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~ Counting the Cost Ezine ~  
Everyday Abundant Living at Its Best

October 1, 2005  
Volume 6, Issue 4

Ideas, insights and inspirations for living each day to the fullest.

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"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."  
John 10:10

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~ Letter from the Editor ~

Greetings to everyone!

Before we get into this issue of Counting the Cost, I wanted to give a quick update from last time. As some of you may remember, I mentioned that I had been contacted by the casting director of a popular reality show about possibly being on the show. In case any of you were wondering how that all turned out, we did submit our application and family video as requested, but never heard back from the show's producers. Our assumption is that they were looking for a family much more extreme in their frugal lifestyle than we are. We are a kind, loving, peaceful family who choose to live frugally. Gee, I guess that doesn't make for very interesting TV!

Blessings,  
Nancy  
[editor@countingthecost.com](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com)

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#### Feature Article

Your Freezer is Your Friend:

Make Packing Lunches a Snap with These 5 Easy Tips

By Rose Godfrey

Forget the cafeteria ladies from your childhood who came in early to throw together an apple betty or a batch of homemade spaghetti sauce. These days school lunches are ordered in bulk, delivered frozen, and heated before serving. Often, that means a tray full of simple carbohydrates infused with empty fat calories.

I know my kids need more nutritious foods to fuel their brains and bodies, but I count it a success if all my kids get out the door, dressed and ready to go. Lunch? What lunch? I'm usually the one who remembers that my kids need to eat as we load into the van. Fortunately for my hungry brood, my freezer holds the key to quick, nutritious lunches.

With these 5 simple steps, anyone can pre-pack nutritious and economical lunches and still make it out the door on time.

1. Plan ahead - Talk to your kids and find out what they want in their lunches before you begin. Negotiate nutritional content and include a variety of foods to keep interest high. Make a list of everything you need for a week or a month in advance and pick up those items at the store. Most sandwiches freeze beautifully. For the items that are shelf stable, store them in a separate cabinet, marked "for lunches only."

2. Buy on sale - When you come across an incredible deal on great lunch foods, stock up. Purchase as much as you can reasonably prepare at once. For best quality, food should not be frozen and then refrozen, so if you buy 10 pounds of lunch meat, you need to be able to put together a lot of sandwiches quickly. Purchase mayo and other condiments in single-serve packs to include with sandwiches so the bread stays dry until just before serving. Store condiments in a cupboard until ready to go.

3. Pack in bulk - Freezing for a month can easily be done in one afternoon. Once you have a plan, assemble the supplies and dive in. Enlist your children's help, and make it fun. Individually wrap each in plastic wrap and place on a cookie sheet in the freezer to flash freeze. After a few

hours, transfer to an airtight container. If using zipper bags, the freezer type work well. Leftover Christmas tins keep air out and protect delicate treats from getting smashed.

After preparing food for the freezer, tackle the shelf-stable items. To make life easier on busy mornings, sort and separate. Open several brown bags and add the basics: a napkin, condiments, and any food items such as fruit cups or chips which will round out the meal. Add love notes for a personal touch.

4. Label - Adding a label assures that your child gets what he requested for lunch and makes sure that he does not end up with turkey sandwiches every day for 3 weeks in a row. Permanent markers are great for writing on plastic bags or metal tins. Tape does not always adhere after freezing.

5. Thaw and Pack - Packing a lunch is a snap now that everything is prepared. The night before, simply grab a bag from the pantry and add frozen items. Store it in the refrigerator overnight. If you forget this step, pull out what you need on the way out the door. If the lunch is large or the lunch bag well-insulated, toss the frozen food into the microwave for a few seconds to jump start the thaw process. Add fresh fruit or baby carrots and hit the road.

About the Author:

Rose Godfrey is a freelance writer. She lives in California with her husband and 8 great kids.

