

# CHAPTER TEN



# PUTTING EXTRA IN THE ORDINARY

The Power of Fun

by Tiffany Sowby



Tiffany Sowby's passionate dream from childhood—to grow up and be a mother—has come true, as she is now the mother of five children—three boys and two girls, ranging in age from 3 to 14. Though the realities of motherhood are often far from dreamy, Tiffany does her best to keep her passion for motherhood alive by appreciating, recognizing, and finding joy in the little things of life.

As a mom, Tiffany enjoys spontaneous thank-yous, children's laughter, laundry, handwritten notes and drawings, and nap time. Outside of motherhood, some of Tiffany's favorite things are date nights, writing, shoes, long conversations with friends, and rainy days.

While Tiffany's diploma from the University of Utah is filed away in a drawer somewhere, Tiffany has chosen to focus her time and efforts into motherhood. Through writing and speaking, Tiffany is committed to helping other mothers find contentment and joy in motherhood. Two of Tiffany's greatest passions, writing and motherhood, come together at [ourmostofthetimehappyfamily.blogspot.com](http://ourmostofthetimehappyfamily.blogspot.com).

Recently, as lunchtime approached, my three-year-old son Joshua sat at the kitchen table saying, “I’m starving,” while I ran around the kitchen unloading dishes, sorting papers, and dealing with phone calls. I was in a typical late morning routine and I needed a few more minutes to finish up a phone call and put away some dishes before making lunch. All Joshua wanted was some lunch, and maybe some attention. After getting off the phone and hearing a second declaration of starvation, I realized my tasks could wait. To my son’s pleasant surprise, I stood in front of him at the kitchen table with a pen and paper in my hand and politely announced, “Welcome to Tiffany’s Kitchen. What can I get for you to drink today?” I barely heard his words, “apple juice,” because of the giggles that ensued. While the dishwasher sat open, my three-year-old and I played restaurant. I don’t know if I’ve *ever* seen Joshua smile that big while eating lunch.

As mothers, we have demands on us all day every day. Even nighttime hours are not exempt from the duties of motherhood. Middle-of-the-night feedings, sick children, and bad dreams muddle together with the daytime tasks of laundry, house cleaning, employment, volunteer work, and meal preparation that require practically all of our time, effort, and energy. How can we make sure that neither our families nor we are dragged down with the myriad of tasks that could very easily overwhelm all of our days? It starts by simply reminding ourselves that there is more to life than laundry.

Most of us as very young mothers, and of course as pre-mothers, planned on being *fun* mothers. We envisioned story times, play times, creative projects, and traditions that we believed—no matter what—we *would* do. And then something happened. We became mothers! Before we knew it, our time was filled with responsibilities: bills to pay, housework to do, faces to wipe, stains to launder, and so much more. Whatever happened to those early visions of homemade piñatas, beautifully-decorated cookies for every holiday, picnic lunches on the family room floor, and nature walks?

*“People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.”* - Dale Carnegie

Every mother wants to be successful. Every family wants to succeed. Have you ever thought “fun” might be the missing ingredient you need to get to the success you want? Do you ever find yourself rushing through your days acting as though fun is to be reserved for a time when, and only when, you have completed all other tasks, chores, and responsibilities on that never-ending “to-do-list”?

The reality is that putting a little more fun in our personal and family life can potentially make us *more* successful, not less—not to mention much happier throughout the journey. When we make the effort to team up fun and responsibility, we’ll begin to see for ourselves that fun is actually a vital part of success.

Opportunities to incorporate fun into our lives are all around us. Sometimes we just have to slow down so we don’t miss them. Sometimes, we need to forget about the “to-do-list” and just let it happen. While the definition of fun will vary for individuals and families (based on circumstances and interests), the need to have fun within a family remains universal. So

how do you start having more fun? The following sections illustrate four aspects of fun that can easily be incorporated into family life: family traditions, simple times, spontaneous moments, and putting *extra* in the ordinary.

