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On Tour

I can't believe that the summer is almost gone. It has been a good one. One of the best. It has been hot, and happy, and we've been on the road for much of it. As I write this I-77 is passing away beneath us, moving us through South Carolina on our four day trek home from the south of Florida where we've spent a fabulous two weeks. The first week was spent at the Disney World resort with family. Of the six children, not one child knew we were going to Disney until we drove into the park. I don't know who enjoyed the surprise more, the children, or the parents. It will be one of those golden moments we remember forever. We spent one day at Epcot and one day at the Magic Kingdom; not enough time to see either one, but more than enough for all of us. The highlights by far were the fireworks shows of an evening. I don't know if there is anything sweeter than watching the wide eyed faces of kids who don't get out much overwhelmed by the extravaganza that is the Disney nighttime shows. We made precious memories and took lots of pictures of six kids lined up in mouse ears. The whole week was made possible due to the extreme generosity of an adopted Grandma who works for Disney and provided tickets for all ten of us, as well as helped us with accommodations at the resort. To Nana we extend our heartfelt thanks, we could never have done it without you! Following the parks and an overnight with Nana, we spent two fabulous days visiting NASA at the Kennedy Space Center on Cape Canaveral. The children were overwhelmed by the sheer size of everything. It was fabulous to see the shuttle Atlantis on the launch pad and rub the hull of an Apollo vehicle that actually spent time on the moon. By the time we'd seen both IMAX 3-D movies about the space station and the moon landing, walked the astronaut hall of fame, ridden in the G-Force simulator and climbed around inside a model of the shuttle, two of our boys were inspired enough to declare that they

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are going to be astronauts and visit the moon when they grow up. Who knows? Maybe they will. The second week the children and I spent floating around the lazy river at the JW Marriott in Orlando while Daddy worked and spoke at a conference. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it! The boys became lizard hunters extraordinaire, storing their captives in a carved coconut that some sympathetic lady had donated to their cause. We were provided with two other large home schooling families pool-side whose Daddies were also engaged at the conference. Between us we had 13 children who had more fun than conventionally allowed floating and splashing. We Mamas held down pool chairs and compared notes. It was therapy for all of us, an unexpected gift in an unexpected place.

In spite of all of the organized fun we have had on this trip, the best fun has been free. On the drive down we stayed overnight with my 94 year old Mim who proudly paraded us around her old folks home and arranged for the children to play their instruments for all 250+ residents while they ate their lunches. I doubt very much that a professional string trio could have brought more joy to those old bones than Elisha's barely recognizable "Hot Cross Buns" did. I'll never forget the sight of a seven foot tall elderly gentleman whom the residents call "Slim Daddy" with his head thrown back and toes tapping as he conducted along to Hannah's lively rendition of "Lord of the Dance". It was a joy to bless them with joyful music and tiny bodies to pat and squeeze. We spent a restful night in my Aunt's pine lodge at the top of the world in the Great Smoky Mountains. There is nothing like eating pancakes your children made, al fresco with the mountains in the background and the head of a big black Newfoundland dog lurking at your shoulder. We found ourselves over a lovely weekend in Marietta, Georgia with the only family members on either side that have more children than we do: the Burrells. They, and their eight joyful kids, welcomed us with open arms, even though we haven't been to visit in over ten years. We were blessed by 19 year old Ruth's viola solo at church, Anna's wonderful banana and pumpkin bread breakfasts, and 14 yr. old Jon's unending patience with our tag along boys. In fact, we rarely saw our boys, four of the Burrell sons are in the same age group and they were playing all manner of rough and tumble games. I laughed to hear Janet delivering the "No guns, knives or other weaponry at church, thank you very much" speech that I give every Sunday myself. Tony and Michael loaded up ten of the kids and headed out to visit Civil War battle sites and memorial grounds. Janet and I sipped iced tea and swapped boy stories. It was a lovely visit. The snap shot I'll hold in my head from their home was at our departure. All ten of them were up, dressed and standing at the door to see us off at seven in the morning. The older girls had provided us with more breads, bananas and to-go cups of coffee and tea for our trip. We felt very loved. Another overnight was spent by the children and I with cousins in south Florida. I almost canceled our visit, we were so tired. I'm so glad I didn't. I don't think we stopped laugh-

