Forever Family

Ancestors Who Shaped Our Lives

Families exist in some form in every society in the world. In many cultures, the family is regarded as the most important institution. There are many types of families and the roles of family members can be different from culture to culture. But the basics of family are the same around the globe. And they are same as when your ancestors were going to work, raising children, celebrating holidays and birthdays, and doing many of the everyday things you do now.

Your connection to your ancestors goes beyond similar activities. Understanding the importance of family history is a valuable tool for children as they pass through some of the most influential years of their lives. A recent survey among teens asked, “If you had to choose between being rich or famous, which would you choose?” The overwhelming choice, especially among teenage girls, was to be famous. Today’s media often give children the idea that their identity is based on what they do, not who they are. Learning about their ancestors helps children value not only their heritage but also who they are as individuals.

Ancestors are much more than just names and dates. They were people with hopes, homes, and hardships that made your life—and your children’s lives—possible. We often forget how our ancestors might have struggled and sacrificed. Your family was instrumental in helping to shape who you are. Search back into your family history and learn their stories. Some of those stories will have an impact on how your children think of themselves. They will better understand and appreciate who they are and where they came from.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Many families have a tradition of remembering and telling family stories. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, these tales of aunts, uncles, grandfathers, great grandmothers, and other relatives are told and retold within the family and passed down from generation to generation. Especially at holiday gatherings, young and old pore over dusty photo albums, letters, or newspaper clippings that reveal faces and places captured in time. Think about starting that tradition with your children at the next holiday.

Find out as much as you can about your ancestors, including their occupations, loved ones, and hobbies. What was life like during the time in which they lived? What were the current events that everyone was talking about? What might a typical day have been like for these people? Share stories with your children that bring to life the kinds of men and women your ancestors were. Explain how they influenced your life and made a difference in their own families and communities. Help your children recognize that just like your ancestors, they also can become individuals who influence family, friends, and colleagues for generations to come.

Looking back over generations, you might find that certain strong traits (a talent for art or music, for example) continue to run in your family. However, exploring your family history could be difficult. You might discover things about ancestors that you did not expect or do not like. Nevertheless, look at all sides of your family history and do not shy away from sharing the painful stories with your children. These are the kinds of details that make your ancestors real and help your children recognize the character traits that made them unique. They will be able to decide what characteristics they want to embrace and pass on to family members who come after them.

At your next family gathering, climb the attic stairs or head to the basement to collect old photos, newspaper articles, or mementos that breathe life into your family's history. Or do not even wait until the next holiday. Many families now also are sharing old stories or photos online. Your children—the next generation of family historians—might be eager to take part in an online exchange to learn and ask questions about your family's legacy.

As the past comes to life for them through the stories and photos that are revealed, your children will realize that although friends may come and go, family is forever.

For Further Discussion

- Who is the current family historian in your family? Who will most likely take over this role?
- What good family memories do you have? Have you shared these with your children?
- Who in your family had the most positive influence on your life, even if it was just during visits or holidays?
- What made these people so special? Describe their character.
- How can you take advantage of the holidays or family reunions to pass along positive family influence to your children?

Check your local public library for these recommended titles

BOOKS

A Father's Legacy by J. Countryman

The Heart of a Father by Ken Canfield

Fathers of Influence: Inspiring Stories of Men Who Made a Difference in Their Children and Their World by Cook Communications (Editor)

Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul by John Eldredge

The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate (Men's Edition) by Gary Chapman

MOVIES

The Lion King

Daddy Day Care

Liar Liar

The Rookie

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