



## **Keeping the Family in Focus**

### *Using Photos to Blend Two Families Into One*

The photo albums spread out all over the floor tell the story. Mandi's perfect jump on the trampoline; Jodie's pout at not getting her way; Aaron holding his new puppy; and Sara riding her horse in the Christmas parade. Pictures truly are worth a thousand words.

Our photo albums hold memories of special events and birthdays. More importantly, they hold a secret I accidentally discovered--the secret to becoming a family.

Blending two families so they become their own family means creating their own new history, new memories, and new traditions. As I said, the photo albums were an accidental discovery. When Harvey and I married, we didn't have any pictures, so I became a shutterbug with my camera. My sole purpose was just to have pictures. With the camera always in easy reach, my family will testify that I was snapping candid photos of everyone, nearly every day. A fresh roll of film was loaded into the camera as quickly as the last one was finished.

I didn't waste any time getting them developed either. Within a week, the new pictures were already in the photo album.

I knew I was on to something when everyone in the house poured over the albums laughing and recounting the moments they shared. Recording both the fun moments in our daily lives as well as the special events on film, caused everyone in our house to come together as a family. They seemed to forget their stepfamily differences as they unified into a newly formed family. That first album is so worn from years of looking at it that the binding has separated from the rings that hold the pages together.

Of course, just taking pictures at home isn't enough to make a blended family come together. Orchestrating special events and fun times to photograph and remember will bring you pretty close to the mark, though. Planning a big vacation wasn't always an option for us financially, so we did the next best thing. We took smaller, more affordable excursions.

Creating your own history doesn't have to cost a lot of money and time. We're blessed in Arkansas to have a lot of wonderful places to visit within a three-hour drive from our home.



Our excursions took us to the state parks, on picnics, and to ballparks. We spent time fishing in a friend's pond and going out on the lake with other friends who had a boat.

The important thing to remember as you strive to become a family is to include everyone and create special memories as a family. Take your children's personalities into account and work with them instead of against them. You may like visiting museums, but that's not every teen's idea of fun. If your teen can't look back on the event as a fun day with the family, you won't be building cohesion in the family. So, the key is to balance everyone's interests.

Our son, Aaron, loved music as a teen. He could pick up just about any instrument and play it within 15 minutes. Our girls loved to shop and explore. So Harvey and I took everyone to a quaint Arkansas town where the whole family could enjoy the things they liked. There were lots of fun shops for the girls and a great music store for Aaron. He entertained us with the beautiful renaissance sound of the psaltery he bought, and we found lots of inexpensive gifts and treasures in the craft stores for the girls. We created a memory.

Planning these memory-making moments can be fun and fulfilling. The technology of digital cameras and printing options has made taking photos easier than ever. If you're crafty, you might even enjoy putting the memories into a scrapbook.

One caution though, the idea is to get the pictures into an album as quickly as possible so that everyone will enjoy them. If the photos are likely to sit around for a long time until you "get around to it," you'll have missed the opportunity and the point.

Becoming a family takes time and can't be forced. Like fixing a hole in a comfortable old pair of jeans, the patch of new stiff denim needs to go through a few washings to soften up. After the denim is softened, it is sewn in one stitch at a time.

In one of Jesus' parables, He said, *"No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. Otherwise, not only will he tear the new, but also the piece from the new garment will not match the old"* (Luke 5:36). Blending a family is a delicate process. We don't want to tear the garment before it has an opportunity to come together.

If your teen acts uninterested, don't chide him, just work around the attitude and include him anyway. Every effort is another washing in the softening and blending process.



Becoming a family isn't always easy when the pressures of outside influences from an ex-spouse, power struggles between a stepparent and stepchild, or differing parenting methods come into play. Daily tensions and conflicts can make becoming a family seem impossible.

Removing yourselves from the daily grind so you can focus on sharing a family experience is incredibly healing and unifying. Instead of addressing the negative elements of blending your family, encourage the positive aspects of each member in your family. This is good medicine for our families (Prov. 17:22).

### **Memory-Making Tips**

- Keep a reliable camera handy. Bring it with you everywhere you go.
- Take candid photos of everyone in your family. Don't be shy. Snap them when they're sleeping, playing, eating, or goofing off. Don't limit yourself to special occasions; and rather than setting up a posed picture, catch them when they least expect it. Kids are natural hams and love to see themselves in pictures.
- In cold weather, bake cookies together, change bedroom furniture arrangements, or have a popcorn party.
- Many times, friends in church can provide a fun outing. Tell them what you are trying to accomplish and ask them for help. Most people love an opportunity to have fellowship with friends.
- Be creative about planning family times. Whenever possible, take an afternoon to go somewhere outside the use.
- Ideas can be found online and in city visitor centers, and brochures can be sent free of charge. You might be surprised to find great things to do right under your nose!