



Recipe for a Happy Home

Togetherness, the gospel, and family fun—those are the ingredients this Swedish family mixes into a satisfying standard of love.

BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE
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You wake up to funny-sounding, high-pitched falsetto singing coming from the kitchen.

Naturally, you're a bit confused and most likely thinking one of two things: (1) "It's my little sister looking for cookies in the kitchen" or (2) "I'm in the wrong house." But if you happen to be a member of the Ronndahl family from Kavlinge, Sweden, you're not confused at all. In fact, you look forward to this each week—not the singing but what the family calls "hotel breakfast."

"I love the breakfast on Saturday morning," says Isabelle Ronndahl, 14, when asked about some of her favorite things about her family. "Dad always prepares it, and he always makes it excellent." There is a chorus of happy yeses as the other Ronndahl children enthusiastically nod in agreement.

"We wake up to Dad's singing," explains Andreas, 16. A few of his brothers and sisters volunteer impersonations, and they all laugh, including the parents, Brynolf and

Kristina. Laughter breaks out a lot in the Ronndahl home. Then they continue describing how, after the singing, the smell of fresh bacon and eggs draws the family out of bed each Saturday morning. Even more than sharing the food, they seem to enjoy just being together.



They also talk about another ingredient in their recipe for a happy home—family home evening. But that wasn't always the case. "I remember when our family home evenings were mostly very long lessons," says Christoffer, 18, with a playful glance in his mother's direction.

"Sometimes I would get bored and fall asleep," adds Andreas, who was only about five at that time. "But then I'd wake up, and there would be refreshments."

Brother Ronndahl explains that when the children were quite young, Sister Ronndahl would regularly prepare lessons that were over an hour long. The lessons were difficult for the young children to sit through. Now the Ronndahls have eight children, ranging in age from 8 to 23 years old—the oldest, Rebecka, has served a full-time mission and is now attending college in the United States.

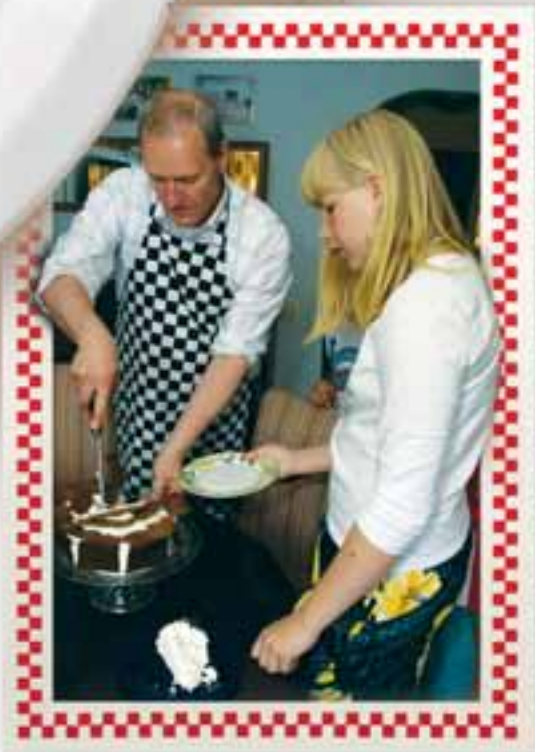
Brother and Sister Ronndahl decided to change their approach to family home evening. "We gathered the family together and said, 'Hey, what do you like to do?'" says Sister Ronndahl. The parents weren't too surprised to learn that the kids liked the food, the games, and singing hymns—they even liked the idea of a lesson, if it were only shorter. Brother Ronndahl sums it up well when he says the right ingredients were there but maybe not in the right amounts. "We discovered we should focus on the fun side of things too," he says.

Sister Ronndahl decided to make an extra-nice dinner so Monday would start out as a special night. Then for family home evening



CHARITY

Fourteen-year-old Isabelle's favorite scripture is Moroni 7:45–48. These are the verses that talk about charity, the pure love of Christ. "I especially love verse 45," says Isabelle. "It tells about all of the wonderful qualities of charity and love. It helps me remember that charity is what really matters most for us to get back to our Heavenly Father."



PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE RONNDAHL FAMILY BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE, OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN LUKE



HOW TO PLAY BLINDFOLDED CONDUCTOR

Twelve-year-old Josefin's favorite family home evening game is easy to play and a lot of fun. Everyone forms a circle, and one person, the "conductor," is blindfolded and placed in the center. The conductor directs the people in the circle to walk either to the right or the left with a point of her finger—changing the rotation of the circle whenever she changes the direction of her pointing. When the conductor lifts her hands, the circle stops. The conductor then blindly points toward the circle. Whoever is pointed at by the conductor must make a noise, any noise—loud or soft or funny or whatever. If the conductor guesses who made the noise, that person becomes the conductor; if the guess is wrong, the game continues with the same conductor.

they added a healthy measure of games and singing. They also shortened the lessons to about 10 minutes. The mixture worked well. "The children started to look forward to Monday nights," says Kristina. "Everybody loved it."

Now that the children are older, the lessons have lengthened and deepened. Rosanna, 20, says, "We actually can do very good lessons nowadays. We love to discuss the gospel and other things. It's fun because we have so many opinions and ideas. Now it is more interesting because we're talking about things that we want to talk about." But the music, games, and refreshments are still part of the recipe.

"My favorite things are the refreshments and games," says Josefin, 12.

"Refreshments and games of course," echoes Christoffer.

"I think the songs and music are the best," says Rosanna.

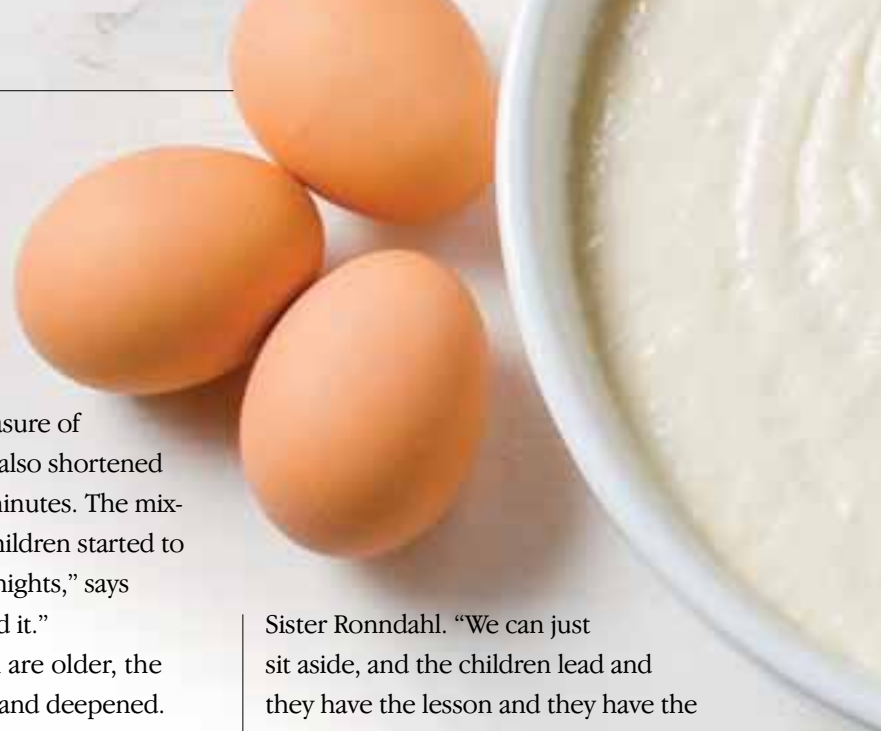
"The lessons," Isabelle chimes in meekly. Her brothers and sisters immediately offer Isabelle some good-natured teasing. "No, really," she adds earnestly.

"I think the whole family home evening is my favorite," says Andreas. "The lesson, songs, games, refreshments—all of them together make it very fun. If we had a family home evening without a lesson or games or songs, it would feel like something was missing."