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ing the whole time we were there. Their grown children had spent all afternoon shopping at Walmart for toys for the kids: brand new play-doh and all the accessories, a coloring book with grow and shrink dinosaurs attached, new crayons, a beautiful red ball with white and yellow stars, a six pack of bubbles, and a whole, extra large sized box of gobstoppers... heaven. We hugged and played and laughed 'til our sides hurt. Just after I got all of the kids settled down in bed, Max, went in and pretended not to see them and rolled all over the bed and the floor squashing them and howling with them. I don't know if there are people who love kids more than they do; their youngest is 18 now and they needed their little kid fix. They got it.

We're riding the loop around Charlotte, North Carolina now. Three states under our belts for the day. Next stop, Hickory. Since our concert at Mim's she has taken a fall and is in hospital. Today she's being moved to a rehab center and we're going to stop in and try to cheer her up. The old Marine in her is stubborn and she's giving my aunt a run for her money. She's against the idea of rehab. Fortunately, her doctor is a Marine too, and he out ranks her, so he's ordered her to the rehab center. This is the only kind of logic that works with Mim. Every time I've hugged her goodbye for the last ten years I've treated it as if it were the last. Today will be no different. I'm told I'm just like her, and in some ways, I am. At very least I see my reflection in her wrinkled hands and clouded eyes. I know that my days are as surely numbered as hers and I try to live by her advice to "Do all the things you want to do." For better and for worse, she has lived by those words. In an hour I'll sit by her bedside and hold her hand and try to speak clearly enough to be understood. I'll imagine myself in the bed and Hannah's daughter in my place and I'll pray that the Lord allows me to sow good seed into my life that in my ancient days I reap the blessings of a multi-generational heritage. Then, I'll kiss her goodbye, hold her frail frame tightly one more time, take the chubby hands of my children in mine and follow my husband home. Home where my own life is unfolding. Where my own memories are being woven into the shawl that will warm my heart in my old age. I will try to "Do all the things I want to" but I will also try to do all of the things that I don't want to do that will enrich not only my own life, but the lives of my children and grandchildren. When I look in the mirror I will see her reflection and consider the legacy she is leaving to me and what I can do to refine it, and pour what is good back into the next generation, my children.

Finding Curriculum for Less

by Nikki Powers

Well, that time of year has come once again! Do not despair, it can be done – and perhaps for cheaper than you did it last year!

When Jen asked me to contribute an article on how I find curriculum so cheaply, I laughed a little. I don't think any of my methods are revolutionary, but who knows, perhaps you will discover a "tip" you weren't aware of, or maybe just reading this will inspire you to do what it takes to save your family some bucks that could be used for a day trip/field trip or some fun supplemental curriculum items.

By starting as soon as possible, and working on it with the bits and pieces of time you get, you can find the best resources, and prices for what your children, or you yourself will need for the coming school year. We moms need to be good stewards of our family resources, and one way I do this is by bargain shopping for our curriculum.

State Inter-Library Loan website - If you aren't already utilizing your library for as much as possible, strongly consider doing so! Do no shopping online or anywhere else until you have seen what you can (at no cost) request through your local library from any of the libraries within the borders of your state. If you're unfamiliar with Inter-Library Loans, ask your librarian to explain it. You can also ask them to give you your state's ILL web address. With this address, you can search from home for the items you'll need for your curriculum. What I do, as I go through my "Book List" in our curriculum, is write "ILL" next to the item if I find it on the website. Remember as you go through the school year, you'll need to request those items you'll be using from the library 1-2 weeks ahead to insure you'll have them when you need them. So I highly recommend going through your plan book (at least through year's end) with your calendar out, and looking for every time you'll need a



Above: Nikki & daughter Libby with a turtle!

book for history, etc. and note 2 weeks prior to request it. Then when January rolls around, go through the rest of the year and do the same thing. It will make your life a lot easier during the school year. If (because of circumstances) you realize you don't have an item you need, flexibility will do well in deciding what you will learn while you wait for your item to come in – and all will be well at the end of the year. Borrowing books is a great privilege we have, not to be taken for granted. There may be items that you borrow, that you later decide should be a permanent addition to the home library, you can then look for a new or used copy somewhere.

