

Family night traditions strengthen ties

Whether you have toddlers, teens or kids any age in between, "family night" is a fun way to bring everyone together. Several local families shared with me creative and sometimes unusual practices that bring their busy family members together for this special night.

Some traditions or their variations were passed down from generation to generation, while others were more recent additions, some created by family members.

The Sievers family of Pomona consists of parents Kirk and Debbie, and Kristen, 19, Ryan 17, and Becka, 9. The Sievers have observed family night since their children were young, but adapted their routine over the years to fit the needs of the growing children.

When the children were young, family night was celebrated religiously every Saturday, with a variety of activities from Movie Night to Talent Time. On Movie Night, the family would turn the living room into a movie theater by dimming the lights, serving popcorn and following "usher" Kristen to their seats.

Talent Time was a mix of singing and acting, in full costume, under Kristen's direction. On Picnic Night, the family enjoyed picnic favorites like chicken and lemonade while sitting on a blanket in the living room. Everyone dressed up in kimonos on Japanese Night and ate Japanese food while sitting on pillows around the coffee table. And, on Game Night, the Sievers played favorite games like "Candy Land" or simple card games like "go fish."

"We were always trying to think of different things to come up with," Debbie said.

Most of the family's entertainment was simple and inexpensive, like evenings when Kirk played guitar and everyone sang camp songs, or taking trips to McDonald's for ice cream.

"Just the waiting and anticipation of it was fun," Debbie remembered.

A popular summer activity was touring locations of special interest to Kirk and Debbie, who both grew up in La Verne. Favorite destinations were their alma maters, the hospitals they were born in and the homes of their grandparents.

Saturday was chosen because it was "more easygoing," according to Debbie, allowing time for the children to help her make a simple dessert, like pudding or ice cream with different toppings. The night's activity was picked at random, in the morning, from a jar containing sub-



Veronica James
CLOSE TO HOME

missions from various family members.

Around age 7, Kristen began using her artistic talents to create intricate programs and menus to go along with the theme of the night.

"It's something she really got into," Debbie recalled.

Kristen now is a student at Mt. San Antonio College and remembers making up menus and helping her mom cook dinner.

"When I was little it was something I looked forward to," she said, "because that was the time my family got to spend together and it was fun because during the week we were so busy."

Kristen feels that family night brought her closer to her parents and siblings.

"My dad used to work a lot during the week," she said, "and Saturday he was home and we got to see him, too. It was nice because we weren't doing homework on Saturday and we didn't have to be anywhere. It was nice to kick back and have fun."

As the children got older and became involved in other activities, the family adjusted. For example, when Kristen was on the drill team in high school, family night often consisted of packing a picnic dinner and going to the game as a family to support her.

Today, Kristen is sometimes busy on family night, but often she and her fiancé, Brad Paulson, join the Sievers for family activities like eating out or renting movies.

"I can really see that because we always did that with our children, they grow up and make it a part of their life, too. They really cling to it," Debbie said. "Everybody gets a lot of joy out of it. We really see with our kids how close everybody was and still is."

For the Frenken family of Upland — Steve and Terri, Matthew 17, Jeffrey, 14, and Katie-Lynne, 11 — family night is a time of relaxation and togetherness each Friday.

"Friday night now is our regroup time," Terri said. "Everyone's exhausted from school. We order pizza, pick out videos and we veg."

In past years Terri and the kids made pizza from scratch, but now, she says, "everybody's too tired and wants to crash."

For variety, the family sometimes plays games or rents video games. Katie especially likes to play card games like speed or gin rummy, which she picked up from her grandmother.

The Hyatt family of Diamond Bar — Jim and Marie, Amber, 10, and Sarah, 6 — celebrate family night about once a month, with either Game Night or Rude Night.

On Rude Night family members are encouraged to be as sloppy as possible during dinner. No utensils or napkins are allowed, throwing of food is preferred over passing, blowing bubbles in milk is OK and sloppy foods like spaghetti are served.

"We're totally slobes at the dinner table," Marie said. "That way it gets all the 'sloppies' out of people, especially little people, so that they have to have good manners the rest of the month. For the most part, the more sloppy nights we have the more successful we are with manners."

Jim Hyatt was resistant to the idea at first — actually "appalled," according to Marie, but now he can sling food with the best of them. The girls especially look forward to Rude Night and frequently implore their parents to put it on the monthly calendar.

"The kids look forward to it," Marie said. "It ensures that all four of us are participating in the same type of fun at the same time, just because our schedules go every which way."

The more traditional Game Night is a favorite of the Diamond Bar Grant family — Greg and Betty, Kenneth, 8, Bronte, 3, and Kellan, 11 months. The tradition began in October when an 8-year-old neighbor, Brianne, began coming over to play while her parents attended high school football games. Soon the Grants and Brianne were playing "Trouble," "Monopoly" and "Life" every Friday night.

"It's something we definitely look forward to," Betty said. "It's a great time to tease each other when we win and one of them lost. It's just a great family time."

• **VERONICA JAMES** writes about family issues for Inland Valley Our Times. She can be reached at veronicajames@mindspring.com.