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Little Farm on the Prairie

Do you know what I love about Indiana? Eighty degree days in March. We flew off of the hill a day early to avoid the Nor' Easter blowing down hard on us and drove as far into the storm as we could bear that first night... only to Connecticut. The ice pounded the hotel windows all night and I awoke at midnight to find all four of my children with their noses glued to the glass watching wide eyed as a huge plow truck was stuck in the parking lot. The next morning it took me an hour and a half of digging and two young Russian men to free my van and trailer from the ice that candy-coated the entire world. Today, that seems impossible as I sit here wearing a friend's sun dress (who packs sun dresses when it is nine degrees outside!). The red buds are blooming and the forests are dripping with dog wood lace. Everywhere we look there are forsythia and daffodils and hyacinths waving at us from the roadside. Can we take some of this weather home?

It has been a wonderful whirlwind of a trip, as usual. Dianne and I and the five munchkins made it out here over three days and have been on tour ever since. We've seen old friends, and new, family and people who have known us long enough to feel like family, with the highlights including Grandma's pizza and Grandpa's ice cream, a ride around the Indy 500 track for the kids and Daddy flying in for the weekend. All this, and we're only half way through the trip!

By far, the most educational twenty four hours we've spent was at the Tracy farm. Mrs. Tracy and I have been friends since we were giggly girls next door to each other in our university dorm. We used to put on green face masque on Friday nights, make instant cappucino and paint our toenails until the wee hours of morning. My how times have changed! Now we've got four

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kids a piece, husbands who travel like crazy for a living and our toe nails are woefully in need of a fresh coat of paint.

By the time we found their farm, I'd called four times to ask Daddy Tracy if he was SURE he had those directions right. Dianne, mistress of the obvious that she is, pointed out after the fourth call that although we live in the middle of nowhere, they REALLY live in the middle of nowhere. No kidding. Our car was mobbed by little men in over-alls and the cutest little red haired, Little House on the Prairie looking little girl you ever did see. Princess Rachel. The only pink pearl in the Tracy family. Our kids rolled in a big pile of blue jeans and gum boots, talking a mile a minute before streaking off toward the barn to start their adventures. We Mamas were left standing their laughing, while Mama Tracy shouted after the herd to "Mind that big rooster and feel free to kick him hard," if he attacked them. "He's mean!" she announced.

From that moment on it was non-stop adventure heaven for all eight kids... the ninth, little nine month old Bethany, just watched the show with wide, blue-eyed wonder as her future flashed before her eyes. The kids rode horses (but not "launch pad" who is aptly named) collected warm, brown eggs, ran full tilt in every direction, found a dead coyote, hung in a fence where it had been chased down by the dogs, and shot guns. Yes, guns. My little red headed friend with her red plaid apron and calf length dresses was once a military police woman, and after that, she was a criminologist. Her husband gave her a hand gun for a wedding gift and she proudly displayed her new shot gun as she gave the kids firearm safety lessons. They all shot b.b. guns, even Ezra, and the big kids got to shoot the boys' .22s. The whole time Dianne was humming the theme song from Deliverance under her breath and Bethany was bouncing excitedly. Half way through the lesson it became apparent that my children were dreadfully bad shots (due, likely, to the fact that our b.b. gun makes rare appearances and is only used with Daddy right there). At this, the good, home school Mama that Mrs. Tracy is, wanting everyone to succeed, reaches into her shoulder bag and announces to Dianne and I, "I hope this doesn't offend y'all, but I think it's time I get out the red neck target..." With this, she unfolds a LARGE paper with a black outline of a person on it with various areas numbered. Just like the ones I've seen at firing ranges. She explains to my wide eyed children that a "5" is a good shot, it will probably kill the person and a "1" is not so good, it might just make them mad. Fire away. When I mention the slightly less than politically correct approach to marksmanship that she's taking with the kids she looks at me and laughs and says, "Well, we just pretend it's Al Queda...." I'm not sure I feel better, but it's hard not to laugh with her and congratulate Gabe on finally making a good shot. He got a five.