Internet – Once I have exhausted what I can borrow at no cost, I go online to see how cheaply I can get things. You can find brand new items at regular retail, but you can also find items new, like new, and used (with varying degrees of wear). If you don't mind minor wear, you can save quite a bit.

www.directtextbook.com – I just discovered this website and I am loving it! I love this site because they not only show you all the book information, including the retail price, but list the different sources selling the book (new & used) - with the cheapest prices at the top! They even have a link to go directly to the seller's website to buy it. You

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can also check out reader reviews for the book you're interested in. This has become a real time-saving resource for me!

www.ebay.com – I always check ebay separately, because I have found some auctions I'm watching do not always show up on the directtextbook site. Ebay has been my main source for saving money. Sometimes directtextbook has just provided a confirmation for me that I'm getting the best deal possible. We moms are very busy with so many responsibilities, so in order for this to work, write on your calendar the day an auction will be ending, then in the morning, go online and see how many hours & minutes remain; set your kitchen timer for 5-10 minutes less than that, so that you'll have time to get to your computer and bid at the last minute. Bidding at the last minute is the best way to get what you want for as little as possible. If you bid early, it just drives up the price. We call this late bidding behavior sniping, and it is great because not a lot of people can or will do this; since we're home most of the time – we are at an advantage. The effort is well worth it, I usually save 50% or more on the items I find here.

Search Engines – You can also do a general search for an item, through ask.com, yahoo.com, or others. Who knows where you may stumble across a great deal that may not have (for some reason) shown up on the other two sites.

Curriculum Sales – These often happen at the end of the school year, so if you know that one is coming up try to be prepared by knowing what you'll need for the following school year. You may want to order your plan book early (always a good idea). You could photocopy the "Book List" and bring it with you. Being a part of a home school support group is a good way to find out when and where curriculum sales will be. A decent-sized support group will often put on their own annual sale.

Conventions – These also come at the end of the school year, and if you will be able to go to one...do your research prior to going (ILL and online), or you'll likely get caught up in paying full price (or close to it) for brand new items. Conven-

tions are a great place to flip through books and get a better grasp of what they are like. You can sometimes find things you wouldn't find on e-bay or at the library, you can see what vendors are like-minded, and sometimes, you just want something brand new. Buying at a convention saves you shipping and handling.

Home school Bookstores – If you have one near you, show your support by visiting them. You may see things that are new to you, and it's another great way to get a feel for the material by flipping through the pages. Sometimes they will provide extra things – like ways of bringing home schoolers together, or sponsor learning activities. These are often family-run businesses, and supporting them may be of more value than your own financial savings.

I don't know about you, but when I save money on something, it is very exciting! So, when you have exhausted all of your resources to do so, then you can gladly purchase the rest of your curriculum, at retail price if necessary. Certainly, there are many times where that's exactly what you will need to do. Through the Institute for R.E.A.L.I.T.Y., I have become familiar with some companies/ministries that write curriculum that are such a blessing to me – that I don't mind going right to the source to place my order. I pray we can all enter into this school year as prepared as possible, and with joy in our hearts that we have the privilege and have heeded the call to educate our children before the Lord.

Our Product List is Growing!
Check Out The Cool New Kits To Create With Your Kids!

Time for Twos (begin with 2-3 yr. olds)

Thinking with Threes (begin with 3-4 yr. olds)

Years One, through Seven (consecutively following TW3)

A Kaleidoscope of Days

(a collection of stories based on our family's experiences...fun!)

