



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Funded Drug-Free Community Coalition
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November 25, 2009 – Holidays are Family Times

Helen Hanson is a retired James Madison University faculty member now doing Story Time in the Bennett Family Center. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

In a Thanksgiving picture book that I read to children this time of year, a little boy seems to be in everyone's way as the meal is being prepared. Grandpa invites his grandson to go for a walk to pick up chestnuts. Their gathering of chestnuts is the hit of the evening when they are roasted for all to enjoy.

This holiday season while many of us scurry around getting the meal ready, maybe some time can be scheduled so the younger and older generations can have time to enjoy each other. Grandparents have so much to share about the differences from the times they grew up compared to today's experiences.... getting their first TV, not having cell phones or home computers, what they wore to school, what music they listened to, and what they did when they had free time.

Most children love to learn about their families in this intimate way. And they are also learning about history in a very personal way. Many families have ethnic backgrounds that are unique to them, and children can learn to be proud of their heritages. Maybe grandma and grandpa even speak a different language. For families that have moved around, getting out a few maps may be helpful.

Sometimes there are medals or special certificates that can be shared and talked about with younger family members. There are even uniforms which are stored away. Hope chests still exist with precious physical reminders of a wedding. Attics are wonderful places to explore family treasures.

Older people do have contributions to make to family gatherings. And they like being appreciated. Young children are learning respect for their elders as they learn of the contributions the older people have made to the family.

Recently a well-known politician died who was clearly well-regarded by his constituents. He told reporters of many occasions when he personally helped their families out. Why did he spend so much effort helping the 'little' people? It seems that when he was a young boy, he spent a great deal of time with his politician grandfather who regularly visited with all the people he was representing. It would seem this manner of dealing with people was learned at his grandpa's knee.

You can also spread the exploring of the family's history into the local cemetery as you walk off the holiday meal. Our family enjoyed looking at the old tombstones and the dates of how long the people lived, when possible epidemics occurred, when soldiers went off to war, and where ancestors' graves are located (the kids even learned a little math!)

When members of a family get together, they can appreciate their family bonds and hold greater respect and love for each other, realizing the contributions each and every one makes to the family.

Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care*
Serving State College Area School District
Dawn Taylor, Community Mobilizer, 814-237-6191
dtaylor105@gmail.com
Web address: carecentreregion.org

Centre County *Communities That Care*
*Serving the School Districts of Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and
Philipsburg-Osceola*
Elizabeth Eckley, Community Mobilizer, 814-404-9511
centrecountyctc@yahoo.com
Web address: centrecountyctc.org