

Families That Thrive

By John Blackwell, Ph.D.

Recognize That Molehill!

The oven had been on all night. I wasn't a happy camper. Our daughter Jaime had had her friend Sara over the evening before. They were watching the first episode of *LOST*. Jaime baked something for the two of them to eat. They enjoyed their evening together.

I'm the first one to wake up in the morning. When I went to the kitchen, it was a tad warmer than usual. I also heard something. It was the sound of the oven. Jaime had forgotten to turn it off. I guess she was lost in *LOST*.

I did not appreciate her wastefulness, and I let her know it. Since we recently moved, we are functioning on one income right now. Nancy isn't yet working outside the home. Jaime recently finished law school. She has taken the bar, but she's just beginning her job search here in Kansas. We aren't running on fumes. The trees here are gorgeous, but they produce leaves, not money. I was *not* a happy camper.

I would have been better off if I had just gone to work, cooled off, and let Jaime know what happened when I wasn't so ticked. One of my problems is that I am not burdened with a surplus of patience. I decided to let her know of my displeasure *before* I went to the university. To do this necessitated waking Jaime up. I didn't yell or rant or rave. At least, I don't think I did. I merely let her know that *I did not appreciate the waste!*

Jaime couldn't have been nicer: "Dad, it was totally my fault. I am so sorry!" And she was. There was nothing contrived about her contrition. Her apology was anything but a fake. Jaime's sorrow merited a ten in the category of authenticity. She was wrong. She knew it. She admitted it. That was the end of it.

Almost.

Three evenings later, Sara was returning to our home. Jaime had invited her for dinner. That was fine. Sara's a good family friend. Jaime and Sara both like *carne asada*, and Jaime was trying a new recipe. "Dad, I'll do everything. You can just enjoy the meal." I love to cook, but I was delighted. Jaime's a pretty good cook herself. Takes after her old man!

Late that afternoon, I got a call at the office. It was Jaime. "Dad, the propane tank on the barbecue is empty. Whoever used the barbecue last forgot to turn it off." Jaime said nothing more. She concluded her report with a respectful silence, allowing the truth to sink in. It was a long silence. Too long. Way too long! I dangled in midair. I couldn't turn and run because there was no ground under my feet.

I was the one who used the barbecue. I had used it six evenings earlier—two evenings before Jaime had used the oven. In other words (to quote Jaime), "Dad, you left it on for a whole week!" She laughed.

She laughed because she knew that it was a molehill. She knew it wasn't a mountain. She also knew the importance of knowing the difference.

One of the gifts that Nancy, Jaime, and David have given to me is the ability to recognize the difference between a mountain and a molehill. They know the difference between the big stuff and the small stuff. They know how *not* to get too worked up about

the little things. In fact, they know that when I get worked up about the little things, I have this nasty habit of spoiling lots of things that I might otherwise enjoy.

Their capacity for recognizing the difference between a mountain and a molehill is wonderful. I think of the number of times I have sabotaged a situation because I acted as though something was of far greater consequence than was true.

Tonight, the Blackwells are having some students to our home for dinner. We're going to barbecue. Ever so respectfully, Nancy and Jaime asked if I would take the propane tank to the store and get it refilled. I told them that I would be delighted to.

The propane cost me \$18.97!

What will happen in our relationships when we begin not only to recognize the molehill for what it is, but to treat it as one?