

Parenting Corner – Family Identity

March 21, 2007

What do friends think of when they think of your family? If someone asked your children about your family, how would they describe you? When I was growing up, a lot of who we were was about what we didn't do. In later years, I learned to have a positive, proactive identity.

When our kids were beginning to hit the pre-teen stage, we learned to tell them, "Stahnkes like to go camping. Stahnkes like old movies. Stahnkes behave in public the same way they do at home. Stahnkes are kind to those who are weaker or elderly. Stahnkes are active in the political arena. Stahnkes *love* to read." And so on.

We invested ourselves in our children and took time to train into them in the things that we thought were important. I read aloud to the whole family as we traveled. I read aloud after lunch every day as we homeschooled (and still do frequently after dinner). We read classics, and mysteries, and comedies, sports stories and westerns. We took joy in new and bigger words! We celebrated when someone used them in everyday conversation.

We camped. The kids would help set everything up (with five kids, you have a SYSTEM!), and then ran off to set up their hideouts. We took turns cooking and cleaning up. We made sure Mom had time to rest as well. It was what Stahnkes did!

We watched old movies together and got teary-eyed together and threw pillows at Dad together when he went, "Boo-hoo-hoo" to break the moment. We discussed what we would do in those situations we had watched, what moral values we saw and liked. We talked about the news of the day as we drove in the car and what the justice system should do about what we saw. We discussed the value of hard work and the rewards of thriftiness.

We talked about our ancestors: my husband's who were German immigrants, and mine who were a mixture of Europeans and Native Americans. Some were pastors and US Marshals. We reinforced the legacy, and encouraged them to add to the fabric of the past with *their* skills and talents.

Now our children are all in their 20s, and are doing the same things with their kids. They live what we did with them. Our grandchildren love some of the same movies we do. Their parents teach them the "why" of obedience and the blessings and joys of being good.

We did not do this to control our kids' lives, but to lead them in a way that affirmed what was good, and to set them up for a happy life. A wise man said, "A child left to himself will bring shame to his mother." We guided, nurtured, and influenced. They have since thanked us. We still camp together sometimes and play games together, and love to talk and be together. They are still Stahnkes. We are proud of them, and they are some of our best friends.

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Talk to your spouse and then to your children, about family identity. Here are some ideas:

- What do we like to do?
- For what are we known?
- For what do we want to be known?
- For what were our past family members known? Is that something we want to emulate? If not, how can a new legacy start with our generation?
- What do we like to do together and why?
- What does a good life look like? What can we learn by observing someone's life that has gone awry?
- What if our whole country was made of families like us?
- Do some other families have values that do not fit our family? (Do not be afraid to say, "Others may _____, you cannot.") What would be better choices and why?