Growing in Grace

(articles on aspects of parenthood)

Table Talk

(a set of over 100 discussion starter cards)

Newsletter Volumes 1-5

(burned on CD)

Latin Quiz Program on CD (for use with Yr. 2+)

Home Organization System

A binder system & CD ROM to help you get it all in order!

Chore Cards Training System

Meal Rotation Cards and Life Skills Training for Kids

Wooden Bird House Kit

Paint Your Own Snake Kit

I Can Sew: Bonnet Kit

Be Creative: Leather Scraps Grab Bag (a million uses!)

Build Your Own Rubber Band Powered Car Kit

Build Your Own Sailboat Kit

Discover! Excavate A Mayan Temple Kit

Deluxe Wooden Sword & Shield Set... ready to paint or swashbuckle!

Please Contact us for further information or a catalog.

Looking For God

by Stephanie Payton

I went looking for God last week.

A few weeks ago, we had a storm with winds strong enough to fell many trees throughout our neighborhood. I certainly saw evidence of His power.

My daughters have been watching a robin build her nest, lay eggs, and nurture her newborns. I have certainly seen evidence of His creative ability.

I have only to look around me to see evidence of Him. Indeed, the heavens declare His glory.

It was His face I was interested in, though. Or, rather, should I say it was a glimpse of His face that drew me.

The world would have me believe His face is anywhere I want to see it. Human and animal alike are able to reflect it.

I know this to be untrue, though. My dogs are quite able to demonstrate affection, but that affection falls short of anything godly. And the last dead mole I found on my sidewalk surely didn't reflect the face of God.

My oldest daughter, a precious 9 years old, told me recently she couldn't remember my ever having a "grumpy day." Her optimism abounds. This child, almost too long to hold on my lap, extends her mercy on a daily basis.

In her, I have seen the face of God. His mercies are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness.

My next daughter, a very vivacious 7 years old, pursues me with much enthusiasm. I'm the "best" mom, the "most wonderful" mom, and the mom that "better never even THINK about sending me to school!" She is loyal and faithful.

In her, I have seen the face of God. His love is relentless, and he pursues me with great passion.



Audra Payton, the oldest of Scott & Stephanie's children, Nile's Beach, MA

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My next daughter, a very sweet 6 years old, is my cuddly companion. She loves to play, and play hard, but she also enjoys the sweetness of cuddle time. She thinks my lap belongs to her, and everyone knows it if her need for physical touch is not being met. She loves me, quite simply, through all the good and all the bad.

In her, I see God's face so clearly. He wants me, He desires close fellowship with me, and is with me yesterday, today, and tomorrow. I always know where I stand with Him, for His steadfast love never ceases.

My youngest child, a wonderfully stubborn 5 years old, has shown me the story of my own redemption. For those of you who don't know our story, we adopted him almost three years ago. He can bring me to tears with just a smile. Plucked from a world of darkness and certain evil, His very life reveals the face of God. Every time he says, "I love you", I hear the voice of God telling me the same.

I certainly see God's face in him. God, who owes me nothing, but bestows His love so freely, has redeemed my heart for Him. What a privilege it is to somehow bestow a fraction of that love upon another one of His little ones.

My husband is a wonderful man. He holds me when I hurt, he helps relieve the worst of my pain, and he treats me with a tenderness too sweet to describe. With equal acceptance, he allows me to both weep and laugh in his arms. His desire to lead and love his family touches a great place of need in my heart.

I see the face of God every morning when I wake up next to him. God, who allows me to simply be myself, and loves me anyway. God, who encourages me to the next level of growth, but accepts me where I am. His love endures forever and forever.

Through multiple experiences lately, I have been brought to my knees as I have seen and experienced the face of God. The natural world around me declares His creativity and awesome abilities every day. But it is in the lives of the human world that I am able to see His character demonstrated. Granted, it's not a perfect reflection of His character, but it can be seen, nonetheless. Are you looking for God? The world around us is in turmoil. People are lost. Some truly think God can't be found in such evil and chaos.

