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Joy to the World

The night is dark and quiet. The glow of the Christmas tree lights the room and the first snow of the year is softly falling on my forest. Winter has come. The children went to bed praying that God would send enough snow that they could sled in the morning. There is such joy in the diversity that comes with the seasons. We enjoy that about living where we do.

I am amazed to find myself staring at the last page of our family calendar... the picture of us freezing to death on the top of Mount Washington last fall with my husband’s parents. The highest point in the north east. How is it possible that 2006 has passed us by? It has been a good month, and we are savoring each remaining moment of the year.

November brought with it Thanksgiving and our long awaited trek to the highlands of West Virginia and a 200 year old log cabin where we met family from Indiana for four days of joyous thanks giving. We ate enough turkey to last us a year, shared pictures, played Uno, celebrated Christmas early, and went bowling. Let me just say that bowling is not my strong suit. Every single child scored higher than I did. Even Ezra. Stop laughing. We spent every minute sucking the marrow from life and marveling at how these six children have come to enrich our lives and at how quickly their childhood is evaporating before our very eyes. Tempus fugit.

This week finds us slogging through our last week of “school light” as it inevitably becomes as Christmas nears. It seems there are more important things to focus on than math and science this time of year: Like practicing to sing with two other families for residents of two local nursing

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homes... three mamas, ten kids, two guitars, a violin & a flute. That's a lot to co-ordinate when the oldest children are only ten. Like preparing for the arrival of the grandparents: all of them. Next Monday they descend. My parents drive in from Canada, weather permitting, for a one week stay. Tony's parents wing their way east on Thursday and will stay into the new year. The children are fairly vibrating with excitement at the potential for sugar consumption with BOTH sets of grandparents in the house at the same time. A rare treat. As for we parents, we're so pleased to have both sets of grandparents young and healthy and willing to sow into the lives of their grandchildren in their own unique ways. It is a gift that we could never give them and for which we are eternally grateful to our own parents. Is there any better investment?

This Christmas will be a rich one. Not in presents or stuff. We've spent all our money on siding and cabinets this year. It will be rich in what really matters: a celebration of the eternal love of our Saviour and his birth, and in relationships. This will be the first Christmas without my dear Mim. I will miss the Borders gift certificate and bag of M&Ms she always sent. I will miss laughing my way through her Christmas letter, which was usually more of a narrative of what she wished we had all done with our year rather than an accurate reflection of what really came to pass. I have M&Ms out on the bar in her honor and I will toast her passage into eternity on Christmas Eve. Then, I'll turn my children and do my best to craft a sweet Christmas memory for them with what we have on hand: Jesus, cookies, music, and all four grandparents... maybe even snow for sledding, if the Lord grants the children's prayer. It's going to be great. My prayer for you this Christmas is for joy. Joy in your celebration. Joy in your home. Joy in your relationships. Joy in the quiet places of your heart. A song our three family children's choir is practicing really does say it all: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"

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A Christmas Letter

by Stephanie Payton

For some of you, this will be a repeat, as you'll be getting our Christmas letter in the mail. But I just couldn't help myself, as every other topic that came to mind seemed to pale in comparison to the opportunity to share what is uppermost on our minds right now. So I put practicality away for the moment in order to totally focus on the Love of my life. His birth is new every year, is it not? I never tire of hearing His story over and over. With each year that passes, my children are more able to understand the significance of His birth. GOD came to dwell among us, and for us. Amazing love, truly, HOW CAN IT BE? I cannot fathom the depths of His love, but I am, quite literally, eternally grateful for it. I hope you have a wonderful season of celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The following is our Christmas letter for this year:

As 2006 comes to a close, we are, above all, grateful for the gift of Jesus. We have known first-hand His faithfulness this year, and His desire to reveal Himself more fully to us. We have known His forgiveness and the forgiveness of each other, and it is with joy and anticipation that we prepare to celebrate His birth.

Audra wrote a note for the family this year, and I thought it was just perfect for our Christmas letter. What a delight to see the true meaning of the season understood by a child, and to share in her enthusiasm and sparkle for life as we approach Christmas. I hope you enjoy her words, as well.

