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Family Values

Are families becoming just a group of strangers living together?

There was a time when the word family meant something. Even as the family divided into separate units by marriage or partnerships and set up on their own, members would look out for each other and were always there for support when needed. It was all about caring that others were going alright and sharing both good and bad moments. Many would say that nothing has changed and everything's rosy, particularly in the family home; but I wonder if the old family values are no longer considered important.

Think about a basic family with two adults and a couple of children. How much quality time do they spend together; perhaps talking over problems or simply discussing topics of mutual interest? Aside from asking "What's for tea?" or "Where's my football shirt?" normal conversation is most likely a thing of the past. Certainly they may be in the same house, the same room even; but when the parents or carers are busy preparing meals and catching up on work for the office, and the kids are glued to their smart phones and tablets, who really cares about chatting?

It does still go on, though, via text messages and social media networks; unfortunately the practice isolates the individuals from their present environment. They are each in some kind of communication bubble, connecting with the outside world while being oblivious of anyone close at hand. Not only does it happen at home, but the practice extends beyond, even when walking the street; and as for texting while driving, it's self-centred and downright dangerous. Then it continues at work or school, which also seems to be regarded as acceptable and doesn't matter; or does it? An employee can't concentrate on the job when their mind is somewhere else. Also, judging by recent reports, education is suffering and many youngsters are not attaining the levels expected of the current curricula; and certainly seem to fall short of old school standards. These selfish distractions undermine the work ethic which is just an extension of diminishing family values at home. Nothing's changed, though, has it? Are people so different now compared to how they were before the age of electronic technology? Of course they are.

Life is much faster these days. Even though each one is still only twenty-four hours, there seems more to do, a lot more to fit in. Rushing here, rushing there, barely finishing one task before moving on to another, then another. And in between there have to be brief pauses to message a friend, bringing them up to speed on a matter that could have been discussed in person, had there been time.

There never seems to be enough of it. Admittedly, a fair portion of the 'me' sort is taken up with completing the next level of a favourite video game, the one they tried to master in the middle of a maths period. So what if some of the lesson was missed? There's always

the Internet to fill in the gaps. Funny isn't it that dedication to this irrelevant entertainment far surpasses that needed to acquire basic and necessary life skills; and in particular this includes quality time spent with family.

Once the teenage years are reached, sometimes before, youngsters tend to gradually disconnect from parents and carers. Gone are the days of family holidays and playing cards or board games with everyone round the table. Interests are different and few are carried over from those early growing years. However, time taken while the child is totally dependent and able to ingest new knowledge like a sponge, this is where true family values are learned; and if handled in the right way with care and consideration, both child and adult form an intimate bond; in particular a priceless mutual respect. By actually teaching face to face, one on one, this is how lasting relationships are built,

There is no substitute for that kind of personal nurturing which is why we structured our Moonberry Pie stories the way we did in the hopes of encouraging a valuable connection between reader and listener. Our idea is explained in the introduction, which can be accessed by clicking on the flash at the top of the Home page; then clicking again on the word **Introduction** in the first paragraph. It may sound simplistic – it is; perhaps a childish notion, and it is that too; but irrelevant and a waste of your time it is certainly not. As well as being entertaining the stories teach moral values, problem solving, kindness and compassion; and because there are no pictures readers have to put in the extra effort to make them come alive for their listeners. In effect, they have to become true storytellers like the ones in the olden days before television and illustrated story books. There is no substitute for this kind of very personal interaction.

Needless to say, life is not all about telling bedtime stories; and some carers might claim that they do share a good portion of the day with their children. They are always ferrying them to football, basketball, dance lessons; and they do stop to cheer them on while standing on the sidelines, phone in hand for the odd text or chat; which is okay because the important part of the learning process and team building is handled by teachers and coaches. They are, after all, the experts and good with kids. Well, that's their job, isn't it?

But with respect to your own children, you are the expert; or should be. And if you take a moment to reflect and have to admit that they have become strangers, maybe you should do something to put this right. It is never too late to try again. All it will take is your time, and a bit of imagination. The end results will be truly worth it.

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