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Readers' Poll Question:

Teachable Moments

Some of the sweetest moments in the life of a parent are those times when you realize that your child actually grasped a concept you tried so hard to teach. Whether it be the concept of equity and fairness, or the concept of long division, the result is the same. You want to throw both hands up in the air and scream, "YES!" at the top of your lungs.

In our last Readers' Poll question, we wanted to know how you take advantage of those daily opportunities to impart life lessons to your children. We asked, "How do you try to make the most of your child's teachable moments?" Here are some of the answers we received:

"When my children receive their weekly allowance, there is a quotation attached. Kind of like a fortune cookie. Each week I look on the [www.quotationspage.com](http://www.quotationspage.com) website for an appropriate thought or sentiment that I feel will benefit my child. It is printed, cut out, and paperclipped with their money. I consider this to be 'planting seeds.'" ~ Lisa

"I find that the most valuable and memorable moments for my children are the ones where it is me, not them, who has to learn something! For example, my youngest son vividly remembers the time when a bird flew into the house and I had to be brave -- I hate birds -- and carry it in my hands to take it outside. We prayed that Jesus would give me courage beforehand -- and now when we talk about God helping us, it's the bird he remembers! And then there was the time when I had to eat tomatoes -- something else I'm not keen on -- at a friend's house. It sounds like a little thing, but seeing Mummy eating something he knew I didn't like, and then afterwards me telling him, yes, it was hard to eat and no, I didn't enjoy it, made a real impact on my eldest son. I think being a parent is all about modeling the behavior I want to see in my children. It's really hard! But bring on the teachable moments. I watch out for them for me, first, and my children, second. I have a long way to go and a lot to learn." ~ Trudi

"...My children are now 14 and 16. I find that the majority of teachable moments especially with my daughter (the 16-year-old) are the ones that will hopefully guide her to becoming the best person she can be. In the car ride home from school after we have dropped off the various friends she had offered rides home to throughout the day, she will begin to tell me about her day. As 16-year-old girls can be sometimes, her conversation at times becomes a bit gossipy. After she's done with her story, I try to play devil's advocate and get her to put herself in the position of the person she was gossiping about and also throw in the actual act of gossiping. After a few rounds of debating the issue, more often than not I get her to see the point I'm making. It seems to be working because I overheard her telling a friend the other day on the phone, '...you should really try to put yourself in her shoes....' The amount of maternal satisfaction in that one sentence was just absolutely wonderful! Of course, I'll tell her I know she does listen to me ... when she's a few years older and can appreciate the statement. At this age she'd only say, 'Moooooooooooooooooooo!' P.S. I absolutely love your newsletter. I look forward to it each month. Thank you so much for the wonderful hints and tidbits. I've used & shared so many of them." ~ Tauna



"Talk It Out" Question  
Big Party, Small Budget

What do you do when you are in charge of planning a big gathering involving both kids and parents? What kind of activities can you plan that are both fun and frugal? These are the questions one of our readers recently asked. Brandi wrote:

"I have 2 daughters (ages 9 and 7) and I am proud to be the soccer team mom for both girls teams. I am responsible for an end of year party that will take place around Halloween and am looking for frugal ideas that the kids and parents alike would enjoy. Typically we have gone to places like Chuck E. Cheese's but that is a nightmare waiting to happen, not to mention costly after paying for games and food. I had great success with an ice cream sundae party last spring, but the weather at the end of October is not really conducive to that. Please help!" ~ Brandi

Wow! Brandi does have a challenge on her hands. Luckily for her, our readers sent in many good suggestions. Here are a few we received:

"My son's birthday is in October and we are always looking for fun things to do outside (if the weather is nice). One of the most liked activities is a simple treasure hunt. My oldest daughter likes to hide the items so that my son can participate also. All his friends (11 and 12 year olds) love this simple activity. We usually let the boys compete against the girls. Instead of just giving them a list to search for, my daughter thinks up 'clues' like, 'It grows on trees, turns gold and you will find it on the ground,' for a gold colored leaf. Biting apples hanging from a string is also a fun fall activity. Have fun!" ~ Phyllis