## **Family Traditions**

Every family has traditions. Some are deliberate celebrations of milestones and holidays such as a first birthday or the first day of school. Others are less intentional, developing out of weekly rituals such as Saturday chores or Friday night pizza. Some traditions are short-lived, while others are treasured practices that are passed down through generations. Traditions are found in every family, making them an ideal avenue for incorporating FUN into family life.

One of our family's favorite traditions is celebrating "half birthdays." We keep it simple: an inexpensive gift, *half* a chocolate cake (with *half* a candle in it), and the first *half* of the traditional "Happy Birthday" song sung. Just after my son recently blew out the broken-in-half candle atop his half cake, my daughter said to me, "Half birthdays are fun. Everyone celebrates birthdays, but not everyone does half birthdays. They're *fun*." Sometimes it is the small, simple traditions that bring fun into our routine lives.

An advantage of this tradition is that it has a "set date." The half-birthday date finds a presence on the family calendar and inserts fun when it would otherwise be filled with normal routines and tasks.

With a little effort, even the more serious and "necessary" traditions or routines can become more pleasurable. Each Sunday, as a family, we hold a Family Council. It is a rather somber meeting when we discuss and journal the past week's events, and then give each child the opportunity to bring up any "matters of importance." Last year, my daughter Megan was acting as the scribe recording the meeting in our Family Council Book. As she flipped through the book looking for the next clean page, she started to laugh. She paused and read about a Family Council from almost seven years ago. As a family we laughed aloud as she read her "matter of importance": "Keep my new pajamas clean so I can wear them every night." What was once a "matter of importance" to her as a five-year-old girl now seemed silly and trivial. It was funny! Our Family Council agenda now includes reading an entry from a previous Family Council. Without fail, we laugh every time. What could be a dry and boring family meeting has become *fun*!

Another of our family traditions falls on March 2nd. As an adult, the day always stood out in my mind because of a silly memory from back in my college days. Later, when I had three young children, my grandfather passed away on this day. A couple of years after he died, I thought about the reasons that particular day stood out in my mind. Throw into the mix that it is Dr. Seuss' birthday, and I had all the motivation I needed to start a new family tradition! Our celebration is very simple. Upon waking up, my children find a new Dr. Seuss book on the kitchen table. At dinner, we tell a story about my grandpa and I regale them with the silly memory from college. It isn't a big event, but it's enough for good

memories. Take it from my daughter Ellie, who recently asked, "When's that day we get a new book on the table? That's a fun day."

Traditions will naturally vary from family to family. When selecting traditions for your family, pay attention to what your family considers fun. Ultimately, the most important part of the tradition is spending quality time together.

This mom points out some important considerations when selecting family traditions:

*Pick traditions that suit your family. If your husband or kids can't stay on pitch, then caroling at retirement homes may not be your best option.*

*My way isn't the only way. When deciding which traditions you'd like your family to have, it's easy to think the way your family did things when you were growing up is the best and only way to do it. If you let yourself believe this fallacy, your family will miss out on some wonderful memories.*

*When I was growing up, Christmas Eve meant gathering with our cousins to reenact the Nativity in full costume, complete with musical numbers. My husband's extended family also gathered on Christmas Eve, but to play ball. Everybody went down to the college court to play basketball in the big family tournament.*

*It was easy for me to think that performing the Nativity is the ideal way to unite a family in love and purpose. But imagine a family of athletic boys being forced by their mother to "wear that bathrobe and aluminum foil crown, and do it with a smile!" That doesn't exactly engender feelings of warmth and family unity. My husband's tradition of a basketball game is something they have really loved. It has tied them together, just as my family's tradition tied us closer every year.*

*Life is short; enjoy it to the fullest. Fill your family life with fun by making traditions that bind you to those you love.*

*- Heather Whitehead*

Another adds this important thought:

*Traditions are for the whole family. My grandmother, Iva Lou Herd, was a huge proponent of having the adults and the children play together. Every September we had a family reunion at a lake. It was a cardinal rule that EVERYONE participated in the official Herd Family Reunion Field Games and Treasure Hunt. As always, my grandmother's methods proved to be right. It was so fun watching uncles and cousins, with giggling toddlers clinging to their backs, running from clue to clue. When someone tripped and fell, there was always someone bigger to scoop them up and encourage them to keep laughing (and quit crying). And there was no greater excitement than when, amidst the three-legged race, one of the big, strong uncles went crashing down making way for two little nephews to bound their way across the finish line to glory—now that was a*

*victory! There was always lots of cheering and laughter . . . as they say, the more the merrier. These events became the highlight of our reunions, and the real treasure was everyone having fun together.*

*- Shawnie Sutorius*

Whether you are looking for new traditions or evaluating those you currently have, take a moment to consider if having fun is a part of them. Incorporating fun into traditions will make them more appealing to everyone.

