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December 2014 • Volume 105

MATURE Lifestyles OF TENNESSEE

Fifty Forward

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Jump the Generation Gap with Stories this Holiday Season

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Give Your Immune System a Winter Boost

MIDDLE TENNESSEE'S CHRISTMAS TREE FARMS

Voices of Experience:
Stories to Jump the Generation Gap

By Deborah Wilbrink

You can make your holiday visits with the young people in your life pop and sizzle, rather than fizzle. This year, have a plan that enables conversation to flow freely across the generation gap. You may not want to use a "joystick" to kill targets on a screen. Or, heaven forbid, perhaps you're not a football fan or don't enjoy texting. What to do? **Young people would like to hear your stories.** Use these tips to draw them into conversation, and enjoy your meet and greets much more:

Choose a comfortable place and an unhurried time. Make it easier to truly listen. Don't hesitate to speak your heart: "I would love to spend some time just talking to you and listening to you. I want to know you better. Let's trade stories."

Plan some topics that you have in common. School days; music; dating; holiday dinners; learning to drive; pets; least favorite jobs; your first television or computer; historic events … even those typical conflicts with parents!

Deborah Wilbrink works on her holiday column.

Sharing family history at a reunion.

Take turns telling the stories, and keep them short. If I tell one about getting dental braces just before my first date, I'll need to ask if my niece has a good story about a first date or blind date. Be a good listener, too!

Take a few photos along to share on your visit. You at a younger age; your grandchildren's parents as children; ancestors; and photos of events, your first car, the prom … those will catch the interest of those hard-to-reach teenagers. You'll want to share open-ended questions that start with *why* and *how*, those that aren't answered with a *yes* or *no*.

Risk it all and say, "Ask me anything!" Some children have not been exposed to much imagination. You can start the ball rolling by "modeling" -- ask another person an easy, open-ended question about their past (not an embarrassing one) and listen intently.

Storytelling can be the centerpiece of the holiday visit. Just as "I am thankful for …" can go around the table at Thanksgiving, one can pick a topic and do a round of stories. If you really plan ahead, ask visitors to bring an object or a photo to a family round of Show and Tell. You'll be jumping the generation gap together before you know it!

If storytelling gets to be popular in your family, you can work on it as a family project for the next generations to enjoy. Teens are especially good at recording and editing video, but you may also have some budding writers and photographers in your family. Who provides the most interesting stories? You do, because they are different from today's. Start small and swap some stories with the younger folks this season.

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