***The Family Tree: The Night of the Storm***

 **Memory Swing Activity**

**By Laurie Copmann**

 *When life sends a storm…build a swing*

**Activity Introduction**

Remind the children or individuals that all books, even kid’s books have an inspirational or learning message that can be shared with others. Adults can also enjoy a simple message found in a children’s book. To enhance the idea of the memory swing, read the award winning book *The Family Tree: The Night of the Storm* individually or with a group. Share and discuss the symbols at the back of the book. This will encourage ideas for a symbol of remembrance for their swing creation. The children can also create their own symbol or picture for their memory swing. (Including a symbol on the swing seat is optional). Any size swing seat will work for creating the memory swing. An actual full sized swing seat (approximately 10 inches by 24 inches) that can be utilized in a tree, or a replica swing seat (approximately 4 inches by 8 inches) that can be displayed on a wall, table, or hung on a door knob, etc.

The swing activity is a help in healing activity, that offers a message of hope for all. The activity gives someone grieving an opportunity to decorate a swing seat, to honor the memory of their friend or loved one. The idea of taking a branch lost in a storm and building a swing may help grieving hearts heal. Generally, a swing seat could have a picture drawn on the top of the seat. On the bottom of the swing seat a message or letter could be written to honor their lost loved one or friend. When the art work and message are completed, an adult should spray the swing seat (top and bottom) with clear enamel to protect the artwork. Once the replica swing seat is dry, an adult can help tie a precut section of rope (approximately 24 inches in length) in the holes of the swing seat. Knots need to be tied on the bottom of the swing seat. Then the finished swing can be displayed wherever the child chooses.

**The Story Behind the Memory Swing**

The memory swing activity came about after two young children lost their mother to cancer. Struggling with the loss, their aunt read the award winning story, *The Family Tree: The Night of the Storm* to the family. After reading the story, the family was inspired to decorate and build a swing seat in their mother’s honor. The book offered a simple message of hope and healing to the children and their family. They tied the swing seat to a branch in a tree in their back yard. The memory swing seat gave each family member a place to connect, retreat, find reverence and peace. A therapeutic place to ponder the happy times, as well as remember those treasured memories of their mother.

**Camp Activity**

A camp counselor reads the award winning book, *The Family Tree: The Night of the Storm* with the children. This story can work will all ages of children. Just remind them that all stories have a message and even adults can enjoy a children’s book. After the story has been shared, give each child a swing seat to decorate. Swings can be painted, colored with makers, or wood burned designs could also be incorporated. Utilize whatever means of art the child can imagine. On the top of the swing seat the children can create a picture that best serves the memory of their lost loved one. On the bottom of the swing seat children can write a note of dedication and love to honor their loved one. The swing seat can then be taken home to share with their family and displayed somewhere in their home. This activity can also be a way to help everyone heal as a family. It is helpful to give each child a book to read with their family, so they all can hear and be inspired by the message of hope. The family will have a better understanding of the symbolism behind the swing, after hearing the story. They could even create a full size memory swing as a family. The swing could offer a place for each member of the family to sit and find peace and solitude.

**Swing Seats**

The actual swing seats and replica swing seats can be any size. I have been making swing seats out of repurposed wood flooring that came from an old house, that is over 100 years old. The house was dilapidated and in disrepair, and I could not bear to let the word and character pieces in the home not be utilized for something amazing. The house was taken apart and the wood utilized for other projects. Memory swing seats being one way to repurpose the wood that made walls and provided shelter for a family. I have also made smaller replica swings seats that can be made to be displayed anywhere, or they can be used to adorn a families Christmas tree.

**Author’s Mission**

I hope to share the award winning book *The Family Tree: The Night of the Storm* with as many children and families as possible, in hopes of helping them find a way to move past the grief and sadness in their hearts. I believe a simple message, or act of honoring loved ones helps us become closer to them, even though they have moved on. In time the happy memories can imbed themselves in our hearts, so we find the strength to move forward again. Building a swing from a lost branch helped me find that forward path.

Best Wishes,

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