### **Simple Times**

Too often, we have the tendency to over-complicate and over-plan activities, yet it's the little things that children tend to notice and remember. What mother hasn't had a child more interested in the wrapping paper or cardboard box than the item inside? While an activity may not always go as we originally planned, by keeping our traditions and activities simple, often the end result works just as well. (If not better!)

Last summer, I asked my children what they remembered as being the most fun from the previous summer. The replies included: "The time we went on a picnic and I caught fish in the plastic container the treats had been in," "Pretending we were camping in the back yard," "Dad re-arranging rocks and making a pretend hot tub in the canyon creek." Do you see a pattern here? None of my children mentioned a visit to an amusement park, the local swimming pool, or a vacation. While those outings certainly have a place in family memories and activities, sometimes it is the simple, creative events that really stand out to our kids. (And are often far less stress and preparation than field trips and vacations!)

Here's an example of a simple, creative game:

*A game we love to play is the Paper Bag Game. You divide into two teams and everyone gets their own brown lunch sack with something in it that they have to eat. We vary the food to add a little excitement because you never know what you are going to get in your bag—delicious or detestable! After everyone is standing in front of a bag you start with the person at the head of the table. As soon as the first person has finished their food the next person can go and so on and so forth. The first team to go through everyone wins! If you do not have enough people to make teams, just put a timer on and try to do it under a certain amount of time. This is great for a family night or when the kids have some friends over to play. You can use anything you have in your cupboards—just make sure no one peeks in their bag before it is their turn!*

*I want you to know that my children do not readily shout with joy at my ideas. They most always think they will be "dumb and boring." But once I get them to actually do it, (I totally ignore their whining) they love it.*

*- Allyson Smith*

A couple of Halloweens ago, my kids asked to go to our local recreation center for a Halloween carnival. Having been a couple of years earlier, I was not keen on repeating the event with five children (including a baby who was six months old). I didn't want to disappoint my children, so I racked my brain for a replacement activity. That first 'Family Carnefel' (as the homemade sign of our then seven-year-old stated) was the beginning of an affordable, simple and fun family event that we continue to enjoy. On a random weekend, when we have a free night and some creative energy, each family member is placed in charge of an event. We've had activities as simple as tossing a coin into a bowl, as well as more challenging cowboy roping contests. We've tried balloon trains around the house, eating donuts from a string, and passing cereal from straw to straw. A Family—or neighborhood—Carnefel is guaranteed to elicit plenty of laughter.

I am a believer that in doing simple things together, some of the best relationships can blossom. Simple activities are easy to fit into hectic schedules and require little planning. This mom clearly understands this:

*Not long ago I taught my girls how to play Rummy and Nertz. Now, there is nothing they would rather do with me. Marissa, in particular, often talks me into "just one game" before bed. It only takes a few minutes, costs nothing, and always has us laughing and interacting. Elaborate and expensive activities, while wonderful to do once in a while, tend to be overwhelming or impractical to do very often.*

- Shawnie Sutorius

Really, it isn't hard to have fun with our children. The little impromptu restaurant episode with my son that busy lunchtime entertained him every bit as much as an outing to a fast-food eatery's play zone would have.

*"At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, or a parent." -Barbara Bush*

Time spent with our families doesn't have to be anything grand. It is quite often in the most simple, unplanned moments we make some of our best memories!

### **Spontaneous Moments**

Oftentimes we underestimate the ease with which we can incorporate fun and laughter into our family's lives. Sure there may be extra clean up and work later, but first there is the fun, and that is the part that everyone will remember.