Take the time to look a little more closely. He hasn't forsaken you. He is nearer than you might think. He cares for us, as those created in His image, with an ever-abounding love and compassion. While you will never look upon His face in your earthly dwelling, you have only to look around to see the reflection of His face surrounding you. It is in the lives of many that cross your path.

And this brings up one last question. What is your own life reflecting?

The Weasel Farm

I've discovered something in my ten short years of parenthood: Kids are embarrassing. Completely appallingly humiliating at times. Just about the time I think I can turn my back for a second someone blurts out something hideous, and there I am, smiling apologetically, trying to mop up the mess. One such moment occurred at the pool last week. We were so blessed by the company of the Howard family; every day Mama Howard and I shared a pool side seat while our kids of similar ages dove and splashed and swam. I found in her a kindred spirit and a companion for our week of corporate convention. Her oldest daughter, 13 year old Anna, kept an eye on the little ones and was especially kind to Ezra, who cannot be trusted. In the middle of the third afternoon as Mrs. Howard and I were sunbathing and chatting, Anna appears, red faced and giggling to whisper in her mother's ear. Soon they were both laughing and looking sideways at Ezra. I knew another piece of humble pie was headed my way. "Is everything okay Anna? What did Ezra do?" I asked. Anna giggled again, blushed a little and said, "Well, he came up and said, "You have milkers, but my Mom's are bigger!" Oh my. Now I was blushing. "Oh, Anna, I'm SO sorry he said that to you! He's been watching Aunt Dianne nurse and he's very interested in lactation right now!" We three girls sat their and laughed. Anna was gracious beyond her years, having three younger siblings, all of whom had been nursed in her presence as a child. Eventually she headed back to the pool and even risked swimming with Ezra again. I apologized to her mother, again, who just laughed and laughed. I guess it IS kind of funny if it isn't YOUR kid who said it.

QUOTES FROM THE KIDS:

Following the night show at Epcot:

Tony: "Sam, what was your favorite part?"

Sam: "The fireworks, our town doesn't have the whole world lit up like that!"

At the Rainforest Cafe: Ezra, wide eyed afraid, screaming at the animatronic animals: "Can those monkeys walk Dad?!!! DAD!! THEY CAN'T WALK, RIGHT??!!!"

At Mim's retirement home: Ezra: "Why does Mim smell funny?" (three words: Icy Hot Gel)

At my Aunt Patti's house, from beneath a huge pile of Newfie dog: Elisha: "I got slimed."

Famous last words at the pool: Hannah: "Hey Mimi, WATCH THIS!"

Gabe, with a wriggling piece of lizard tail in hand: "It got away Mom... all but the tail!"

Wilds of Creation

House “Wren-ovations” part 2: The New Family

On August 8th, the baby birds hatched! Although several tiny voices are audible within the bird house, it is nearly impossible to know how many babies have actually hatched out.

The parents make endless trips to the woods for food. I have been fortunate enough to witness the feeding process, which goes hand and hand with waste removal. New parents have to keep up with housecleaning. After all, there are five to eight babies in that nest and what goes in must come out!

The parents snatch small bugs and caterpillars off tree limbs, and then fly with them, clenched tightly in their beak, back to their hatchlings. Before exiting the house the parent picks up the waste “bubble” with the very tip of its beak then exits the house. As I observe this process, I find that the parent bird will carry the waste a long way off before letting it drop it to the ground. No doubt it is to conceal the secrecy (or lack thereof in this case) of their new family.

Like a precise timing mechanism the two adults travel to and fro, collecting bugs and depositing them into hungry little mouths.

Each time the parent would near the nest, the babies would explode with chirps of excitement. The strongest chick stretches its neck high above the others and holds his mouth wide open in order to receive the first of the food. When that chick is filled, it quiets down allowing for other chicks to stretch up to be fed. “Pick me, pick me”, I would imagine them saying. As quickly as they had begun chirping when their parents arrived, silence would over come them as the parents left once again.

