

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY?

My great-aunt Millie made the best meatballs. When she cooked dinner, her whole house filled with the smell of simmering tomato sauce, and the kitchen clouded up from the steam of boiling pasta.

She was my great-aunt “by marriage.” That means she wasn’t my grandmother’s sister; Aunt Millie was married to my grandmother’s brother. That marriage made us family.

But you didn’t have to be related to Aunt Millie to be invited into the house. Or to join the family at the long oval table full of delicious homemade Italian food. All you had to do was *accept* her invitation to come in, sit at the table, and “mangia, mangia!” That means “Eat up!”

The Bible says that we aren’t called God’s children because we are related (like to a certain person). Instead, we

are children of God because of a promise.²³ The promise was a Messiah, Jesus, who would save us from our sin (wrongdoing), which separates us from a holy God: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Jesus invites every single person to believe in Him. That includes YOU! Accepting His invitation makes you part of the family of God forever.

WRITE A STORY INSPIRED BY YOUR FAMILY

Writers get ideas from all kinds of places. Many of my ideas come from my own life or the lives of my family members. An entire book can be inspired by one event. When I was about eleven years old, a tornado destroyed the barn my father and grandfather had built. Years later, that gave me the idea for *Jack vs. the Tornado*, the first book in the Tree Street Kids series.



Some of the fun facts in this book were inspired by my family history and other people's history. Mr. Piepenbrink,

Jack and Ellison's fifth-grade teacher, tells a story about his grandfather's ship being sunk in World War II. That is exactly what happened to my grandfather!

During World War II, the USS *Quincy*—the Navy ship he served on—was one of the three US ships sunk by enemy fire during the Battle of Savo Island, August 9, 1942.²⁴ To survive, my grandfather had to jump into the shark-infested waters of the Pacific Ocean. But he didn't know how to swim! He was able to grab hold of an empty barrel floating nearby until he, and the other survivors, were rescued by another ship.



Ellison's great-grandmother is based on a real person named Marjorie Blackistone Bradfield. In 1938, she became the first African American librarian for the Detroit Public Library and helped establish its collection of books written by African American authors and about African Americans. She was later head librarian for Detroit Public Schools.²⁵



The character of Grandpa Tom Thompspon was inspired by two legendary men of western North Carolina where I

live—Elisha Mitchell and Big Tom Wilson. Mount Mitchell in western North Carolina is the highest peak east of the Mississippi. The mountain is named after Elisha Mitchell, who was a minister, a geologist, and a professor at the University of North Carolina.

In 1857, Mitchell was attempting to prove his estimate of the height of the peak when he fell to the bottom of a waterfall and died. When Mitchell didn't return from his trek, search parties were sent out. His body was found by Big Tom Wilson, a well-known guide, hunter, and tracker.²⁶

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN!

What event in your life can you turn into a fictional story?

1. First, choose one event and write down everything that happened as you remember it. (You may want to ask a sibling or parent what they remember because they'll share different details.)
2. Be sure to write in "first person." That means you'll tell the story as the "I" narrator. For example, "*I* was ten when the tornado sirens went off in the middle of the night. *I* jumped out of bed and ran to *my* mom and dad's room."
3. Next, pick one moment from that event that is most interesting or exciting to you.

4. Now choose a different name for yourself—like maybe Simon Jugglesnort or something.
5. Write about that part of the story again but this time, use “third person.” Retell the story from Simon’s point of view. For example, instead of “I” telling the story, you would write, “*Simon Jugglesnort* was ten when the tornado sirens went off in the middle of the night. *He* jumped out of bed and ran to *his* mom and dad’s room.”

Do you see how the second example sounds like a fictional story? Try adding details that are completely made up—maybe even Bigfoot!

NOTES

1. “Coyote,” A-Z Animals, <https://a-z-animals.com/animals/coyote/>.
2. Robert Burns, “To a Mouse,” 1785, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43816/to-a-mouse-56d222ab36e33>.
3. “Northeastern Native Americans,” Twenty Tens Take on Native Americans (blog), <https://twentytensnativeamericans.wordpress.com/northeastern-native-americans/>.
4. “First Thanksgiving Meal,” History.com, updated November 15, 2023, <https://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/first-thanksgiving-meal>.
5. R. C. Gatti et al., “The Number of Tree Species on Earth,” Institute for Global Change Biology, University of Michigan, <https://seas.umich.edu/globalchangebiology/publications/number-of-trees-on-earth>.
6. Ben Crair, “Why So Many People Still Believe in Bigfoot,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-so-many-people-still-believe-in-bigfoot-180970045/>.
7. Christina Rossetti, “Song,” Rossetti Archive Textual Transcription, <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/ap4.g415.1.2.rad>

.html#p64. These words are from the poem “Song” by Christina Rossetti, who also wrote children’s poems, such as “The Wind.” Her poem “In the Bleak Midwinter” was set to music and became a popular Christmas carol.

8. In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began an 8,000-mile expedition journey to explore lands west of the Mississippi River, with the help of Sacagawea, a woman of the Shoshone tribe. If they’d been lily-livered, which means “cowardly,” they would never have succeeded. After two years, the expedition produced invaluable information about the geography of the land, identified 120 animal specimens, and collected 200 samples of plants. “Lewis and Clark Expedition,” History.com, updated March 28, 2023, <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/lewis-and-clark>.
9. Genesis 15:5 (NLT).
10. Genesis 17:5.
11. “Eyeshine,” Texas Parks & Wildlife, https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/nonpwdpubs/young_naturalist/animals/eyeshine/.
12. “1850–1860 Slave Samples,” IPUMS USA, <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/slavepums/documentation/about.html>.
13. Pronounced [myur-i-dee]. The largest of all mammalian families, the rodent family includes more than 1,383 species of mice and rats, <https://www.britannica.com/animal/Muridae>. That’s a lot of cheese!
14. “American Black Bear,” WNC Nature Center, <https://wildwnc.org/animals/american-black-bear/>.
15. “Chicago’s Night Sky,” Adler Planetarium, <https://www.adlerplanetarium.org/explore/exhibits/chicagos-night-sky/>.
16. “Light Pollution,” National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nightskies/lightpollution.htm>.

17. This saying, and other versions of it, have been attributed to lots of people, including Mark Twain, Winston Churchill, and Chinese proverbs. See <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/07/13/truth/>.
18. "Why Do Bloodhounds Have Long Ears?," Pet Finder, <https://www.petfinder.com/dogs-and-puppies/information/dog-facts/why-do-bloodhounds-have-long-ears/>.
19. Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 25.
20. The genus and species of the black bear. "Classification of Black Bears," North American Bear Center, <https://bear.org/classification-of-black-bears/>.
21. "How Dangerous Are Bluff Charges?," North American Bear Center, <https://bear.org/how-dangerous-are-bluff-charges/>.
22. The genus and species of the platypus. Pronounced [or-nih-thuh-RINK-uhs ah-NAT-uh-nuhs].
23. Romans 9:8: "In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."
24. "USS QUINCY (CA-39)," Naval History and Heritage Command, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-navy-ships/alphabetical-listing/q/uss-quincy--ca-39-.html>.
25. "Marjorie A. Blackistone and Horace Ferguson Bradfield papers, 1931-1978," University of Michigan Library, <https://findingaids.lib.umich.edu/catalog/umich-bhl-2014084>.
26. "The Death of Elisha Mitchell," North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, June 27, 2016, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/blog/2016/06/27/death-elisha-mitchell>. Today, you can easily reach the top of the mountain and see the most amazing views in this part of the country.