapture the magic of an old-fashioned Christmas, but with a modern twist. Just consider:

1) Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults are quick to read and can be read together at any time. You won't have to rearrange your entire schedule for this Christmas magic - all you need are

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a few stolen moments here and there.

2) Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults allow you to create special Christmas traditions for your family. Many cultures read the Christmas story aloud during the holidays. Reading favorite inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults together can be a great way to develop special holiday traditions for your own family.

3) Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults are about sharing time - not about spending money. Getting together to read inspirational Christmas stories out loud is about sharing time together. It is not simply another impersonal way to spend money. In fact, inspirational Christmas stories are very economical, no matter what your holiday budget this Christmas season!

4) Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults can help you teach your family what the season is all about. These stories have modern settings and twists and are exciting and fun. At the same time, they are about the miracles and togetherness that Christmas should represent. Without lecturing or moralizing, inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults capture and reveal exactly what this time of year is all about - and they do so in a way that everyone can understand!

5) Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults can create cherished memories for your whole family. Stir up some cocoa and serve some cookies to your audience. Take turns reading inspirational Christmas stories out loud, and put on some quiet Christmas carols in the background. Inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults can be the perfect way to set the stage for a fabulous Christmas celebration.

The magic of reading and the wonder of Christmas combine together in inspirational Christmas stories for children and adults to create a wonderful way to celebrate this most exciting time of year! Why not get some inspirational Christmas stories today and create a tradition that your family will love and cherish for years to come?

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and sign up for our F*R*E*E* NEWSLETTER FULL OF TIPS,

TOOLS & RESOURCES for reviving the fun, joy, magic and real meaning of Christmas every day of the year.

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