

Fair Oaks

LIVING

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UNPLUGGING
TO RECONNECT:

*The Packham
Family Balance*

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taking the sabbatical at home in Fair Oaks. That means fix-it projects and to-do lists are put on hold. Instead of thinking about what needs to be done, they focus on appreciating their home, neighborhood, beloved pets and each other. Unplugged from screens and obligations, Kyle and Jana said they have more time to say “yes” to the requests of their four children. Yes to crafts. Yes to games. Yes to adventures.

“In a family of six, you have to be a little more thoughtful of how much activity you take on,” Kyle said of maintaining balance in their everyday lives. “I think we try to be intentional about not doing too much, but we err on the side of saying yes.”

For the Packhams, saying yes materializes as lessons in gymnastics, ice skating and rock climbing. Jana said they try to find activities the family can do together. Last year, all four children took to the stage in a musical production of “Willy Wonka Kids,” with Isla starring as Mr. Bucket, Bennett as Grandpa Joe, and Maris and Luelle as “the cutest Oompa Loompas in the factory,” according to their proud parents.

In addition to cheering on their children from the stands, Kyle and Jana lend their expertise to coaching. Despite a demanding career in public service, in which he advocates for special districts like Fair Oaks’ own water, parks and fire, Kyle has prioritized time to coach Bennett and Luelle in his favorite sport, soccer. An Eagle Scout himself, Kyle also helps organize the annual Pinewood Derby competition in Scouts for Bennett, Maris and Luelle.

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The Packham Family Balance

By Laura I. Winn

Photography by Isabel Ollinger and courtesy of the Packham family

Seven years ago, Kyle and Jana Packham took a one-week sabbatical that changed their lives. With bags packed and three small children in tow, they headed to a ranch in Plumas County and left their worldly worries and responsibilities behind. They unplugged both literally and metaphorically: no phones, no screens, and no work for Kyle, a chief advocacy officer for a nonprofit trade association, and Jana, a speech therapist for a hospital. At the time, Jana was exhausted from the hectic pace of life and needed a

break where she could stop stressing about every detail and start having fun. And then one day at the ranch, that is just what she did. Standing on a dock overlooking the water, she let go and jumped in. “It was an epiphany moment,” Kyle said.

For Jana, that tranquil time spent together bicycling around the river, kayaking at sunset and roasting marshmallows around the campfire allowed her to “really enjoy my kids instead of just managing them,” she said.

Since that fateful trip, the Packham family has taken an annual sabbatical to unplug

from their devices and charge up their mental and physical batteries. While the first day or two can be a rough “detox,” the next several days provide fellowship, rest and solitude for the family of six, which includes Isla, 12, Bennett, 10, Maris, 7 and Luelle, 5.

For some sabbaticals, the family has turned to nature for its healing powers. Yosemite, where Jana grew up hiking with her parents and grandparents, and where Kyle proposed to Jana atop Half Dome, is their “most favorite place of all.”

The Packhams have also found peace





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Jana, who now homeschools her children as a stay-at-home parent, has volunteered with Capital Community Athletics, where she coached running and helped organize races and celebrations for refugee girls from war-torn countries. For eldest daughter Isla, who also participated, meeting Afghan refugees and learning their stories of adversity and bravery was

especially eye-opening and impactful.

"We keep an open mind about exploring the world around us," Jana said.

The Packhams explore with intention. Every year, they try to visit the beach in the summer and the mountains in the winter. On vacations to national parks, Isla, Bennett, Maris and Luella have conquered challenging hikes and completed the Junior Ranger programs. The older three have even added surfing and skiing to their skillsets.

Back in Sacramento, the family brings that same sense of purpose to service in their church, River City Christian in Rancho Cor-

dova, and support of local charities, including The GreenHouse, a community enrichment center for under-resourced youth in the Gardenland Northgate area.

In their own pocket of Fair Oaks, Kyle and Jana said they cherish time with their neighbors who host house concerts, gingerbread-decorating parties and old-fashioned Fourth of July block parties. "Our neighbors have been what you want neighbors to be," Kyle said. "We couldn't ask for more."

And whether disconnected or dialed in to devices and daily duties, the Packhams have a clear focus: "bonding and enjoying being together." ■



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