Dear family,

This is not a day of just getting and giving gifts. It is a day of celebration. The celebration of the birth of Jesus. It is a special day for every one. The best gift is Jesus. We give gifts to one another because God gave to us first. Getting gifts is fun, but remember there is a better reason for Christmas. And that is the birth of JESUS. I would rather have Jesus than the gifts I get.

I love the gifts I get from you, but I could not live my life with out Jesus which is why I like Christmas so, so, so, so, so much. I love you. Merry Christmas.

Love, Audra!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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Our picture was taken on our vacation this summer to the New England coast. As vast and powerful as the ocean is, a magnificent creation of our God, it pales in comparison to the love He bestows on us, and to the power with which He reigns--both now, and forevermore.

May your Christmas be a joyous celebration of the
One who knows and loves you best.

Blessings,

Scott, Stephanie, Audra, Lydia, Elise, and Lucas Payton



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Steering The “Energetic Learner”

The Energetic Learner. You know the one... you probably have one at your house. It came as such a surprise to me, after a couple of years of schooling my very academically compliant daughter to have our school room invaded by a loud, bouncy, seat-work-challenged boy. Why is it so often the boys? I have at least two that would be candidates for medication if they attended “out school,” as they call it. It is not that they are attention deficit, as some call it, it is that their attention is divided. They are interested in so many things at once that sometimes focus is our biggest challenge. I prefer to call them my “energetic learners.” The ones that have to move and groove. The ones who rarely, if ever, finish a printing lesson with both cheeks planted on the chair. The ones with a million questions about a million things I’ve never even thought of. Do you have one? Does schooling him (or her) drive you crazy? Me too. Especially in the winter.

One of the great blessings of having the ability to home school my children lies in the freedom to craft an educational experience that is unique to each child. Hannah’s school need not be Gabe’s and Gabe’s need not be Elisha’s. The content remains the same, the method of delivery varies. I am far from having this all figured out for each of my children, but I have learned a thing or two along the way that might be of use if you too have an energetic learner at your house:

The single most important piece of equipment in our home school is... a computer? a microscope? books? crayons? NO! It’s a mini-trampoline... best twenty bucks I ever spent at Wal-mart. If you have an energetic learner, this is indispensable. Bounce through math facts and spelling words, or latin, or geography flash cards. Bounce between worksheets. Bounce, bounce, bounce. It will take the edge off enough to get through the morning’s lessons.

Minimize worksheets. Ask yourself, “Is the worksheet really necessary? Is there another way to teach this, or quantify the learning?” If the answer is yes, use it. Do English lessons orally. Get on board with Charlotte Mason’s concepts about narration as evaluation. Become project minded.

Become a field trip detective. The energetic learner will form better relationships with the information you want him to assimilate if he gets to DO something. Make use of museums, working farms, home school group field trips and real life experiences where you can and link these to the book work he already has to do. It will give him a “why” to motivate him to slog through the worksheets.

Get out of the box. Does school really have to look like school? Could it be in one hour blocks throughout the day? Could it be outside under a tree in summer? Could some of it be interest driven or project based? Could the

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whole family get on board with one big experience/project/trip and learn as a group? What does your child love? How can you work to accentuate his God given strengths and make them work FOR his educational experience and not against it? If every single day is a fight then maybe we need a new battle plan.

Use every day life. Have you got maple trees? Make syrup. Birds? Get out the field guide. Squirrels? Shoot 'em, skin 'em, fry up some gravy... maybe that's too much for some people... how about drawing them in your nature notebooks instead? Is there a kitchen in your house. Cook with that kid. Teach fractions while you chop carrots. Measurement, volume, a myriad of other math and science concepts can be pointed out in the kitchen by an on the ball teacher. Don't just look around your house. Look around your friends' houses too and draft them. Know a contractor? Rent your kid to him for the day (warning, if your boys are like mine you may need to pay him to take your kid and teach him... money well spent.) Maybe you can even swap kids with a friend and each of you teach within your strength. This is the beauty of a home designed education! Get creative!

