

HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

Sharing About

- Seasonal Suggestions for Low-tech Encounters
- Old-fashioned Family Fun
- YOUR Invitation to Contribute to *HomeWord*

The Pause That Refreshes by Eileen Pettycrew

I have a deep need for peace and quiet in my life. Given the choice between a hike and the circus, I'll take the hike. But when our daughters came home from school with free tickets to the circus, I decided to be a good sport. The following weekend, we climbed into the car. Responding to urgent requests from the back seat, my husband, Jim, punched in the girls' favorite radio station. Before we were out of the driveway, Top 40 tunes bombarded me, a harbinger of things to come.

The three-ring circus exploded with color, music, flames, and flashing lights. Vendors hawked overpriced plastic light wands and three-dollar snow cones. One performer ran like a hamster on top of a giant spinning wheel that nearly touched the ceiling while the master of ceremonies boomed a play-by-play into the microphone. Acrobats did high-rise tricks in four different corners, and my head was soon spinning as I tried vainly to watch them all at once. Bengal tigers leaped through rings of fire, loud music punctuating every jump. Two motorcyclists roared into the "globe of death," riding in death-defying circles with parallel precision. Knowing they were inches away from disaster kept me glued to the edge of my seat.

During the intermission, rock 'n' roll music pounded in my ears as cranky kids stood in long lines to jump in an inflated house or to ride a pony or an elephant. My good sportsmanship was fading. I longed to escape the sensory overload.

When the circus finally ended, we made our way through the crowd. I burst out of the coliseum, happy to see the sky again.

After dinner, our daughters' energy levels were high. They scrambled around the house, teasing, laughing, and singing. As I fixed a cup of tea, I decided to retreat to my bedroom and shut the door to all the commotion.

But a small voice within beckoned me back to the living room where the girls were roughhousing on the sofa. I sank into a chair, picked up my book, and began to read. Within minutes, my oldest daughter opened her book. Soon afterward, my seven-year-old plucked a book off the shelf and settled into a chair.

Jim entered the now quiet room, sat down, and picked up the newspaper. The girls didn't move a muscle.

After a while, Jim and I exchanged smiles. "It's so quiet," he whispered. I nodded in agreement. After an exciting day, reading together as a family was the perfect antidote. No loud music, no flashing lights, no dazzling colors, no heart-stopping circus tricks. The weighty feel of the books in our hands, the cozy warmth of the room, and the occasional rustle of a turning page were our only stimuli. As I savored our quiet time together, I felt the peace of God flood our home.

I am grateful I listened to the voice within that challenged me to re-enter the chaos and initiate a low-tech encounter with my family. It's a relief to know that in our fast-paced world God can still be found in the quiet moments.

Here are a few ideas to help you initiate your own low-tech encounters, those times when we are most aware of the presence of God:

This winter, bundle up your family and take a nighttime walk. Find a clearing and do some stargazing.

Set aside an evening to work on hobbies together. Knitting, crocheting, sewing, or embroidering are good choices, as are woodworking, painting, or sculpting with clay. Tinker on bicycles together, or look through old family photographs.

When spring arrives, dust off the bicycles and head out for a bike path. Set no goals. Enjoy the fresh air, sunshine, and time together.

Next summer, go tent camping in a more remote area and leave the radio, CD player, and television set at home. Notice the wind in the trees, the gurgling of a stream, the songs of birds.

Take your family on a fall hike, stopping frequently to listen for the sounds of nature. Watch quietly for snakes, insects, moles, and other creatures. Admire God's handiwork in the stunning autumn colors.

Any time of the year, designate one day a week as radio-free during car rides. Notice what can happen—delightful conversation, spontaneous singing, or blessed silence.

Eileen Pettycrew lives in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoys hiking, bicycling, reading, and playing the piano.

Family Time

by Jennifer Christ

Families are busy, no doubt about that. Together time often consists of snacking while watching a rented video. While this is one kind of together time, there are alternatives. Call them low-tech encounters or call them good old-fashioned fun!

Our children are teens and young adults now, but looking back over our years together, some of our best memories of family fun have come from a few leisure-time customs and some very simple low- or no-cost games.

During the winter months (there are many in Wisconsin!), Friday night is *Game Night*. After the dishes are done the family gathers for games and snacks. Sometimes we play regular board games like Clue or Trivial Pursuit, or various card games. ("Spoons" can get pretty wild!) Other times we play more active games like charades.

One of our old favorite games has always been "Sardines." All family members wait in one room while one person hides somewhere in the house. After about five minutes everyone scatters, looking for the hidden person. If you find that person, you don't say anything, instead, you just quietly slip into the hiding spot with them. The game continues, each person discovering and joining the others. Just try to keep the giggles under control with five people all stuffed in a small bedroom closet! The last person to find the family of sardines is "it" for the next round. This game has gotten even more fun over the years as long, lanky teens try to stuff themselves into small spots.

The first weekend after Easter signals the end of Game Night and the beginning of *Pick-a-Park Sunday*. With the aid of a map, family members take turns picking a city or county park to explore. After church we go to the store to pick out a simple cold lunch, then pack a blanket, some Frisbees and balls, and head for the park.

Hiking, collecting rocks, walking on the beach, and playing football are often part of the fun.

Whenever we find a bridge with a river or stream underneath we play "Pooh Sticks." All members choose a short stick and launch them at the same time over one side of the bridge. Everyone hurries to the other side of the bridge and waits intently to see whose stick sails out first. There's something about this game that makes you want to keep trying "just one more time" to see if your stick will be first. You can't get a game much simpler or more fun, as Pooh and Piglet would surely agree! Our teens still play it, just for old-times sake.

Over the years Game Night and Pick-a-Park Sunday have changed and adapted along with our family. The words on the Scrabble board are harder and the quality of the snacks has taken on new importance (teenage growth spurts!). At the park the teens often zoom ahead on in-line skates while Mom and Dad take a leisurely walk or even rest on a bench. What hasn't changed is simple family together time once a week to nourish and refresh us all.

Jennifer Christ enjoys time with her family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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Like to Write for HomeWord?

In order to better reflect the mission of Family Faith-Life Resources of Saint Mary's Press, which focuses on families with children ages 10–19, we are changing the format and content of *HomeWord*.

We want to stimulate dialogue between parents and teens. Each issue will contain a key question, an article from a parent perspective, and an article from a youth perspective addressing the chosen theme. Here is a list of themes for 2001:

- Anger and fighting fair
- Reconciling well
- Beliefs
- Going to church on Sunday
- Stress
- Friendship
- Temptation
- Values
- Media influence
- Worries
- Depression
- Listening
- Building the future together

We hope the dialogue format of *HomeWord* will prompt readers to enter the dialogue by giving their views on the key question via our Web site, www.smp.org.

Each article should be in the 550–600 word range and written in a personal style, using first person narrative to convey the message. If you or someone you know, especially someone age 10 to 19, might want to contribute to *HomeWord*, please write to Leif Kehrwald, *HomeWord* Editor, 1262 NE Fifty-third Avenue, Portland, OR 97213. Call or fax Leif at 503-282-9223 or e-mail him at lkehrwald@smp.org. If your article is accepted, we will pay you fifty dollars. Every article submitted will get full consideration.