"Since its near Halloween, how about a fall-themed party? You can have a pumpkin-decorating contest with the team. Divide the girls into groups of 3-4 and have an extra adult or two to help. Find all kinds of things the girls can use to decorate their pumpkin (no cutting the pumpkin, though). Craft stores always have a bargain table full of things. Have a large table set up for stuff they can find to decorate with and set a time of 45 minutes. Then have a judging with all the groups voting on the best pumpkin and have a rule you cannot vote for your own group. Prizes can be gift card for a sub sandwich or a local ice cream place, etc. Then serve a meal of hotdogs or something else that is budget conscious." ~ Amy

"Try a Peanuts-themed party. Find a Peanuts Cartoon Coloring Book and let the kids color the pages for the decorations. For food, peanut butter cookies or apples dipped in peanut butter and a big bowls of popcorn (Charlie

Brown Thanksgiving!). For entertainment, buy a very large bag of peanuts in the shell, and cast them out in the backyard. Give each child a brown lunch sack and set a timer for 5 minutes to see who can collect the most peanuts! For 'goody bags' give out a box of cracker jacks or sack of peanuts. Imagination and creativity are cheap and appreciated by the guests!" ~ Lorraine

"What about a visit to a local apple orchard/pumpkin patch? You can usually take hayrides, pick out a pumpkin, or pick apples. Some of them even have places where kids can learn how apple cider is made or corn mazes. This could be less expensive. You could also do an apple theme at home. Think of activities like bobbing for apples or making caramel apples. You could get the caramel, apples, and popsicle sticks relatively inexpensively, then get some different types of nuts or chocolates that kids could use to customize their final apples. Another idea might be a nature hike. I don't know if you live near any good parks, but you could create a 'scavenger hunt' of sorts. Give the kids a list of items to find in nature and a tote bag and have them go out in groups to find the items. You could then polish off the event with popcorn and hot chocolate (for some reason this combination reminds me of fall). What about a make your own pizza event? I'm not sure if this is feasible for you. You might want to do this only in a kitchen that has two ovens. It depends on how many pizzas you would have to make! My favorite pizza dough is a kind where you just add water and let it rise for 5 minutes. It's also the least expensive I've found. You could probably make two or three personal pizzas from one packet of dough mix. The kids could then add whatever toppings and sauces they wanted." ~ Halley

Thanks to everyone who took time to respond. If you'd like to read more of our readers' ideas, visit the "Big Gathering, Small Budget " page on our website at <http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/sports.htm>

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Our Newest "Talk It Out" Question:  
Disposable Cameras at Anniversary Celebrations

Have you noticed the new trend of having disposable cameras on the tables at wedding receptions and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary parties? One of our readers recently wrote in to ask about the proper way to ask guests to use the cameras so they serve their purpose of capturing precious memories. Charlene wrote:

"We are about to have our 50th wedding anniversary. I plan to put out disposable cameras on the guest tables. Have you heard or seen any cute or clever notes that can be attached to the cameras to ask the guests to take photos for our

memory book? I can't seem to find any creative thought in my head!" ~ Charlene

Good question. I don't have any ideas for this one but I'm sure some of our readers do. If you can think of some creative ways to let guests know what they supposed to do with the dispoable cameras, send them to us at: <mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Cameras> Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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Creative Frugality Explored  
Saving on Portraits

It's that time of year again. Time for the school picture dilemma. School portrait packages are always so expensive. Yet parents want enough pictures to pass out to all the grandparents. What's a frugal parent to do?

