

A WONDERFUL READ FOR YOURSELF AND ANY PARENT YOU KNOW: *The Family Bond* by Dr. Susan Kuczmariski

--Jennifer Safir

Rarely do I come across a book that I want to share with the world. I'd like to thank Dr. Susan Kuczmariski for writing *The Family Bond*, which I would recommend without hesitation to parents with children of any age. Dr. Kuczmariski spoke at Barnes and Noble on State Street in Chicago on Saturday, June 10. In her discussion, "Simple Ways to Bond with Your Family," Kuczmariski shared some ideas from her book. She brought her family along with her, and her sons actually seemed pleased to be there, even participating in the discussion. If that's not proof of her family's special bond, I don't know what is!

Susan Kuczmariski earned a Doctorate in Education and two Master's Degrees in Sociology and Education from Columbia University. Her educational, professional, and personal background all helped lead to the writing of *The Family Bond*. As an educator Kuczmariski teaches teachers, as a cultural anthropologist she studies family culture, as a sociologist she looks at families as small interactive groups, and as a parent of three boys she speaks from personal, heartfelt experience. In addition, Kuczmariski has conducted lectures, workshops, and seminars on leadership and familymaking over the last twenty years. She has taught at several universities, worked in three non-profit educational organizations (including the United Nations), and co-founded an innovation-consulting firm in Chicago, named Kuczmariski and Associates. This varied experience shines through in *The Family Bond*.

At her Barnes and Noble discussion, Kuczmariski talked about four simple ways to bond with your family:

Playing. Kuczmariski recommends taking at least 10 to 15 minutes each day to play with each of your children one-on-one. As the adults, parents should act as the active listener, watching your child and encouraging him, taking his lead. "Play should be a renewing experience," says Kuczmariski, and she suggests taking an interest in those things your child finds enjoyable. Nature can act as a renewing experience as well, and Kuczmariski's family has an annual frog race to demonstrate the power of nature and play. Another idea she mentioned involves cooking together, although she cautions that "the process of cooking is really the most important part," and not to be so concerned about the culinary outcome. She offers more wonderful ideas in her book.

Talking. "Talking is really important to bonding. It's really great to put everything out there and talk about it." Kuczmariski encourages families to talk about all of their feelings, no matter how uncomfortable it may initially be. She recalled creating a worry list, accompanied by a solution list, when one of her sons needed help dealing with some worrisome issues for him. Other pearls of wisdom:

- "Ask your kids what they like most about you."
- "Talk about what your goals are as a family."
- "When you do a lot of talking [and listening], you're experiencing something your child is experiencing."
- "When you talk together you learn a lot from kids."

Equality. Kuczmariski admits that this is the concept with which parents have the most trouble. She recommends that parents let their kids be involved with rule-making, since they will be much more likely to adhere to rules they helped create. Another thing she does with her family involves writing down what values are important to each member. By doing so, the parents learn what is most important for each family member and can decide better what to do with their time. Talking also promotes more successful conflict resolution; when you have a problem, you work it out as a family.

Self-esteem. Kuczmariski believes that families can become a lot closer if parents work hard to build their children's self-esteem. She suggests two ways to do this:

Offer descriptive and timely praise. Be specific about what you're praising. "I'm so proud of how you studied for three days for that test" is a lot more helpful and fulfilling for a child than "You did a great job on that test."

Recognize everyone's strengths. Kuczmariski suggests that each member of the family write down his or her strengths: "We really do need to write them down because we walk through this world and forget what our strengths are." If your child's young, help him create the list. "If the individuals in a family are strong, the family will be strong."

I was curious to know if the Kuczmariski boys realized how special their family is. One of her sons said that they do realize their parents are "cool," and their friends realize it, too.

Susan Kuczmariski discusses all of these ideas and more in her book, *The Family Bond*. Short, insightful, inspiring chapters deal with a wide variety of topics. Some of my favorite quotes from the book include the following:

- "Children are experts in enchantment. Take time to look through their eyes."
- "Encourage your children by storing their strengths and accomplishments for a rainy day."
- "Feelings reflect reality. They emerge from inside the child and become invaluable information. To honor a child's feelings is to understand and strengthen that child."
- "Encourage children to listen inwardly and to trust themselves."

There are many more wonderful insights in *The Family Bond*. As an expecting mom and an educator, I found this book immensely entertaining and thought provoking, but I think parents with children of all ages would find eye-opening, simple, creative ideas, as well. It's never too early or too late to create that strong family bond. Treat yourself, your spouse, or other parents you know to this meaningful book.

