



July 17, 2007

Parental Wisdom – Emails

Auntie Mame and the Family Reunion

She often told her nephew, “Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are starving to death.” – Auntie Mame

We all have a strong need to belong, and extended family shows us the interesting mix of personalities, ages, and stages that makes up this wonderful gift we call family. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins all with different personalities and temperaments are part of who we are, and what we belong to. And we all need to belong to something. It’s all about connections – connections underlie everything. That is why in the movie, *Castaway*, Tom Hanks’ character creates a friend out of a volleyball he calls Wilson.

Most extended families don’t live in the same city anymore, let alone the same block. While there are benefits to distance, isn’t it sad that your kids may not know your relatives as well as they could or should?

For many families, the return of the family reunion gives everybody exactly what they need – a sense of belonging to a group larger than an immediate family.

“The lack of emotional security of our American young people is due, I believe, to their isolation from the larger family unit. No two people – no mere mother or father – as I have often said, are enough to provide emotional security for a child. He needs to feel himself one in a world of kinfolk, persons of variety in age and temperament, and yet allied to himself by an indissoluble bond which he cannot break if he could, for nature has welded him into it before he was born.” – Pearl Buck

Did you know that African American families account for half of all family reunions held in the United States? About 70% of summer non-business related travel by African Americans is reunion related. Source www.crayola.com

Ironically, the same ease of travel and technology that allows us to move further apart can bring families together. The younger members comfortable with technology can easily design websites, upload photos, and create email distribution lists, making it all child’s play.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

Plan ahead – July is family reunion month, so get started now for next year. Don't expect this to be smooth sailing; even the closest families will have problems agreeing on everything.

Calendars – begin by getting conflicting dates out of the way, like weddings, graduations, and studying abroad. Pick two or three dates that make sense and email everyone. For the family members that do not have email, here is a free conference telephone bridge that might work <http://www.telejunctions.com/>

Involve everyone – build teams by utilizing everyone's talents. Have the finance person in the family oversee the budget, while the party planner organizes games and activities. Make sure the finance person is cost conscious but avoid having a family member host the event at their home which tends to create a less than evenly distributed event.

Visit the Family Reunion Institute of Temple University - the only organization of its kind in the United States. The mission of the Institute is to serve as a resource to families having reunions. Here is a link explaining How to Organize a Family Reunion. <http://www.temple.edu/fri/organize.html>