Having said all that, let me add one other thing: I am by no means advocating teaching everything within your child's active learning style and side stepping the worksheets and math books altogether. Where is the growth in that? Yes, we want to teach most every-

thing within a child's primary learning style, this is the way to make sure he learns as much as possible. However, we must also develop his areas of weakness and prepare him for anything and everything life may hold for him... which, almost inevitably, will include some formal classroom training and testing for some aspect of his future life. We do our children a disservice if we do not develop within them the ability to sit at a desk and work quietly. No child was ever fully prepared for a high school algebra class with only kitchen style, hands on math lessons. It is very important, especially for a naturally energetic child, to be carefully trained in the fine art of self control. It starts in the high chair, "Fold your hands and show self control while you wait for your strained carrots." It continues through middle childhood, "Yes, you may go drag that piece of plywood a quarter mile back into the forest, haul it up a tree and build a fort with it... just as soon as you sit quietly and finish your math lesson." These are important things to teach. The key, it seems to me, is balance. The energetic learner needs to move and we have to work with what God gave us, not squelching their love of learning and natural joie de vivre. We also need to work toward steering the energetic learner toward socially acceptable displays of his energy and teach him to operate within the larger educational/work culture beyond our four walls. E-mail me your tips and tricks for your energetic learners and I'll print them in a future issue!

Raising Up A Hunter

The Miller Hunt-Year Three

by Judy Daley

The third annual Miller hunt took place on Saturday December 9th. This year was Elisha's first time on the 2 hour trek through the rough forest terrain as a hunter. When learning to hunt one must focus on the game he is tracking, watch for signs of the animal (foot prints, scat, actually sighting of the critter) and remain as quiet as a church mouse in order to go undetected.

This year the boys were not alone. I followed up the rear, taking photos and seeing to it that the hunting party remained together. The bigger the hunting party grows, the tougher it is to stay safe at all times.

Mr. Daley and Gabriel were quick on their feet. The two were always about 10 yards ahead of Elisha and me. I watched them slide through the thick underbrush then leap over small streams only to find they needed to wait up for the rest of their hunting clan.

Elisha made his way along through the woods happily snapping off all the dead twigs at his eye level and singing joyous songs. I continually reminded him that silence is extremely important when hunting.

By the time we had made our way to the edge of the creek, where Mr. Daley and Gabriel sat waiting on the other side, Elisha was well out of "hunting mode" and clearly into a mind-set of adventure. "Look Mrs. Daley, ice! I'm going to walk on it". "NO Elisha, don't walk on the ice. Stay on the highest rocks and walk across the creek. We don't want wet feet!"

There is something really special about little boys, something that takes them far beyond the reality of what the adult just said and into their own world of exploration. Elisha was mesmerized by the way the shiny ice hung over the running water. He stood still for a moment watching, as the cold water poured over the rocks glistening as it traveled down stream. As he made his way toward the ice, Elisha stated, "I'm going to step on it". Just then, I grabbed his arm, balancing him on the higher stones. "Elisha, we have to continue across the stream, not play in it. We are hunters today." He complied with such a joy-filled attitude and bounced his way along in front of me. I hardly held back a smile as I thought to myself, "What a great kid".

As we neared the one hour mark of walking it became clear we needed a break. Elisha had already asked me three times, "when are we going to rest"? Mr. Daley and Gabriel had picked a

great resting spot atop a large rock. We could see into the woods all the way around us, in the event a squirrel, rabbit or partridge should show up.

Elisha asked, “Did you bring anything to drink? Do you have any snacks?” Again, I fought back the overwhelming urge to smile. “Yes I do have drink and snacks Elisha. Would you like some?” “YES, I’m very thirsty”, he said. After serving the gang beverage, and resting a short while, we were back on our feet headed even deeper into the forest.

We approached an area of coniferous trees. Some of the tallest trees had been blown over in a wind storm, leaving them lying flat on the ground. Still full with evergreen branches, we struggled our way around them looking for small game animals, as they often take refuge underneath brush. It is hard work for a boy with tired legs to continue pushing forward in these to lag behind. Reaching over Elisha, I would lift

heavy situations. We were beginning a large branch in front of him, allowing him to push through the smaller ones. This would continue until we reached a bit of a clearing when, to my surprise, he began holding branches back for me so that I could pass through with ease. What a gentleman! Meanwhile, Gabe and Mr. Daley were somewhere ahead of us. Clearly this is not a good sign when you are supposed to stay together. “Come on Elisha, we’ve got to go catch up to the others! Come on buddy!” As you can imagine, Elisha had a smile on his face and as he pulled himself up, he pushed his way forward, all the while singing We Three Kings! “Weee thwee kings of Owien-Tar....” By now my cheeks were killing from smiling so much. It was “PRICELESS”!