In our last Creative Frugality topic, we wanted to hear how you save money on portraits. These could be school portraits, sports team portraits or even family portraits. We asked, "What creatively frugal methods do you use to save money on professional quality portraits?" Here are some of the answers we received:

"...If you have (or can borrow) a digital camera, you can take cute pictures of your kids at the park, etc., and upload the pictures to [www.yorkphoto.com](http://www.yorkphoto.com). Then for 99 cents (plus reasonable shipping), you can order little sheets of 4 wallet-size photos; you cut them up and they are perfect for kids to trade. For \$4 each my kids have enough pictures to trade. The cheapest school portrait package at our school is \$14. When I did this last year we got so many compliments on the pictures; both my daughters had their picture taken with their brand-new baby brother. The photos were unique and didn't break the bank." ~ Catherine

"I go to Yuen Lui every January and July for their 'children's special' which is \$39.99 (for one child and a bit more for each additional child) for 1-8x10, 2-4x6's and 8 wallets. This is enough photos for our immediate family

and you can always purchase more if you need them. The quality is unmatched and the photos last forever and don't yellow with time as the discount store photos tend to. They have sales almost every month, check it out:

[www.yuenluistudio.com](http://www.yuenluistudio.com) ~ Suzie

"My children go to public school and have their pictures taken to be used in the yearbooks. But I never buy the pictures because they're grossly overpriced and never very flattering. Every fall I take the whole family to WalMart and have a family portrait taken, plus individuals of each child and one of my husband and me together. The cost is less than just one school portrait package and the pictures are better since the photographer takes time to make each of us smile." ~ Penny

"What we have done for almost 17 years for school pictures for our 5 children was to take their pictures at Walmart. We did use our homeschool portrait package one year, but we didn't think the pictures were that great, so we went back to Walmart. Our kids are also in our homeschool basketball program, and we take not only individual pictures of each one (once or twice a year), but we also take a group picture of them in their basketball jerseys together (they love these pictures). In our area we have 4 Wal-marts within a 30 miles radius, so we can take pictures often, by using different Walmarts and not just one (they have a rule: one package per phone number at a time, or until the pictures are back). We have 2 girls who have already graduated, and I insist on a new picture of them at least once a year. We get enough pictures for our family and for their friends from \$5.99 - \$8.99 a package, plus extra pictures for scrapbooking that look beautiful. We also take Christmas pictures of our kids at Walmart and send in our cards. We may seem really frugal, but it has been a great investment in quality pictures." ~ Shelly

Thanks to these readers for responding. If you'd like to peruse previous topics of discussion or read more of the responses we received for this question, visit the complete listing of topics on our "Creative Frugality" webpage:

<http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/creativefrugality.htm>

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Our Newest Creative Frugality Topic:  
Fun and Frugal Fall Festivals

In the next few weeks, many churches across the country will be hosting fall festivals in their communities. These gatherings serve two purposes. They provide a safe Halloween alternative for church members' children, and they also provide an opportunity for churches to reach out to families in the community who might never darken the door of a church otherwise.

In our newest Creative Frugality topic, we want to hear what your church does to put together a fall festival or similar event on a tight budget. We ask, "What creative ideas has your church group used to plan a fun, yet frugal fall festival for children in the community?"

This is definitely a timely topic since many of you are probably in the midst of preparing for this kind of event as we speak. Submit your creative ideas to us at: <mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Festivals> Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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~ What to Expect Next Time ~

Do you have an Aldi's supermarket in your town? If so, have you heard rumors about the tremendous savings you can find there? Maybe you wondered if the rumors sounded too good to be true. In the next issue of the newsletter, guest contributor Amy Clark gives us the lowdown on exactly what Aldi's is all about and how you can save big by shopping there. Don't miss it!

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~ Counting the Cost Reader Classifieds ~

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~ Additional Resources from Counting the Cost ~

Counting the Cost Editor Nancy Twigg is available to share the message of simple, frugal and meaningful living with your organization, church group, or Bible class. Nancy specializes in presentations to Christian audiences, but can tailor a message to fit almost any group and any budget. For more information, visit: <http://www.countingthecost.com/speaking.htm>

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