



Georgia On My Mind.....	1	Wilds of Creation.....	6
Home Schooling.....	3	What I'm Afraid Of.....	9
Mail Bag.....	4		

Georgia On My Mind

The sky hung low and black over Savannah as we arrived last night. Lightening leapt up to dance for us and rain pounded the windshield for the last thirty miles or so. Ezra, kept up a low level mantra of the following questions: "That funder sounds like a monster truck, but it's only the clouds crashing together, right Mom? If the funder keeps up I can sleep with somebody, can't I? Maybe with Hanny..." He hates storms. It rained the last time we were in Savannah as well. We were stranded on River Street under the overhang of the Hyatt for the better part of an hour in rain so thick we could barely make out the lights of the newly loaded ocean freighter passing out of the port and through the river toward the sea. Maybe it always rains here.

We are a little over a week into our work tour with Daddy. His conference in Orlando went well. We spent a day at Disney's Animal Kingdom and five days floating around the lazy river at the hotel and eating our PB & J by the pool while he preached on some aspect of database development and server set up. The highlight for the little boys was the tiny, blue rubber, squirty shark that came each day with their kid's meal. The highlight for the big kids was lizard hunting and a foosball table. The highlight for me was falling asleep IN the pool on my birthday. Fun was had by all.


Last year we wished we'd had more time in Savannah, so this year we took some. We spent a lazy day exploring the historic district, perusing a railroad museum and riding the blue Oglethorpe tour trolley all over downtown. With a 120F heat index. There is nothing that says "Old South" like the live oak trees, still relatively young at 150 yrs. old (they live well past 400 yrs. old) draped with spanish moss, branches intertwined like arms reaching over the cobbled streets, lined with crepe myrtle, of historic Savannah. I almost expected to see Scarlet O'Hara herself come sweeping down one of the long scrolled iron staircases on one of the old squares. Even in the heat, it was idyllic. I've spent the day sweating, and drinking in as much of the culture as I can, along with gallons of sweet tea, in honor of our friend Dianne. It's likely to be years before we make it back. When we do, we'll come in February!

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Home Schooling

Schooling comes to us all in September. On the heels of all of our "trippin'" this summer I'm in a race to get our school room ready and our books in order. The most fun though is meeting with other Mamas as we all count down to this year's big blast off to compare notes and swap ideas. In three short weeks, Labor Day will be upon us and school will be in full swing.

I am always amazed at how quickly the kids settled back into the routine. This fall we'll be teaching the usual: Readin' 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic. The boys will moan over their copy work. The girl is excited to officially start high school, but will moan over her math. It couldn't be any more stereotypical. Only Ezra is truly excited to see his books of a morning, yet, we all manage cheerfulness and are thankful for the freedom to do it for half a day instead of a whole day, and four days instead of five, and in our stocking feet and holey jeans instead of uniforms.

Like everyone else, in Public or Private schools, we read everyday. We draw and color, we memorize math facts and foreign language flash cards, and poetry. We listen to classical music and learn our composers. We make art. We do science. We have history projects. We practice our penmanship and our spelling. The schooling is nothing unusual, we slog through the same basic stuff that other schools do, although maybe in different ways. This is home SCHOOL.

But this is not really what we do. We are not home schoolers, we are home schoolers. We HOME school, not home SCHOOL. Can you see the difference? Let me explain.

Of course we teach our children. It would be educational neglect if we did not. We do our time to satisfy the state, just like every other educational institution. Maybe we can do it faster because we have fewer kids to contend with and we know them better. Maybe we can make it more fun by using innovative methods tailored just to our kids. Maybe not. It doesn't really matter, the bottom line is, it must be done. The state requirements are the minimum. They are the small hurdle that must be cleared so that we can do what we really want, which is to HOME school.

For most of the Western Cultures, home is where we come sleep, and maybe eat. Where we regroup for the next activity, or check the community calendar for availability. It is where we meet our basic needs of food, shelter and hygiene, and, sadly, often little more. Work, schooling, extracurricular activities and lessons, church, clubs, and groups keep most of us anywhere and everywhere but home. The concept of home as more than a house to wash clothes in and sleep for a few hours, or maybe throw a party in of a weekend, is fast disappearing in our culture.

There are many reasons we teach our children at home. The quality of their intellectual education, is a big one. But it isn't the only one. What we really want to instill in our children over the long haul of their childhoods is not that there are four quarts in a gallon, or that China is the biggest manufacturer of rubber balls, or that there is a use for learning Latin. What we really want them to learn is the art of life. The beauty of a life lived to the glory of God, in harmony with His creation, and with grace extended to fellow man. We would like them to learn the value of living a quiet life and caring for their families. (1 Thess. 4:11) We hope that we can live out an example for them of what it means to be a family. To love your spouse. To treasure your children. To value the wisdom of the elders of the family. To treat one another with kindness and love (the only two rules we have at our house). To seek to meet the needs of others and reach outside of the family, as a family,

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to extend love, and bless those around us in any way we can. We want our children to come to see home, not as a building where people who are related to each other live, but as the center of all things vital. The center of relationships, of ministries, of communities, of churches, of business and commerce, of education and intellectual growth and stimulation, of music and art. We want our children to grasp the concept of home as the first brick of social structure, a very important first brick that must be molded and fired carefully so that those placed upon it will build straight and square. We want them to see their Daddy and Mama loving each other, helping each other, working together for the good of the home, so that they will know how to do the same one day. We want them to learn the practical skills necessary to make the home safe, and beautiful, and warm, physically, emotionally and spiritually. We hope that they will grow up through our home and make homes of their own far better than our small example. We're working hard on our brick, hoping that their bricks will be even better.

