



A Season of Happiness

Focus



The Art of Conversation

If we don't use it, we'll lose it!

I've seen it and, probably, so have you – people sitting close, around a table, on park benches or just the grass, waiting at train stations and bus stops; not talking, merely tap-tapping away on their phones or tablets. Some may be playing games; others presumably, are communicating with another person. Fair enough if that person isn't within shouting distance, but often this isn't the case. The one they are conversing with might be sitting right next to them. That, to me, is pointless. These days you can't even criticise it as a waste of money, because the argument in favour of continuing the practice would be to declare that contact between phones on a reciprocal plan costs nothing; and anyway, there's Bluetooth. That would seem to be an end to it – they are quite happy to carry on the way that suits them, so why should I bother? Despite the opposition, I strongly believe the art of conversation is important, and we seem to be losing this once-popular gift of the gab.

Technology can't be blamed entirely. Many years ago before everyone had a cell phone, I recall a report that conversation between members of the average family lasted no more than 30 minutes a day. Certainly, they spoke to one another – "What's for tea? Pass the salt, please. Have you done your homework yet?" – but rarely did it extend to events and interests beyond the household routine. I'm glad to say we didn't fit into this category, spending a good portion of the time we were together talking to the children and to each other. Topics were wide and varied, adapted to cater for differing levels of understanding and education. I believe it helped all of us to grow as a united family, rather than just a group of distant individuals living under the same roof. For us, holding a conversation was a normal part of our day and hardly remarkable, except for one time in particular.

Through circumstances, we were living in a caravan: two adults, four children, a cat, a budgie and a cockatoo. Our "residence" was an old four-berth trailer – no room for us, so we had to sleep in the annex. In the evening, we would fold down the dining table to set up the double bed, and all of us would crowd onto this, cat included, to watch whatever was on our 12 inch black and white TV. I was looking forward to one program in particular – the Kirk Douglas version of "Spartacus." Wishing to appreciate the movie without interruption, I laid down the law: "No talking!" It was fine until someone whispered a question which one of their siblings tried to answer, facts disputed by another; all wrong as I, in my wisdom, felt bound to point out. Thus ensued a brief discussion which I called a halt to because I was missing my movie. It started up again a few minutes later, prompted by a different part of the story, then another. Before long, we were all into a huge factual and philosophical debate that continued until the movie finished and the kids had to go to bed. I guess I ought to have been disappointed, but I was quite the reverse. Spartacus the movie would be around for years to come; that precious interaction with my family was something only the memory of the moment could repeat. There would be other times, most of which proved stimulating and enjoyable; none, however, epitomised the importance of conversation the way that one did.

I suppose some might question why we need conversation at all. Isn't a text message enough to keep moving forward in a way that doesn't interfere with a busy lifestyle? There are more things to do than just talk. As for the kids' basic education and development of social skills, the schools handle that, don't they? Then we happen to glance at an assignment they are writing. We aren't spying, would just like to know the level they are at and maybe help rectify the odd spelling mistake. Flawed English we expect, certainly not unintelligible strings of abbreviations and codes. No wonder normal conversation is on the wane if it has to take a back seat to iPhone language.

I have a solution: put down the newspaper and forget the television to play games instead – not the video kind that totally absorbs a lone individual in a fantasy world to the exclusion of the real one; I mean proper games which involve two or more people sitting at a table interacting with

each other, actually in person. Play them with the children, with friends, with each other. Monopoly was always a family favourite; plus Cluedo and Scrabble. Here's another - The Game of Life, fun for young and old, and pertinent as the name implies; and there are many more. There are plenty of card games that can be played with a standard pack; others specially printed like Uno. We have loads of these which we played regularly when the children were younger; then we became too involved in our own private interests and they fell into disuse. We still played cards on odd occasions, usually when the power went out. The true revival came during a trip to the UK.

Catching up with friends we hadn't seen in twenty years was a bit unnerving to begin with. We were eight people who had become strangers. Unsure how things had changed over time, we were walking on egg-shells. When words seemed to be drying up, someone thought playing a game might be an idea; I may have been the one to suggest dice, in particular a game called Zilch. "Never heard of it," they said; so we taught them. As individual players took their turn, the others chit-chatted, tentatively at first, but becoming more at ease as the night wore on. Next, the cards were on the table for a version of rummy that any number of people could play. By the end of the evening, sides hurt from laughing and because there was still so much to say, another get-together was hastily arranged. Twenty years of separation had been wiped away by half a dozen plastic cubes with spots on and two packs of playing cards; helped, of course, by the art of conversation.

Socialising with others is an essential part of our growth. From the day we are born there is a need to communicate, and not merely to convey the basics of survival like simpler forms of life: conversation is an enjoyable pastime, an enlightening and uplifting one. Social media can help bridge the gap when distance is an issue; but it is no substitute for a genuine face-to-face chat. Tone of voice, facial expressions and body language make the words spoken more meaningful and less prone to misinterpretation.

My suggestion to the text addicts is to try it sometime - switch off the cell-phones and actually talk. For the families who never seem to find the time – make some. What should we talk about, some might ask? Well, anything and everything. Just ramble on. Conversation is like that, skipping from one subject to another, whatever comes to mind. Join the movement to renew the art of conversation. Then, years from now when future generations are discussing its merits and re-invention, your name might be mentioned as one of the original revivalists. That prospect really would be something to talk about!

A Season of Happiness - helping you towards a better lifestyle

For a look at some more informative articles on a variety of subjects just click on the navigation bar



Focus



Money Matters



Healthy Living



eBook previews



Recipes



Popcorn

Where every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for us may not work for you. Please bear this in mind.

Copyright © 2015 All Rights Reserved