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We finally shook free of the kids (after the guns were put away) and my dear friend walked me all over their new 21 acre farm. We walked the fields, the forest, the stream beds and the fence lines. We talked about all of the stuff we always talk about and other than our obvious morph from teeny-boppers to Mother Hens, it was as if we had never been apart a day. It is always that way with her. Now and then, as we walked, we caught glimpses of two boys, Elisha and Jesse, stalking us in the forest. They really thought we didn't see them. I came up in the estimation of the big boys when I picked up a HUGE crawfish we found in the stream. He was almost as long as my hand. I say "was" because, to the great joy of the children, I showed them how to cook him and each little person got a dime sized piece of meat at dinner. Extra "Uncle Jenn" points for me! Charlotte Mason would be proud.

Our kids slept like cordwood stacked in the tiny upstairs of their house and woke at dawn to suit up in boots, yesterday's dirty clothes and borrowed sweaters to brave the early morning cold on the way to the barn. Ezra, non-farm boy that he is, must have asked Aunt Netty three times if she was sure he was going to get breakfast before she shooed him out the front door with an empty tummy to do the early morning chores, "Around here, the animals eat first, then the kids eat!" With twelve year old Travis as grand marshall of barn work my kids helped feed the horses and chickens, collect the hens' eggs, bottle feed the baby goat while a farm style breakfast of pancakes, potatoes and ham was cooked up, to Ezra's great relief. They played soccer for the remainder of the morning while Uncle Rod fixed me Turkish tea and we discussed the finer points of traveling that country safely... which he has done and we will do soon. It was a sad goodbye for us all when the time came. They were only consoled by knowing that we were on the way to the airport to get Daddy and I knew I'd see the Parents Tracy at the convention in a couple of days. Dianne and I laughed all the way out to the highway and she was still singing the Deliverance theme song.

Post Script: We did, in fact, see the Tracys at the home school convention. While they were there, Jesse, their youngest boy, called Mama on the cell phone to see which pot they could use to boil up ALL of the crawfish they had found that morning in their stream. Thanks to Uncle Jenn.

Post Post Script: In case any of you find yourselves in possession of a baby goat, Mrs. Tracy says to tell you that the Baby Wise book works like a champ for sleep and contentment training in both sorts of "kids". Having met her goat, I can testify to her success, although, I'm not sure it was Mr. Ezzo's intended application!

Of Words and Silence

by Stephanie Payton

**But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.
Habakkuk 2:20**

I'm sitting here, at the computer, typing this. My almost-10-year-old daughter is sitting beside me, propped on a stool against the filing cabinet, reading a book. We are comfortable in our companionable silence.

Moments like these happen quite regularly—moments that have no need for an infusion of the spoken word. Moments that, indeed, would be made less than what they are by words.

Equally so, there are times we must speak. This is both practical and necessary for life! But woe is the man who does not choose his words carefully. The Scriptures have so much to say regarding the use of words. Some of my favorite verses, from Proverbs 15, include:

vs. 2 "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly."

vs. 4 "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit."

vs. 7 "The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools."

vs. 23 "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply, and how good is a timely word!"

As a mom, one of the things I want to instill in my children is a sense for when words are in order, and when silence is appropriate. If they come to believe that they always have to have something to say, will they know how to be silent before God? On the other hand, if they come to believe that silence is awkward or "bad", what will they think when God is silent?

I love the Word of God. It is both spoken and silent at the same time, is it not? His spoken Word, breathed into life, and fresh with each hearing—yet quiet, awesome in its silence. Words are a dime a dozen, but a man who knows how to dwell silently in the presence of our Lord holds a priceless treasure in his hands.

I was recently listening to a cd when I came across this song. It is a traditional French carol from the liturgy of St. James, 5th century. This particular rendition is solemn and haunting. I do not know if just reading the words will do it justice, but my hope is that it will, at the very least, encourage you to go before Him in silence. There is so much to hear in the quiet.

LET ALL MORTAL FLESH KEEP SILENCE

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.
King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of olden earth He stood,
Lord of Lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood;
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.
Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day
That the powers of hell
May vanish as the darkness clears away.
At His feet the six-winged seraph,
Cherubim, with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to His presence
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! LORD MOST HIGH!

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The Wilds of Creation

Bandit & Rascal

by Judy Daley

It was in the spring of 1980 when my first two raccoon kits arrived. They were tiny, no bigger than a kitten. I can recall how helpless they looked.