As we moved past the hemlocks I could hear Elisha complaining about being picked by something. From a short distance it looked like very thin tree branches which should not be a bother. “What’s picking you?” I asked. “Dis bwanch”, he said, as he carefully lifted it to show me. “Ah



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ha, this is a beech tree branch Elisha. Do you see the spines on the end of the branch? That's what's picking you so much. You must be very careful around these branches, okay?" And so, from that point on Elisha announced his approach to each and every Beech tree that he saw along the way. At one point we were walking through a grove of beech trees. Elisha began saying the word "beech" over & over & over again.

I thought to myself..."Oh I hope his parents don't miss understand what he is saying!"

Upon returning to the Miller residence on Fern Hill, Gabriel asked Mr. Daley if he thought they could "give the gun a little shoot". Since the hunting had been a bit on the thin side, (i.e. nothing) Mr. Daley agreed that the boys, and their little brother Ezra, could shoot the shotgun under his supervision. First, the boys were all given eye and ear protection, then they chose which target they wanted to shoot at. The choice was an outline of a deer or a bear on a sheet of white paper. Once chosen, each target was attached to an appropriate backdrop. Mr. Daley helped hold the shotgun down-range as each boy took his turn shooting at the target. Even Pa Miller took a shot, getting a bulls-eye! His sons proudly cheered!

When all was done, Gabriel had a moment of reflection stating; "Next time, let's take your car someplace that has more game Mr. Daley. We never shoot anything around here." Mr. Daley agreed that the next Miller hunt would involve, at least a little travel and apparently, one more member, Elisha.

Fun was had by one and all.

Mail Bag

Hi Jennifer,

I wrote to you earlier this summer and requested a mailed copy of your newsletter, (which I have been getting now.) Thank you so much!! I told you that my sister-in-law introduced me to your website; she doesn't have children of her own, but is very supportive of what you and others like you are doing for families. Thank you so much for all your hard work, and for caring for the family unit. The mothers and families represented in your articles are such a blessing and inspiration to us all that we really can make it thru! Motherhood can be so hard at times, and I'm so thankful to have the sound advice of fellow moms to fall back on.

Thanks so much!!

A.B.- Indiana

The Christmas Miracle

Christmas is the celebration of miracles. We remember immaculate conception of the Christ child and wonder at the faith of a young girl. We contemplate the virgin birth, in a simple stall, and are amazed at God's providence. We imagine the visit of angels to shepherds and imagine their surprise! We regard the star created just for this occasion and are awestruck that pagan kings would travel so far to bring gifts to a baby they had no reason to care one way or the other about. We read the accounts and marvel at God's clear hand in the events and see how He carefully planned his son's arrival on our tiny planet. There are so many miracles to remember and thank God for this time of year.

In all of the Christmas pageants and school plays and family celebrations in which we mark these miracles, the greatest is often missed. Certainly, Christmas is about the birth of Christ, but even more importantly, it is about God's overwhelming love for humanity. That the all powerful, completely pure, perfectly just creator of the universe, who we had deliberately chosen to disobey and separate ourselves from, could love us enough to personally walk upon this planet in the form of his son, Jesus Christ, is unfathomable. The true miracle of Christmas is summed up in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." God reached out to our lonely, dying planet that cold winter night so long ago. He saw us in all of our depravity and loved us. We had nothing to offer him. We could never do anything to repair the damage we had done to our relationship with him in the garden. But, he loved us. He still loves us. The miracle of his love and the son he sent are as real today as when Thomas touched the wounds in Christ's hands. It is a free gift, a Christmas gift. All that we must do is to say "Thank you Lord, I accept your gift! I am filthy with sin and I deserve to die alone without you! But, I accept the gift of your son, who paid the price for my horrible sin and rose victorious! Thank you for loving me!" No package. No paper. No bow. But the best gift ever given, or ever received.

