

## QUALITY FAMILY TIME?

By Michael M. Tickenoff

O, lets say about three years ago, in early summer, I took the time to begin a new plan of "QUALITY TIME" WITH MY FAMILY, especially at the dinner table. I requested, and explained to my family the importance of being together in harmony during our one daily meal together, and I emphasized the importance of harmony!

Well now, the very next day, my plan was working great, all was going harmoniously wonderful at the dinner table until there came a strange noise from our front yard. So I asked one of my daughters to go take a look. She reported back that it was just a car parked in our driveway, adding, Umm...and it's making lots of weird noises!"

"What do you mean weird noises," I inquired just as I was putting the first cut of my um-ummpious steak into my mouth.

"I don't know Papa, just lots of noise."

OK, a father's duty requires him to oversee all family situations and so I arose from our Quality Family Time at the table. Mr. Cool, casually strolled over to the front door to see what it was all about. Sure enough, never leave it up to a teen girl to divine correctly a tragedy in the making. This was not just some ordinary car sitting there making a few weird noises----but it was a car which was anchored there with its engine roaring full blast, while steam hissed out between booms and clangs! There was no choice, I had to run out there, to see if anyone needed help because all the windows were fogged up.

Upon my swift arrival to this vehicle in stress, I could barely hear myself think; for the engine was racing at full speed, and I mean full bore! The inside of the car was filling with smoke and I knew from the sound that the engine was going to blow at any second. I carefully opened the door but nobody was inside, so I felt around, trying to find the key to shut the furious running machine off but in the smoke and frightful noise I couldn't find it. Thinking to maybe lift up the gas peddle and slow the engine down might be the solution but that did not help. I thought for sure, that if I might touch anything else, the car would take off and crash into my house or run someone down, so I backed out of the smoke and left well enough alone.

Not knowing what to do, I ran back to the porch where my wife had come out and was now hollering out impossible suggestions, over the noise. Being of a practical nature, she insisted that I try saving the car. So I ran back across the yard with her idea of becoming a hero to all, while she followed close behind. The intensity of the scene was magnified greatly by the strain of the roaring engine along with the steam and smoke and we both were now very nervous and slightly tensed...really slightly!

Truly concerned for my wife's safety I yelled for her to get back, "Leave the car saving to me dear!" Of course, she refused, so in a forceful tone I began to demand, and as if for emphasis, just then fire shot from under the car, and as she turned to run she slipped and fell full length onto the wet grass!

From that point on, things began to really go down hill; she began expressing her own fiery indignation at me. Accusing me with all appropriate terms, that I had purposely caused her fall. Somehow I had managed to destroy our "Quality Family Time, and so on and on she railed.

Ok now, I now had this burning up car behind me ready to explode and a wife sitting on the ground...fully steamed! With this the kids were now running around the yard encouraging me to do something, while attempting to rescue their grass stained mother off the lawn.

Finally, huge bursts of sparks began to shoot out from underneath the car, black smoke belched out from the motor while belts banged and clanged so loud that the neighbors up and down the road gathered to watch this curious family spectacle. Soon, the engine started to break up and I could hear pistons and parts shattering and breaking loose. Then suddenly, one huge burst of fire shot out from under the car and my whole family ran away screaming like frightened seagulls, yelling at me to, "GET AWAY!"

Then the engine slowly revved tighter and tighter, sort of, well not just sort of, but more like exactly, as a jet engine before take off. Then with a final hiss, a few chokes, it BURST and DIED! Smoke and steam poured from the front, the back, from underneath...everywhere possible. I felt terrible that I could not have stopped the engine or do something for the owner of this car, whoever that careless person might be...???

My very frustrated wife had now stomped away into her room, extremely upset at me for my inability to hold up our standard of "Quality Family Time". I supposed, at the same time causing her embarrassed fall from grace in front of the neighbors. No doubt, it was all my fault---and for sure, I lost the opportunity to become a hero!

I stood there looking at the smoking car, then up to my front porch and I was alone. I was now mentally exhausted, drained of all self worth and only wanted to get back to my dinner. However as I strolled alone back to the front porch, I discovered that during all the excitement, the front door was left open and our family cats had run for their lives. They somehow managed to find comfort in our dining room and took full advantage of the lack of guards at the dinner table. They had come in and had taken possession of the abandoned table, so much for that quality dinner.

It was later, while sitting alone, I finally managed a cold bowl of cheerios when a rather humble man came by explaining his predicament. His wife had left in somewhat of a fuming huff, hitting a large bolder as she recklessly drove out of their driveway. The gas and shifting linkage got stuck on full throttle and she was driving it in low and out of fright, abandoned it in our front yard. And for safety, she took the keys with her so nobody would steel the car?

I almost laughed in the poor guys face. I could just see someone sneaking along the road and coming up on this jet roaring car, shooting out smoke and sparks and even consider stealing it?

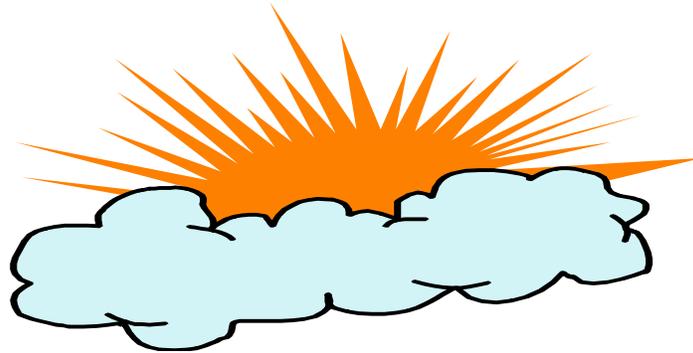
I decided to help the poor man push his wreck over to the side yard. The engine was gone, about a \$2,000 replacement! And the now not so humble guy hinted at some kind of a law suit against a family who would dare let an engine just blow up for no reason at all!

Again, the next day just around dinner time, when we were making a second attempt at Quality Family Time, the tow truck came for the totally ugly and thoroughly broken car. This time, I ordered everyone to stay seated, "Don't dare get up and look," and so we sat quietly through a fair good meal. But just like a good wife, who cannot forego one of those choice moments, she suggested, "That the tow truck driver should take me away too, but of course I stayed cool!"

\* Thus, then and there began my wonderful plan of Quality Family Time!

- \* Is there a moral to this episode? Certainly, sometimes, you never know when Quality Time has actually arrived?
- \* Or...possibly, never substitute adventure, in place of valuable family harmony!
- \* Perhaps, never investigate strange noises while eating dinner!
- \* For sure, do not scribe Quality Time in stone, just grant it opportunity to have its place...WHENEVER!

By Michael M. Tickenoff ©



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