One mom shares this experience (and I would like to think I would enjoy the humor, spontaneity and FUN in this experience had it happened to me . . .).

*I will never forget the hot summer afternoon that my father hid in the bushes for nearly thirty minutes, garden hose in hand, waiting for my mother to arrive home from the store*

*and walk into the house. As her car pulled into the drive, my heart began to race as I heard my father stifle a childlike giggle. As soon as she was within range, he roared from the bushes soaking her from head to toe! Soon, he turned on the children. Within moments, we all stood on the lawn, wet with water and tears of laughter.*

*Then, the challenge was issued. Someone had to get back at Dad!*

*It was a few weeks later when I saw my Mom dragging the garden hose inside the house. We followed her, curious as to what she could possibly be doing. She held her finger to her lips, begging our silence; she then tiptoed into the bathroom, hose in hand, where my father was taking a nice, warm shower. Oh, how he yelped when that icy water hit his shoulders! I don't think I've ever heard my mother laugh so hard. Looking back, I realize how important it was for me, as a child, to see my parents having fun. Laughter makes us feel secure. It relieves tension. It relaxes our minds. It brings families closer. Nothing warms my heart quite as much as the sound of their sincere, unabashed laughter.*

*- Jenny Proctor*

A few months ago, I heeded a challenge to add more “serendipitous moments” into my mothering. It seemed almost providential that just days after committing to the challenge, I drove past a local park, with all of my children in tow. My six-year-old asked if we could stop and play. I'm not quite sure who was more surprised, me or the children, when I turned into the parking lot in spite of the fact dinner needed to be on the table in thirty minutes. The kids had fun playing at the park while my eldest child and I sat alone in the car talking. As I called out to the children that it was time to go, I silently praised myself for giving into the moment. The pleasant visit to the park came to a screeching halt when my six-year-old had a temper tantrum about leaving and my eight-year-old attempted to rein her into the car with his cowboy roping rope. Though it temporarily left me second-guessing my efforts to be a ‘fun mom’, months later, we all laugh about the spontaneous trip to the park.

Life can get crazy and hectic for all of us. There are deadlines, tests, appointments, schedules, and outings that must be managed. But amidst these daily pressures, we cannot forget to have fun.

*Sometimes every day seems exactly the same as the day before. I get so wrapped up in the routine motherly duties that each day blurs into the next, and before I know it another week has gone by! I find myself struggling to remember what we did in any given week, or what I even accomplished. I need to slow down and remember that when I'm a cute little old lady (as opposed to an ugly old lady), it's not going to be the household duties and chores that I remember, it's going to be the games, the laughter and the FUN that I had with my children. That being said, these memories aren't going to create themselves; I need to put down the dish rag and the soap to have some spontaneous fun with my kids!*

*- Shayne Dickson*

Surely you can all relate to the following scene: Mom's trying to cook dinner, homework is being done at the kitchen table, a child is typing a report at the computer, a toddler is underfoot, the phone is ringing, neighbor kids are knocking at the door looking for a playmate and somebody needs a Band-Aid RIGHT NOW. What do you do? The most tempting solution for me is often to run away from it all, but of course that wouldn't help anything. Very often during these chaotic moments, I turn the nearby radio on. I grab a makeshift microphone (usually a utensil, pencil, or broom) and begin singing loudly. Sometimes I'll even hop up on a nearby chair. This spontaneous outburst works like magic (almost) every time. Somehow, even with loud music and several voices singing, the chaos dissipates, the tension disappears, and by the time the song ends everybody is rejuvenated and ready to continue with their tasks.