On one occasion I heard a very disturbing noise coming from one of the parents. Having heard the Wrens for several weeks now, I knew the different sounds and understood what they implied. This was clearly a distress alarm. As I peered out of the back door I saw the tiny bird was faced toward a cat, which had found his way up onto my deck. The cat was after a potted plant of catnip that I was growing for our own indoor kitty. As promised, I helped protect my Wren family by scaring the cat away (at least for now). The bird never thanked me, but quickly went about the business of feeding the brood.

As the days go by I am more anxious than ever to see the little ones emerge. I look forward to the first day of their “flight school” training. No doubt each bird will have a different take-off and landing strategy on its first attempt at flying.

It is heartwarming to watch how birds encourage their fledglings to leave the nest. They will perch on a nearby tree branch and begin calling to the brood. It will be in early morning, a day without notice, without invitation. One by one they will press toward the opening of their house. Then, taking turns, they will stand at the opening, stretch their half-feathered wings for a second or two, and leap into the air.

Flapping feverishly, each bird will aim for the only food source they have ever known; their parents! Some will make the vertical flight with little effort while others may spiral to the ground. Not all will be lost for those who fail to make it on the first attempt. They will be fed on the ground until they have regained confidence to try again. What a joy it is to have witnessed nature's little miracle once again.

Come to China Day!

Since the planned China Day in June was preempted by the birth of baby Bethany, we're going to try again next month!

*Saturday, September 23, at 10:00 a.m.
on Fern Hill in New Hampshire
join us for food, project presentations and fun!*

For more information or to R.S.V.P. please contact:

The Millers

603-934-1052 or i4reality@i4reality.org

(There is a 50 person limit, so get your names in quickly!)

Mail Bag

Jenn,

I absolutely LOVED your article about choosing joy. What a convicting piece of work that was! I am quick to notice when my children are being ungrateful, and yet I can clearly see my own lack of gratefulness at times. May God renew a joyful spirit within us each and every day—even before we've had our coffee or tea!

Love ya,

SP

Preparing For A New School Year

With each passing day it comes closer. A day of great excitement but also of diminished freedom. A day of new beginnings as well as of familiar old rhythms. The first day of school. Most of our public school friends have already marked this milestone for the year, but not us. I just can't bear to send my children back to their book work before September. In true Canadian fashion (at least from my childhood) we start no sooner than the day after Labor Day, and that is plenty soon enough.

I love the first day of school. So do the children. We always kick it off with a special breakfast, the introduction of the new school year schedule, the presentation of new supplies and photographs taken by Daddy in our school room. The children love new books and they dive in with enthusiasm. It is always a great day. It takes us all of one morning to set our feet upon the path of our new school year. However, neither that morning, nor the year to follow comes easily. Long before the celebratory breakfast and photographs the preparation begins... in fact, it usually begins in October for the following year. There are hours of book research, reading, reviewing, writing and refining that goes into producing one year's worth of curriculum. Then, there is all of the work of blending four levels into one cohesive unit that will allow me to teach four at the same time and provide a family centered approach. Then there is the up front prep work, the gathering of supplies, and the million other things that precede that first exciting morning of the new school year. You know all of this. You do it too. Maybe you don't write your own curriculum, but certainly you spend hours and hours making friends with the one you purchased and rewriting it to suit your own family's needs. At least I hope you do. This year I seem to have gotten an inordinate number of questions from first year home schoolers to this effect: How do you

prepare for the school year? How do you teach more than one kid? What is your schedule like? Do you really teach everything in your curriculum? How long does it take? What can I do to prepare myself? Thanks to these moms' questions this article was hatched in my brain. To me the greatest joy of home schooling is the freedom to do it YOUR way and not someone else's. In this article I will attempt to answer these questions from our perspective and tell you how we do it. Please keep in mind that just because we do it this way does not mean that YOU should, and I encourage each family to find their own unique approach to the adventure of Living Education.

How do you prepare for the school year?

