

**Growing Concerns**  
**A question and answer column with Dr. Marti Erickson**  
**www.MomEnough.com**

Question: I have no children of my own, but I have been very close to my 6-year-old niece ever since she was born. We especially love reading and doing artwork together on weekend afternoons. My brother and his family will be moving to Europe in a few months and I'm devastated that I will no longer be a part of their life. Is my niece old enough that she will remember me? And is there anything I can do to stay close to a child this age even from such a distance?

Answer: Although it certainly will not be the same with your family members so far away, there are many steps you can take to stay closely connected to your niece. Indeed we live in a global village today, with many of us actively linked to friends and family around the world. Although your niece is old enough to retain memories of the many wonderful times you've had together, some of the following suggestions will help to make those special memories even stronger for her as she grows up.

- Since you have a few months together before your niece moves, you might want to engage her in making a photo story book of the things you've done together. If you don't have photos of all the special times, draw pictures and write stories. Be sure to leave space at the end for the future visits you're sure to have with each other. This is a way to let her know that you plan to be a part of her life in the future.
- As a going away gift, how about giving her some art supplies and asking her to send you pictures of the new places she goes and people she meets. Show her the refrigerator or wall where you plan to display these pictures, so she knows that you will treasure them.
- After the move, every few weeks send her a videotape of yourself reading her one of her favorite stories. Or send her a book with an audiotape of you reading it, so she can follow along as you read. Then she can send you a video or audiotape, reading a simple book for you or telling you about her new school and neighborhood.
- A fun and creative activity with children this age and older is to create a marathon story together through the mail. You could start by sending her a beginning of a story (in words or pictures), then letting her send you the next installment...and so on, back and forth. (E-mail would work for this too if you both have access.)
- For a more personal touch, set a regular time for a monthly phone date with each other. By scheduling a consistent time, you will still be a predictable part of her world.
- Finally, don't underestimate the power of sending funny little greeting cards, perhaps with a small surprise inside. My own children, now in their twenties, still remember the cards their grandmother sent them when they were little, always with a single stick of gum inside. That simple stick of gum was a sweet reminder that Grandma was thinking of them across the miles.

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