Consider this experience that required no clean-up and no preparation—just a little imagination (and spontaneity):

*One afternoon I was relishing the fact that my boys were contently playing. It was a great opportunity to get some writing done.*

*As I listened to their distant laughter, I felt a little prompting to join them. Moments like these don't come along very often, one part of me reasoned. The kids are happily playing and I can get some writing done, the other part of me said. But, then I heard it in a different way: Moments like these don't come along very often, when the kids are happily playing and I can spontaneously join in on the fun.*

*Joining them won out.*

*I poked my head into the room and saw they were playing Pokemon. I jumped into the room and onto the bed shouting 'lightning strike!' with my arms shooting out lightning bolts. The look of surprise on my children's faces was priceless. For the next twenty minutes or so we laughed and played, and I received hug after hug from my boys. They seemed overjoyed I had joined in with such enthusiasm. This was a moment, purely spontaneous, which I seized instead of letting it slip by. It didn't require a lot of time or effort, but I am grateful I followed the prompting because we shared a priceless moment none of us will forget.*

*- Chantelle Adams*

Motherhood is certainly not easy. Duty calls often, and it is all too easy to get caught up in the day-to-day responsibilities that demand our attention. Try looking at it a little differently though: Since our duties are demanding, we certainly aren't going to forget about them; so why don't we occasionally pause and have some fun? Nothing that is really important will get left undone just because we have stopped to enjoy a funny moment. In fact, sometimes the funny moment may be the very thing we need to get our work done, as this mom can attest:

*I had promised to make some lemon bars for a baby shower one day. I was naturally crunched for time. My kids were at my feet begging me to let them up on the counter to help. Seriously, if I did not let them up on the counter they were going to DIE! They needed to help me THAT BAD! I was starting to get flustered and wanted them out of my way, preferably someplace far like Australia.*

*This was one of those moments when I knew my attitude would either make or break the household mood for the rest of the day. I had some choices to make. One: Go to my happy place and pretend that my children really are in Australia, and then maybe I won't notice the annoying pleading. Two: Give in, let them help, and hope no one notices some mystery ingredients in the lemon bars. Three: Bring out the spontaneous kid buried inside of me and make this a game. Everyone loves games, right?*

*I had some leftover lemon juice. (We all know where this is going . . .) I told my kids that I needed some taste testers to see if my "lemonade" was still fresh. Giddy with anticipation I had my video camera ready. Let the taste testing begin!*

*My oldest, Remi, took one sip and knew what I was up to. Corr, my youngest, not so much. He chugged the entire thing! He put down the glass and got a bad case of the sour shivers, or to be more accurate, sour convulsions. We were hysterical, despite the sour lemon juice, and best of all made an awesome video! My kids kept themselves busy watching the video over and over, while I finished my lemon bars in peace. Instead of it being just another boring day in the kitchen, we will always remember it as the fun lemon juice day—even if my kids are terrified of lemonade for the rest of their lives!*

*- Shayne Dickson*

We have to remember that spontaneity requires choice. These sorts of memories can only be made if we value having fun with our family enough to give into the moment.

### **Putting Extra in Ordinary Days**

Early in my mothering career, I sat in a meeting about family activity ideas. The lady presenting the lecture told of a time her school-age daughter didn't want to go to a friend's house after school, as she worried about what fun she may miss out on at home. That thought profoundly affected me, and made me ask myself, "What can I do so my children think of our home as a fun place and believe that every day is not just going to be an ordinary day?"

Now, I have to admit, the majority of days in our house *are ordinary days* and I absolutely love and treasure them. The sounds of an instrument being practiced, a dryer running, and a toddler pushing a toy car along the kitchen floor make for a pleasant soundtrack to a lovely, ordinary day. But, who doesn't like to have something thrown in to inject a little fun into our otherwise-routine days? It is often the pleasantly ordinary days that make the perfect backdrop for a splash of fun.

*There are always jobs to be done, so why not include your children and make it fun? I have turned dusting into a scavenger hunt. We always turn the music up so we can dance and sing while we work. My kids love to help in the garden because we dig holes, find bugs, watch things miraculously grow, and then eat the fruits of their labors. It sometimes takes a bit longer to complete the tasks, but this kind of “fun” allows you to teach the importance of work and responsibility to your children while spending quality time together.*

*- Chantelle Adams*

One of my children’s favorite things to do, that adds a little “extra” to the ordinary, is an after-school treasure hunt. There is no set schedule to when I may do one. (Honestly it depends on my schedule and energy.) There is sheer delight on my children’s faces when they enter the kitchen after a long day at school to find the tell-tale signs of a treasure hunt on the pantry door. It usually starts with a drawing or rhyme that tells them where to go next. The four to five scattered clues that follow take them upstairs, downstairs and even outside. I love to watch the teamwork and giggles that ensue as a result of my inept drawings or silly throw-words-together-because-they-rhyme type clues. (Do not let me fool you. We have plenty of “Stop, you’re going too fast,” or “You lied, you said I could read the next one.”)

