



CREATIVE PARENTING

The Christian perspective for a happier, healthier home life

We Have This Moment

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

We have this moment
to hold in our hands,
And to touch as it slips
through our fingers like sand.
Yesterday's gone
and tomorrow may never come,
But we have this moment today.

This is the yuckiest experience of my entire life!" That was the pronouncement by Ryan, our six-year-old, upon encountering the Great Salt Lake in Utah. We had anticipated swimming in the Great Salt Lake on our drive all the way from Pennsylvania. As a child I had been told about the natural buoyancy of that salt water. Why, anyone could swim in the Great Salt Lake—it was just a matter of laying on your back in the water! So I was just as eager as the kids were to get there.

What we didn't anticipate was the heat and the murky, warm, smelly, swarming-with-insects, brine water, and the fact that we had to wade more than two city blocks out into the lake to get into water even up to the kids' knees. Truly swimming seemed out of the question. Also, our legs burned from the saltwater coming into contact with every mosquito bite or minor scratch. And, as I already said, it was so unbearably hot!

This was fun? Well, not really. But it did create a memory we've held on to for all these years. It was one of those times, and we've had many as a family, that we "made a memory" even though the event didn't meet our original expectations. In most any event in life, we can remember the disappointing aspects, or we can choose to "make a memory" and remember the event in a more positive way.

Recently a friend told me that one of the ways their family handled difficult situations when their children were growing up was to say, "Sometimes we get the bears, and sometimes the bears get us." She said that seemed to help them keep life in perspective.

Record those memories

Thinking of our Salt Lake experience reminds me of an idea I read about recently in a book. In a list of ten things that can build family solidarity, Moorman suggests saying this to a child, "Let's put that in our family history file. It'll help us remember what we enjoyed doing together at this time in our lives."¹ He was making that statement in regards to parents' responsibility to build family solidarity and encouraging parents to develop and use their skills to begin conversations and activities to get the family working, playing, and talking together.

So some memories are built unexpectedly by events, and others are initiated by parents taking note and taking action.

One of our most treasured possessions is "the red plate." In the center of this plate is a flower, and around the edges it says, "You are special today." The plate came with a special pen, and each time we use it, we write a "memory" on the back. At our house, when a person or event is being celebrated, the plate is set at the table and eaten on by that person. I looked at our red plate recently as I was rearranging the china cabinet.

I noticed the first dates are from 1985: March 8: Marci was recognized for writing a prize-winning poem for the Founders Day celebration at Andrews University. July 23: Ryan passed his driving test. On September 7, 1991, we celebrated our then future son-in-law's return from his service in Saudi Arabia with the U.S. Army. A number of birthdays and anniversaries are noted. Now we have grandchildren's birthdays noted, and we still have some space for more special people and special times. If we hadn't recorded those events and dates, I know they would have faded among so many other life events.

In the forward to *Let's Make a Memory*, Gloria Gaither recalls that the most valuable gift of her upbringing was the gift of a rich childhood and youth in a solid, loving, celebrating home. "The heritage of a family who loved God and each other, who greeted every new day with anticipation and openness, shaped my values and taught me that life was good. The healthy balance of discipline and freedom, the love of simple things, the respect for all kinds of persons, a deep reverence for God—all these were wrapped up in special moments and given to me in the package I call my childhood. ... The home is the natural habitat for growing human beings and shaping eternal souls. Whether we like it or not, we are molding lives ... now. Let's make these precious moments count. Let's make a memory!"

1. Moorman, Chick (1998). *Parent Talk: Words That Empower, Words That Wound*, p. 147
2. Gaither, Gloria and Shirley Dobson (1988). *Let's Make a Memory*, p. 10, 11.