



Marilyn Sharpe
Ministries, LLC

March 2013
Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
Marilyn Sharpe

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BABY CAKES!

Just one short year ago, we were awaiting the birth of our newest grandchild. Due March 31st, we had little prospect of her arriving on that date. After all, her mother was born five, yes that is five, weeks after we thought she was due! Well worth waiting for, but she had taught us that a due date was a neighborhood, not an address!

Lo and behold, our sweet granddaughter arrived on her due date! So, this year we get to celebrate this precious child, who has made all of the difference to her mom and dad, grandparents, aunts and uncle, cousins, and all who love her.

How will we celebrate her and all she means to us? Well, I'm sure her mom and dad will have many, many ideas. They may include ones we used with our children, who are now adults, raising the next generation. They may include some we've heard about from others. There may be some brand new ideas, too.

Here are some favorite birthday traditions:

TELL THE STORY The night before each child's birthday, we snuggled them in bed and told them the story of the day before and the day they were born. Even when they were old enough to roll their eyes at this, they listened. When one daughter was in Germany for her 18th birthday, I made a recording and sent it along. I knew it was important when our son called the night before his son's birthday, telling us he'd just tucked him in with the story of the day he was born!

SPECIAL BREAKFAST It may be hard to pull off on a school day, but make an effort to do something fun at the very beginning of the day. I have a friend whose mother made heart-shaped pancakes. I thought I'd done well if there was a favorite roll or fruit and a birthday napkin on the table! Write a note and pop it in the lunch box, too.

"YOU ARE SPECIAL TODAY" PLATE We own a red plate that gets used by each birthday person. It is a lovely tradition. Now, all of my adult kids have received one for their homes. For heaven's sake, don't just use it on birthdays.

CHOOSE THE DINNER MENU (even, and especially, if the foods don't go together or complete any food pyramid they teach in health class!) This is the time not to insist on five to eight fruits and vegetables on their plate. Chocolate, ice cream, and toast? I've eaten worse.

GIVE A GIFT TO HONOR YOUR CHILD If your child loves to read, donate a book to your church library in honor of your child. If your child loves one toy, donate a similar toy to a homeless shelter or hospice house for the children there to play with in honor of your child.

SPEND TIME TOGETHER The greatest gift you will ever give your child is the gift of time. Spend time together doing something they love to do. For my son, it was building Lego space stations, long before there were any kits that showed you what it was supposed to look like. Mine was a boring rectangle. My son's was always wildly imaginative. It was just a joy to share time.

PLAN A KID-FRIENDLY PARTY Kids really know what they'd like to do for their party. Within reason (which means cost, length, number of peers), let your child decide what they'd like to do. One of ours chose a backyard play date with a cupcake picnic. It was wonderful. The kids loved it. Clean up happened with a hose! A friend's child chose to take friends to Feed My Starving Children.

BIRTHDAY CANDLES Instead of putting the same number of candles in the cake that the child is years old, give a birthday candle to each person at the family table and have them insert their candle, naming one thing they thank God for about the birthday person.

TUCK YOUR CHILD INTO BED and tell them the difference they make in your life. Say it out loud in their presence to God, too.

So, was it just one short year ago? No, the gift of this child of God makes this a year when time stands still, when we celebrate each and every day. Do the same with each of your baby cakes, no matter their age.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Tell your child the story about the day they were born or adopted or came into your life by marriage or foster care. Make this an annual event, the beginning of your child's birthday celebration.
2. Frame pictures of your child at different ages and stages. Put them out where you see them every day. Tell your child the story about when and by whom and why the photo was taken.
3. Take time to tell each child what is uniquely cherished about him or her. Let them overhear you describing their great qualities and accomplishments to another person. Grandparents love to hear this sort of thing!
4. On their birthdays, use the birthday candles to have each person name the qualities they thank God for about the birthday kid. (Adults love this, too!)

5. If it's been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, remember items 1-4 and tell the child that you are thankful every day that God gave you the gift of this amazing child. Let them hear you pray that prayer. When they are sound asleep, sneak into their room, look at that beloved, cherubic sleeping face ... and fall in love, all over again.