Merry Christmas!

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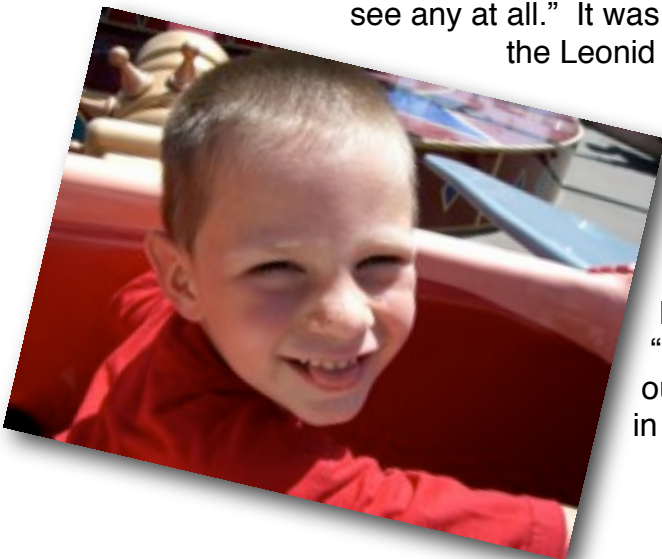
*A Very
Merry Christmas...
From our house, to
yours...
Tony & Jenn Miller
Hannah, Gabriel,
Elisha & Ezra*

A Day On The Farm... The Weasel Farm

As regular as clock work, our little planet spins its way through a debris field that lights up the mid-November skies with a beautiful shower of meteors. The Leonids; named for the constellation Leo. Every year we try to watch. Some years are spectacular, others we miss altogether due to cloud cover.

This year we were invited by good friends, with a better view of the sky than us, to lay on their deck and watch the show. Everyone was excited. The whole way to their house the kids talked excitedly about staying up late and watching the Leonids. Except Ezra. He kept talking about dinosaurs: “Hey Dad? How big is a T-Rex?” “Do they run fast?” “Do they eat boys?” “Are dinosaurs nice?” “How big are they?” “Have you ever seen a T-rex?” and on, and on, and on. Finally, we shushed him as we drove up to our friends’ house. He got out of the car and looked apprehensively at the sky and bolted for the house. Dinner was as uneventful as it can be with nine kids ten and under. Hot chocolate was made (spiked for the parents) and we all settled in to the dark under a starlit sky. Perfect. Except for Ezra. He kept running into the house to where the Moms were knitting, waiting for the window of “really good meteors” at 10:30: “I’m scared.” “I think there’s a dinosaur out there.” “No Ez, no dinosaurs, just meteors... go out and watch.” Five minutes later: “I’m scared. How big is a T-rex again?” And so it went. All evening.

Unfortunately, it clouded up before we got to the “really good meteors” so we only saw a few before we loaded the van with tired, jammy clad kids and headed for home. Ezra was still asking dinosaur questions: “Dad? Did you see a T-rex? I didn’t see any at all.” It was then that it clicked. Ezra was not watching the Leonid meteor shower, he was watching the Leonid MEAT-EATER shower! The poor kid was terrified all evening that two tons of T-rex was about to come barreling out of the stratosphere and flatten him right there in our friends’ yard! No wonder he was scared! You can imagine how relieved he was when he finally grasped that “It’s only tiny rocks and they burn up without landing?!” We’ll never watch the Leonids in quite the same way again!



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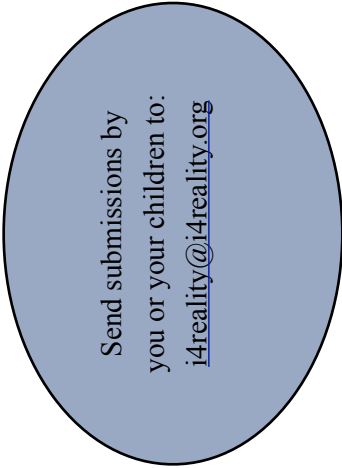
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