"I love it when Brynolf and I don't have to do anything for family home evening," says

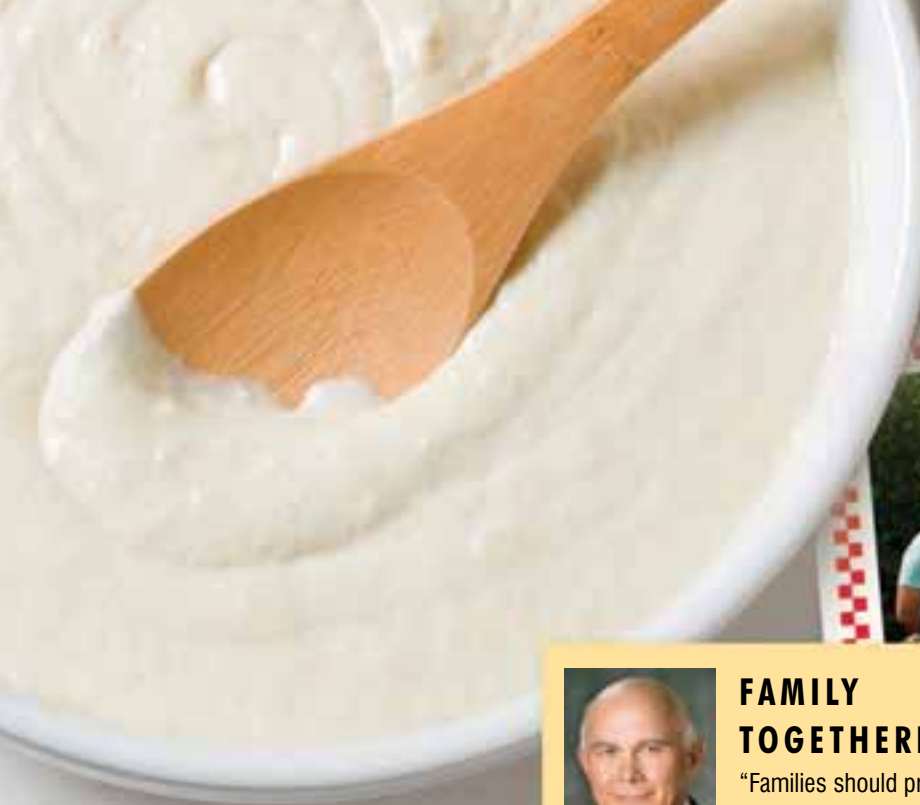
Sister Ronndahl. "We can just sit aside, and the children lead and they have the lesson and they have the refreshments. They do everything. That's my favorite."

Another key ingredient in the Ronndahls' recipe for a happy home is a family council every Sunday after church. They go through each person's assignment for the next family home evening. And since they rotate assignments, everyone gets a chance at all the jobs—from the lesson to the refreshments to



the scripture. They also talk about their regular household chores and how things are going with each member of the family.

Getting together as a family doesn't happen just on Sunday and Monday, however. Samuel, 10, and Johannes, 8, the youngest of the children, both say they like the fun outings and picnics the family takes



FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

“Families should pray together, kneeling night and morning to offer thanks for

blessings and prayers for common concerns.

“Families should worship together, participating in church services and family devotionals.

“Families should study and learn together. . . .

“Families should work together. . . . Families should also play together, so that happy recreational experiences are associated with the activities of the family.

“Families should counsel together, treating all matters of concern to the family and its members.

“Families should eat together. Mealtimes is a natural time for the family to assemble and communicate.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Parental Leadership in the Family,” *Ensign*, June 1985, 10–11.

together. Their father agrees. “We all love to go swimming, everywhere—in lakes, in the ocean, in rivers,” says Brother Ronndahl. They also get together to sing and play music as a band since just about everyone plays one or more instruments.

All this family togetherness has made the Ronndahls best friends as well as family. They love each other and lean on each other. They draw strength from one another. That’s probably why they like to spend so much time together.

And while the members of the Ronndahl family strengthen each other, they also strengthen their ward and stake. “We go to all the activities in the stake and all the outings and conferences for the youth,” says Brother Ronndahl. “We encourage our children to be a part of all the things that happen in the stake and in the ward. The wards are not so big here, so we have a lot of stake activities to bring the youth together as much as possible.” The older

children attend seminary as well. At times, both of their parents have served as seminary teachers. Of course, they’re also involved in their classes and quorums at church.

Those are the ingredients that, mixed together with care, help this family get along so well. From youngest to oldest, from parent to child, they all love to be together because they all love each other. And they have a lot of favorite things to do together, from swimming in the ocean to playing blind-folded conductor during family home evening (see sidebar). “One of my favorite things about our family is the music,”

says Sister Ronndahl. “We are a music family. We love to sing a lot.”

Yes, the Ronndahls all love to sing. They also love to hear singing—especially the silly falsetto coming from the kitchen on Saturday morning. ■