As I listened to the story of how they were found, the baby raccoons became increasingly more vocal. They were most likely hungry after spending the day in the hands of young children who had found them in the woods. The children did not show their parents what they had found until late afternoon. Time was of the essence as the raccoons were in need of nourishment, and soon! I quickly checked the two raccoons over for parasites, bruises, general health and to find out which sex they were. “Let’s see...no fleas, no lice, clear bright eyes, clean ears, no teeth (yet), and nice pink gums. Great!” I had discovered that I had two boys. Phase one was complete. Phase two was to get them to the veterinarian’s office for an official check up before I could bring them home.

The doctor was a tall, blonde haired man with a medium build. He had a gentle smile with a twist of minx. I had worked for him previous to the animal control position. He knew of my love of animals plus my sense of humor, and I knew his.

The doc picked up one of the baby raccoons quietly and methodically checking it over. His face was serious and the room was dead silent as he examined one raccoon kit, and then the other. And then, all of a sudden the doctor picks up his head, looks me square in the eyes with a serious face and said: “Did you know you have to help them eliminate their waste?” I must have had a strange look on my face, or perhaps I had starred at him a second longer than I needed to because he continued by saying; “The mother raccoon licks her babies to stimulate the elimination process.”

I paused momentarily, then looking at the doc with a smirk of confidence, I said, “Oh no.....I won’t be doing that”! The vet simply shook his head and smiled as he continued showing me the technique of using a warm cloth on the lower belly area. I was also instructed to feed them every two hours, around the clock, and was given the milk formula to mix *daily*. I thought to myself, “What’s the big deal? I can do that, no problem.”

When all was said and done, I was walking out the door with two very healthy baby raccoons along with a lot of information to digest.

The first two nights were exciting! I would jump out of bed every two hours (no alarm clock needed) elated to be feeding my new babies! They took to the bottle quickly and the elimination process went well but a bit messy.

By the third night my eyes struggled to focus. As cute as the raccoons were, I had a difficult time staying awake during their feedings.

As the weeks marched on I found myself waiting for the raccoons to wake *me* up by crying at their feeding time. In doing so, I got a couple extra winks of sleep.

Within a few weeks the raccoons had more than doubled in size. They were still very small but could run around the house scaling the furniture rather quickly.

I had given them the names Bandit & Rascal. As time unfolded, so did the meaning of their names.

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Livin' Life Skills

One of my favorite things about having my kids home all day, everyday, is the opportunity to really live life together. I love having the freedom to order our own days, to learn from what life brings us and to teach my children about real life, through real life. We don't need a contrived class to teach "home skills," most every skill they have has been taught naturally, through the home.

I used to be surprised when new families we'd met would ask some version of the following question: "How do you get your kids to.... cook, clean, play together, do laundry, shovel the deck, unload the dishwasher... pick a skill." I didn't know how to answer. I didn't know how we got them to do it. It seemed like they were just born doing those things and liking it. It came naturally to my children, as it had come naturally to me as a child. Didn't other children do the same? Evidently not.

I became a student of other families. Sure enough, Mom was doing all the work. The kids were often grumpy and discontent with their stuff, their siblings, with life in general. The kids thought my kids were WEIRD for doing all of the things they did. The parents thought we were WEIRD for making/letting them. I admit it, we're weird, but we like it, and our kids like it.

So the question remained, "HOW did we get our kids to work and be happy working?"

After thinking through all of the tricks and training tips we had for teaching different skills it occurred to me that it really was none of these things. It wasn't about charts or cards or incentives or any of that. It was about attitude.

Kids want to be wanted. They want to be needed. They want to be loved and admired for their prowess in a variety of arenas. They want to be the best at something. They want to climb mountains and conquer uncharted lands and do things that no one else that they know who is their age can do. Just like we grown ups. This is what causes our children to work and like it. Our two year olds proudly put away forks and scream bloody murder if anyone else tries to do it for them. Our ten year old daughter matter of factly serves us baked salmon, steamed asparagus, fluffy rice, salad and bread that she has prepared, from start to finish, completely by herself to guests around our table. Of course she should cook, it's her night. She beams proudly when the guests exclaim over her accomplishments. She knows that she can do something important, and she is justly proud of her accomplishment as any hostess three times her age. Ezra is four. Every morning he hollers after me to "WAIT Mama! You CAN'T do laundry without me!!" And so I can't. He believes that he's the only one who can push the three buttons in the correct order to start the morning's wash, probably because he can't remember ever seeing anyone else do