Though the “treasure” at the end is rarely anything more than a simple after-school snack, really, who wouldn’t laugh to find a plate of cookies sitting in an empty bathtub? Even my teenager follows along happily (albeit with a tad less enthusiasm than the others). After all, who really ever outgrows fun?

Even our smallest attempts to add a little extra to the ordinary will be recognized and appreciated by our children. March 2nd is an ordinary day for most people. It used to be ordinary for us, until I threw in a little extra. Setting a new book on the kitchen table and retelling stories are nothing special, but they are just slightly out of the ordinary, and that’s enough to make the day fun. Pick a day, just any old day, and put a little extra into it. You’ll be amazed at the little jumpstart and renewal it will give to everyone involved.

It isn’t just our own families who may benefit from our efforts. Sometimes other mothers may be touched by the power of our example. One mom shares the following charming account of such a time:

*Splash, Splash, Splash! I could see a mother splashing in the puddles from last night’s rainstorm with her children. Two girls, pigtails bobbing, held hands as they jumped in puddles of warm rainwater. A boy, pedaling with all his might, was racing his bike through the largest puddle. Another daughter was leaping across small puddles.*

*Puddle-jumping is just one of the many simple and fun ways this mother, my neighbor, spends time with her children. It seems she is always adding fun into their days. Once after dropping something off at my house, I noticed her stop for a few minutes at the park*

*with her son. They slid down the slide a few times, and then continued home. Just a simple action, but fun for a child. She draws with sidewalk chalk, paints with watercolors, dribbles a soccer ball and builds snow forts. I've seen her at the park tossing a baseball with her husband while their children play.*

*When I first met her, I thought she was an ordinary mother. After watching for years, I recognized that she is an extraordinary mother. Her children, who are becoming teenagers, are good-natured. They make good choices and have an unusually calm and relaxed relationship with their mother.*

*This mother has become a role model for me. She keeps her life simplified (even with five children) and minimizes the clutter around her house. Those two habits enable a few minutes of unrushed time nearly every day. Mothering is one of her priorities, and she consistently chooses to use her few daily minutes for her children. She makes life happy for them. Not just for them, but with them.*

*Following her model of creating simple, fun times has required me to work hard, especially at first. I needed to minimize distractions and clutter. Then I needed to prioritize "fun" every day, with every child. Initially I had to plan the time (ten or fifteen minutes every day) and the activity (such as reading stories, singing songs, or playing with play-dough). After a lot of conscious effort, simple fun is becoming a natural part of my mothering. Choosing to create a fun and happy climate has increased happy laughter and family closeness.*

*This mother I admire once told me, "Someday when I am old, and it is raining, I hope my children will call me up and say, 'Do you remember when you used to take us puddle jumping?' and I'll smile and remember."*

*- Allyson Smith*

## **Embrace the Fun**

Jump in a few puddles, put the after-school snack in the empty bathtub, or slide down a slide before you leave the park. It doesn't take much to put a little "extra" in an ordinary day.

Remember how you once envisioned motherhood? We needn't feel encumbered by the grandiose plans of yesteryear. We need to look at the mothers we are now. By putting some thought and effort into our family traditions, keeping things simple, being willing to seize spontaneous moments, and adding some extra to the ordinary, we *can* be the fun mothers we hoped to be.

There is room for fun! There is more to life than laundry! Whether it is a family vacation, a last-minute picnic, or a case of the giggles at bedtime, we all need a momentary escape from the responsibilities and seriousness of life. Our children, and even we, will benefit from the

results of incorporating fun, laughter, and humor into our lives. Fun is all around us, we may just have to look harder some days than others to find it.