

Preserving Special Moments

Quick tips for documenting your child's life.

by Joanne Culley

With the onset of another school year, my thoughts turn to preserving special moments from the last one. I always remember the advice other mothers gave me when my kids were small: cherish these years, because kids grow up fast and they will be gone before you know it. So, with that in mind, I'd like to share some ideas that have helped me to document my children's lives so that I can cherish these special years forever.

Capturing the anecdotes

Because my memory seems to be deteriorating by the day, I know I won't remember the funny, sweet or poignant things my kids say or do minutes later, let alone the next day. But work commitments and household responsibilities sometimes make it hard to find the time to record any lengthy descriptions of what's happening. So I've devised a simple system that lets me capture those special moments.

I keep a hard-cover, lined book entitled, "Anecdotes about the kids," in an easily accessible place (which for me is the bottom of the tea towel drawer in the kitchen). When a special moment with the kids arises, I whip the book out to record it. I don't worry about grammar or spelling, and often write mere fragments. It takes me less than a minute. Later on, when I have more time, I go back and fill in the details.

One of my favourite moments, recorded using this system, was when my five-year old and I were having a conversation about a visit from a friend with her newborn baby. I told him that everyone was a baby at some point. After thinking about it for a few seconds, he blurted out, "Even people from the 1850s?" I still chuckle when I read that entry.

I also paste things in the anecdote book, such as a note my older son left me the first time he and his brother rode their bikes to the store. "Dear Mom," it said, "I have gone to Little Bee Mart with Peter. We are safe. From Stephen." I remember being really worried when I read it, and had to fight the urge to run after them. But they did come back safely



Photo: Gem Weathebee

and I learned to have faith in their abilities and to let them go even further the next time.

Saving the mementoes

To preserve the more tangible items, I go through my children's things from the previous year, retrieving report cards, class photos, "Student of the Month" certificates, music programs or school newsletters in which their names were mentioned – anything I think they would enjoy looking at in years to come. Then I put the papers in clear plastic sleeves in a three-ring binder. When one

binder is full, I date it and start another one.

I use different binders for special events or interests in their lives, such as their first time at camp or their favourite sporting activity or interest. The binders are filled with highlights, such as awards, photos, letters or postcards sent home. I often find my sons late at night, poring through their binders, remembering their glory days.

Another binder or photo album can be an archive for parents' special keepsakes, such as handmade mother's and father's day cards, special pieces of artwork or poems. With the profusion of paper that enters the house, it's important to put aside the artwork and stories you know you want to keep. They can then be dated and stored in file folders or plastic containers, depending on the quantities.

Keepsakes to treasure

By encapsulating these memories that might otherwise be lost in time, I have a tangible memoir of my children's growing years and a keepsake they will treasure as adults.

Lately, I've found myself looking back on my own childhood and writing down what I can remember, so that when my grandchildren are sitting on my knees, I'll have something to tell them.

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