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it. Laundry is HIS job. Snow fell last week after we got back from Indiana. Lots of it. As another foot or so roared down off of the roof and crashed onto the deck Gabe leaned around the corner and peered out the door to survey the damage. “That’d be my job!” He announced, before heading out the door to clear it off before our friends arrived for the day. Later that afternoon, as we Mama’s sipped tea and visited, Gabe and his eight year old friend came up the stairs and plopped six neatly pressed and folded napkins on the table, “Here Mom, we ironed these, I taught James how...” And so he did. Isn’t it completely normal for one eight year old to teach another how to iron cloth napkins on a snowy afternoon when they’re sick of playing outside?

So what’s the point? That my kids can do great stuff? No, of course not. They aren’t doing anything special. We all have to learn to cook and clean and do laundry. The point is that kids CAN do things and SHOULD do things and WANT to do things... even if they don’t act like they do. They want to matter. They want to accomplish things and be proud of their accomplishments. Why not channel that God given desire to conquer into chopping and stacking a huge pile of wood? Just like we as adults get pleasure from giving to others and contributing to society, our children want to give back and feel like who they are and what they think, feel and do MATTERS in their world. What is their world? The four walls of your house.

A good friend of mine who came late to the idea of training life skills put it this way: “I was doing everything for them because I thought that’s what a good mother should do. But now, the house runs so much more smoothly and they actually LIKE working for the family, they’re proud of it!” Of course they are!! Training kids to work isn’t rocket science. There are a million books and charts and systems out there to help get you started. We even sell our own. But you don’t really need them. All you need to do is change the attitude in your home toward work. There is no faster way to motivate a kid to work than to casually mention, within ear shot of the kid, to some adult visiting your home, “You should see what Gabe did, that big pile of wood over there, he moved it ALL by himself. He’s becoming quite a man!” Or mention to the guests at Bible study on Monday night, “The bathroom is the second door on the right, it’s very clean, Elisha is the best bathroom cleaner we have!” Justified praise, praise they’ve earned for a job well done, is the best motivator.

Don’t MAKE them work, LET them work. Not FOR you, but WITH you. Develop team spirit. Conquer the big, hard things. Create Olympic events out of the little, mundane things. Work is a blessing and a gift from God. A way to give back to the community and develop self worth. Watch your children rise to the occasion and let them enjoy the fruits of their labor in every day life.

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Grand Parenting on Purpose

by Dianne Schenk

My grandmother passed away last month after a long battle with cancer and heart disease. I miss her a good deal and I thought that perhaps this month I might honor her memory by suspending my regular discussion about training up babies so that I could share with you some of the ways that she (grand)parented on purpose.

There were so many things that she taught me and so many values she instilled in me. I'm sure many of you have lost grandparents as well, and I'm also sure I'm not the first that has realized what deep impressions those grandparents made on us all. First of all, I have to say that I will be ever grateful that I went to visit my family this past Thanksgiving. I guess I knew deep down in my heart that it would be the last time I'd see my Granny. To be sure, I didn't expect this so soon (a mere four months) after seeing her. Who does, really?

Edna Mae Cloud Henderson passed away March 19, 2007 and we all really miss her...but y'know, more than missing her, I'm so happy for her. I know good and well she is singing her heart out, praising God right along with the angels, and walking with no pain or faltering, on golden streets...and being the homemaker she always was, she's probably fixing up her mansion just so...maybe she's baked up a batch of good Southern cornbread to share with everyone...

