

# One-on-one time creates lasting memories

Finding a few minutes is sometimes tough, but always worth it

By Erin Harrel

A few months ago, my fellow columnist Jim Dwyer wrote a great article sharing fond memories of early mornings in the kitchen with his mother.

It made me ask what my kids might remember as their special times with me. I really had to think hard for instances of making a special time for each of them on an individual basis. I'm with them every day, but when had I designated a specific time to enjoy them one-on-one?

This disheartened me! Had I not inherited Mimi's (my dad's mom) and my mother's gift to make each child feel special even when there were half a dozen kids around?

When I was growing up our house was always full of hustle and bustle. Somehow, my magnificent Mom managed to cook dinners, do ALL the laundry and still make time for each of us. Furthermore, she managed to deposit all four of us in the right places for the right practices. I'm still not sure how she did it.

My father worked a lot to support all of us in our endeavors. But at the same time he always found a way to help us with our projects. My brothers had the biggest skate ramp in town, and Dad spent more than one summer helping me revamp a 1970s Volkswagen bug we bought for a few hundred dollars. It was a huge project, but it provided countless wonderful memories of working with my dad.

Not only that, but Dad managed to make every single



Photo by ERIN HARREL

A big-girl manicure at the salon adds polish to Riley Harrel's one-on-one time with her mom.

wrestling match, cheerleading function, baseball game and dance recital we ever had.

Don't get me wrong; I don't think everything I do with my kids needs be memorable. However, I do wonder what they will remember.

I started panicking as I thought of all the things they might deposit into their little memories: trip after trip to Target and the grocery store, watching Mom do 500 loads of laundry, cooking, cleaning and on and on.

Having three children makes it difficult to spend one-on-one time, but I was determined to create "special time" for each child.

I started making sure I had at least one hour a week with each child. Sometimes we go places together, and other


times we work it into the evening regime. They really love when they get to stay up past bedtime and play games or just chat.

Riley's favorite thing to do is to get her nails done. I used to take her just for special occasions like her Irish step dance recital, but now we go just to spend time together.

The Nail Art salon on Hancock Bridge Parkway makes a big fuss over Riley while we sit next to each other and chat. Riley usually does most of the chatting because it is, after all, her uninterrupted time. The minute we get in the car she reminds me to turn my cell phone off as to keep my full attention focused on her. I have to admit I enjoy it, too.

My oldest really enjoys watching sports or playing

games. Must be the competitive spirit in him. When I asked him what he liked best about spending time together, he said, "Just hanging out with you." That's enough to make sure I don't break this habit of spending quality time with each of my children.

It's not an easy task, I assure you. As a proud member of the over-the-edge crowd (parents of three or more), I can attest that spare moments in a day are tough to come by. I can also guarantee, however, that the rewards of making each child feel special will last a lifetime. That should make you feel great about the job you're doing as a parent! 

—Erin Harrel is in the process of finishing her doctoral work at Barry University. She and her husband reside in Cape Coral with their three children.