Writing each new level of curriculum is a year long process that I think about every day. However, after I have my curriculum guides in hand, the hands on prep. work for a given year begins in earnest. The first thing I do is break the year into manageable chunks. For me, this means two semesters, with Christmas break as the divider. I look over my lesson plans and book lists for the first semester in August. I procure the necessary books and materials for any extra activities. I spend one long day at Kinkos photocopying math worksheets, art pages, and assorted reproducible materials for each child for the first semester. These are placed into expanding file folders: one for each child, one slot per month. This means that all of Ezra's letter worksheets, math worksheets, art and Bible pages are all in one folder for the month of September. I line them up in the order that I will need them according to the lesson plans so that there is essentially no prep. work on any given day. I go through each child's lesson plans and make a sticky note for each week listing any materials needed for science or art projects for the following week, or any library

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books that I need to check out ahead of time. This allows me on each Friday to see what I need to collect over the weekend for the following week's work. I know this sounds like a lot of work up front, and in some ways it is, but it allows me to put almost no effort in during the semester on a daily basis when I'm knee deep in the sometimes difficult juggling act that is home schooling, running a house & a business, with a traveling husband and the usual life commitments. I have found that it is much easier to devote one whole week of August to preparing each kid's lessons for a whole semester in this manner than it is to be scrambling at the last minute and, inevitably, skipping parts of the curriculum that were important to me because I was unprepared. I also prepare an "in-box" for each child, labeled with his name, into which he is to put all completed work for my review. This helps me keep on top of grading, as well as portfolio development, which is required in our state. Finally, I make a complete list of all supplies needed for art, music, science, history projects etc. and purchase all of these items up front. I store them in a special cabinet which is off limits to children without special dispensation from the art cabinet pope: a.k.a. Mom. I then spend a day organizing our school room. This is a controversial subject, I know. Some people are of the kitchen table theology of home schooling. Others are hard core school roomers. Others relegate their kids to quiet rooms in separate areas of the house. Remember, I said there is no ONE way to do this, your way should work for your family. For us, a school room has been a blessing. In one house it was a real 1900's school room on the fourth floor of the mansion we were renting. In another house it was a dining room that we converted. In another, a corner of the basement until last year when we built on a "real" school room, complete with a whole wall of white board and a window seat for reading. Heaven. I have book shelves, desks for everyone, an art table and a trampoline. My arguments for a

school room include the following: A place for all of the "stuff" associated with schooling four kids. A place to make a mess and leave it messy. A place to switch gears mentally to "school time." That said, we've also made it work with milk crates under each kid's bed and only a breakfast bar in a second floor apartment in Chicago to work with. Wherever you "do school" spend some time considering how it will work and planning your time and your space. It will save you time and frustration through the school year. Kids do better with a routine place and process for their schooling, this is as true at home as it is in an institutional setting.

How do you teach more than one kid?

This is not as scary as it seems when you realize that number two child is of schooling age and you're already maxed out with schooling number one... and you've got three more after number two. The principle is very simple, no matter what curriculum you are using: Teach the skill based subjects (language arts, math, maybe foreign languages) to each child individually, teach everything else one room school style. What this means is that you group everyone together for history, literature, art, music, Scripture, and maybe science and geography too, depending on how far apart your kids are. Teach from the oldest child's plan book and supplement with library books for the younger children on the same topics. Read a blend of literature from all of the plan books as interest and time allows. Assign more of the older child's books as independent reading and read aloud the books that even the young ones can enjoy and glean from. Look for ways to add hands-on activities related to the older child's studies that the whole family can participate in. When you choose a curriculum, look for one that lends itself to multi-level teaching to save yourself effort and to provide a more family centered, Living Education, for your children.

What is your schedule like?

This is probably the most asked question, and the hardest to answer. Not because I can't describe our schedule, but because there are so many different ways that work for different people and my way most certainly won't be yours. Two of the best home schooling Mamas I know are polar opposites of me and fly by the seat of their pants daily, doing a beautiful job (Hi Lois & Lynette!). I could never do it their way. They could never do it mine. I love that. The longer we home school the more of a flexible order we adopt. Flexibility is key, and an orderly framework is indispensable. The kids get up before we do and complete their music practice, this is my alarm clock. The boys prepare breakfast, everyone does their chores and we do our morning Scripture/poetry/literature readings while we munch. School starts around eight thirty and runs through lunch time. In these four hours we complete the skill based subjects that require seat work. History, literature & poetry are read over meals. Science activities and art often take over the afternoon and are not generally acknowledged as "school time" by the children. Occasionally Hannah (eighth grade) will have a little bit of her work to finish up after lunch. Afternoons are for exploring, life lessons, chores, music lessons, special projects, or other useful pursuits. We do this four days per week. Wednesdays we take off.