I have so many memories of my grandmother. From just about the day I was born, she had a hand in helping take care of me. I remember when she used to pick me up from school and we'd ride the 15 or so miles home and she'd start singing "Do Lord" and encouraging (ok, commanding...lol) me to sing along with her. She is the first person in my life who encouraged me to begin singing. I haven't stopped since. :~] I can remember many, many afternoons at her house, helping her out in the yard or in the garden...pulling weeds... picking up pine cones for kindling... picking up pecans... picking peas and beans... raking leaves... cutting down the stupid bamboo that kept relentlessly growing behind her house (the wretched stuff multiplies at alarming rates...sorta like rabbits in a sense)... helping Paw-Paw--my grandfather--chop firewood... oh, then there was the day I had to (EW) pluck chickens. Once upon a time my grandparents kept a small chicken coop and raised just enough for their own consumption...I can clearly remember balking at the gross task, and I can hear Granny saying, "Now you just go on and pluck those feathers. Someday you'll be telling your friends that you got to pluck a chicken and there ain't many folks that's done that. You'll look back and remember this and then next time, you'll know how to do it!" I didn't believe her. But here I sit, writing an article that will be seen by hun-

dreds of people...about plucking chickens. :) Oh, the irony. And I guess it is true that if I'm ever faced with that job again, I will indeed remember how to do it. But it's still gross. And the truth is, "gross" tasks and mundane chores aside, what was really happening, beyond the sowing of the cucumber seeds in spring, was the sowing of character traits--work ethic, integrity, perseverance, and responsibility, among other things.

If there was ever a person who never did things unless she meant to, it was my Granny. She was, by definition, a purposeful individual. I suspect that at least some of my conviction about parenting on purpose is a product of her influence in my life.

Aside from teaching me many things, there were the things she did for me, like making and mending clothes for me. I can remember many times standing next to her as she sat at her sewing machine and pinned here and there, admonishing me to "stand up straight! I can't see how much to hem it if you're leanin' over!" Granny saved me from wearing thread-bare clothes many times, that's for sure. She made my 7th grade graduation dress which was canary yellow. All my classmates called me Banana Girl that day (laugh if you must; I'm doing the same as I look back!) but I didn't care...I loved that dress. (It's no wonder that another goal of mine is learning to sew...I'm getting there.)

Shortly after that, during the late summer

before entering 8th grade, I had my tonsils out. I remember the day before the surgery I was so scared but my parents calmed me and Granny washed and rolled my hair so that it would "stay nice and pretty" in the hospital...I remember waking up afterward and seeing Mom and Daddy and my grandparents in the room with me, and Granny gently fingering my hair and smoothing my brow and telling me how good I'd done and that my hair was so pretty! (Of all things.) It took my mind off the pain, at any rate. It's in the little things, I guess. It must be, or else I wouldn't be recalling it now, with such fondness.

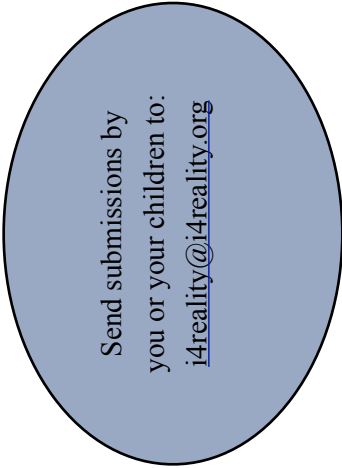
One of my life-long goals is to be a good wife and mother, and once again, I can look to my grandmother for inspiration. If there was ever a hard-working wife and mother, it was my Granny. In all my 28 years, I hardly ever saw her rest. Even in her last few months, when she had lost most of her hair from chemo and her gait was stiff-legged and uncertain, there she was the day before Thanksgiving, sitting at the breakfast table, peeling sweet potatoes and keeping a watchful eye on the rest of the holiday cooking being carried out by my Aunt Myra, her oldest daughter, under her strict tutelage.

I was told that in this last year or so before her passing, that her mind had deteriorated a bit with age and illness. She'd repeat herself, or she'd forget that she'd shared some bit of news concerning someone in the family and would tell it again...but the truth is, these things hap-

pen when you get old. We'll all be there someday. I'll never forget handing over Bethany to her for the first time and seeing the happy tears in her eyes as she marveled over my firstborn and smothered her with kisses...it will be my pleasure to recount to Bethany as she gets older, the great love that her great-grandmother had for her and the brief moments of togetherness they shared.

One day, we will all see Granny again...and it will be her pleasure to show us her mansion and invite us in...she'll tell my daddy, as she always did, to "have his hat off and stay awhile." It'll be a great time. I can hardly wait. But for now, I've got life to live down here. I've got a beautiful little girl to raise. I've got stuff to teach her. Should I start with plucking chicken feathers? Well...maybe we'll hold off on that for a few more years. ;)

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