Do you really teach everything in your curriculum?

Nope. Never. And I wrote it! Each kid is a little different and every year the dynamic in our home changes. We always, ALWAYS cover the basics: reading, writing & arithmetic. Always. But not always in the manner described in the plan books or on the days prescribed. The history and literature we blend from various levels according to the needs of the children

and we add to liberally from the life experiences & travel opportunities that present themselves. We add all sorts of interest driven studies gleaned from field trips & group events that are not written into the curriculum (see the China Day announcement on p. 11). And, you won't believe this, we even leave stuff out! I know, sinful. This year I actually let Gabe out of the last five lessons of his math book, including Roman Numerals. He may not be able to function as an adult. And Elisha didn't do his whole last language book! He just wasn't ready. We'll start with it next year. I think he'll still pass the SAT. I treat our curriculum (any curriculum, actually) as a buffet, pick and choose a balanced diet. Hold the ice cream over their heads until they chew through their broccoli and don't eat the stuff that is rotten.

How long does it take?

It takes a lifetime. From birth and teaching them to nurse right on through. Educating kids never ends. My Mom is still educating me. But that wasn't what you meant, was it? The real burning question is "How much time to I really have to devote on a daily basis to get these kids literate?" That question depends on many factors, not the least of which is curriculum choice. For us, we side with Charlotte Mason and her assertion that mornings were to be for academic lessons and afternoons for life lessons. "School time" a.k.a. book and seat work time at our house takes no more than half a day. Even for our middle schooler. For the little ones, far less. Kindergarten takes not more than an hour and a half. When I was in eighth grade and traveling for the school year my Dad took the number of pages in my text books and divided it by the number of days he thought we'd be gone and that was what we had to do each day. On this most basic of plans public school eighth grade completed in a rolling van took me 2.5-3 hours per day at most. Even for high school level work I don't anticipate it growing

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to more than five hours a day of diligent effort. If diligence is lacking, well, that's another story, and a moral issue, not an academic one. If school is taking much longer than this I encourage you to look at what you are doing and how you are doing it, as it IS possible to accomplish more than adequate schooling in less time.

What can I do to prepare myself?

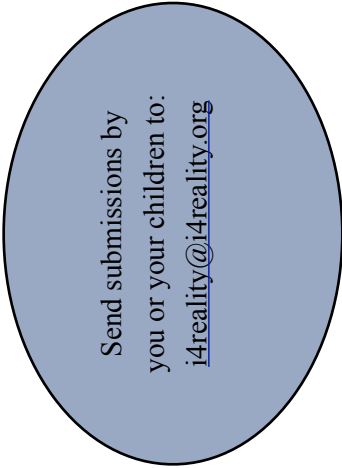
Rest. Spend the last part of your summer vacation enjoying time playing with your kids and doing the things that rejuvenate you. The school year is a long haul. Read books that inspire you. Some of my favorites are The Charlotte Mason Companion: Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning by Karen Andreola, or her second book A Pocketful of Pi-necones Sally Clarkson's books are

also excellent: Seasons of a Mother's Heart & Mission Motherhood are sure to bolster your spirits and renew your vision for home and family life. Edith Schaeffer is a more difficult read but her books The Hidden Art of Homemaking and What is a Family will be well worth your effort. Talk to other moms, but try not to compare yourself, or your children. Most importantly, pray. Seek God for the coming school year. Read the Scripture and be renewed in your calling to hold your children close and teach them as you rise up, as you lie down and as you walk beside the way. May you have a blessed and prosperous school year!



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