We home school; not home school. Do you see the difference. It's not the academics. Everyone does that. It's the HOME that is missing sometimes. It is the HOME that is what we really want them to learn, they can pick up the school anywhere. It is the perennial quest for HOME that drives our choices about jobs, entertainment, travel, education, literature, music, business, church, community, and so many other things. There is much more to be said about cultivating home. But none matters next to this:

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Psalm 127:1

As the brick is the foundation of the wall and the family is the foundation of all other social life, so an Unfathomable Creator is the mud and mortar of all. From his breath we were sprung to life and for His good pleasure we take each breath. To build our homes on less would be to labour in vain.

The shadow of evening is falling over our mountain. I need to go cook. Home schooling is a never ending job. I need to put on some music for kitchen dancing, run a hot bath with bubbles and put some chicken to simmer and smell yummy. Before long my girl will come to help me cut salad. Her Daddy will come hunting for his guitar. And soon dirty little boys will begin slithering in looking for food and a lesson in loving... Here comes one right now.

Mail Bag

Hello again!

Thank you so very much for your help and wisdom! The example schedule and ideas were extremely helpful. I am thrilled to begin our home schooling next week. Our extended family and some friends pretty much think we are nuts, but I think the proof will be in the puddin'! Even if it is not apparent to them, I am still filled with peace and joy to train my kiddos as unto the Lord.

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I hope you don't mind my many questions! I really do feel that your curriculum was a direct provision and blessing to me from the Lord. I had been praying and researching for so long and when I landed at your booth at the convention and then read over your material later on, I thought, "YES! THIS is what I've been looking for!! I can be excited about our first year home schooling because I have confidence and direction with your curriculum. Just wanted to tell you my thoughts and say thank you!

R.K.

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Wilds of Creation

Four Legged Farmers

by Judy Daley

I noticed an odd patch of ground in my lawn this past spring. The area was approximately three feet across and was symmetrical in shape. Looking straight down at the ground I could see small indentations in the soil. Inside each one of those indentations was a tiny green stem sprouting up. It was as though someone had planted each seed precisely where they wanted it to grow. It would be a couple more weeks before finding out what was growing.

I staked off the area, making sure I would not mow the “mystery vegetation” down. A couple weeks passed by before I had my answer. They looked to me to be Sunflowers! But who planted them? The mystery would go on for many weeks but I did have my suspicions. I paused to recall a certain four-legged visitor:

During the past winter months I had hung a couple of birdfeeders from atop my back yard deck. They fed much of the local bird population and the grey squirrel populous as well. One squirrel came to feed on the bird seed every single day. The squirrel would stay at the feeder for very long periods of time.

It was a pregnant female squirrel, though at first I did not notice that she was pregnant. As the days passed by her belly became rather swollen. Towards the end of her pregnancy the squirrel was used to me popping out the back door, with camera in hand, to photograph her. She would lie down on the railing, belly hanging over the edge, looking physically exhausted. Usually, she would only pause momentarily to look at me before returning to her seed-buffet.

And so the sunflowers grew. By July the sunflowers stood five to six feet tall! They were growing so beautifully with strong thick stalks and huge deep green foliage. The large flower heads were turning into seed heads.

“How wonderful”, I thought, “I will have seeds from these flowers to feed the birds this fall”. But in August, just about the time the seeds were ripening, I noticed that a couple of the stalks had fallen over and were lying on the ground. Sections of the seed heads were missing on each stalk.

The next day I noticed more stalks lying prostrate on the ground, but the seed heads were intact. Nothing had eaten them that day. I was puzzled.

Clearly I needed to spend a bit of time as a private eye in order to unravel the mystery. So I set out to keep a close eye on the area.

It wasn't long before I saw a flock of Goldfinches fly onto the tops of the flower heads. They appeared to be checking the status of the maturing seeds by pulling at them with their beak. Their tiny bodies had barely enough weight to make the stalks sway in the breeze, never mind bend them over to the ground. It couldn't have been the Goldfinches.

A couple hours had passed by when something else caught my eye. Two young grey squirrels were bouncing towards the patch of sunflowers. They seemed to be siblings, meaning they were familiar with each other and comfortable enough to run side by side. I was sure they had been born this spring since they had no real fear of me watching them. As I studied them approaching the patch in question, I couldn't help but wonder..."are they the babies of the squirrel I took photo's of on my deck?" It was a possibility. Perhaps she planted the seeds?

When the two young squirrels reached the towering stalks of sunflowers, they each leaped up onto their own separate stalk, making his way to the top of the plant. By the time they had reached three quarters of the way up, the stalk gently fell over to the ground, with said squirrel still attached. Once on the ground the little squirrels feasted on the bounty of seeds. This action took place for the next two days until all of the sunflowers were harvested of their seeds. Not one seed was left. The two squirrels had even taken the entire heads off the biggest flowers and taken them off into the woods.

This was fascinating! It would seem that the mystery was revealed! It was most likely a squirrel that had sowed the sunflower seeds in the first place. How neat to see the seeds germinate, grow, produce seeds, and then the squirrels return to harvest their crop. Sometimes the most fascinating and precious moments of life are right outside our own windows.

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What I'm Afraid Of

Something has been bothering me the last couple of years. I suppose it has been there much longer than I have been aware of it. I'm slow on the uptake sometimes. It has been building at an alarming rate and it is now raging across our land like the flood waters from a crumbling dam. Or so it seems to me. What is it? This dangerous tide? Fear. The Culture of Fear, as Michael Moore (who I most certainly do not endorse on any level) identified it. It manifests itself everywhere: Advertising, television programs, documentaries, news programs, radio shows, even in the kiddie pool at the Grand Lakes Marriott; it is inescapable.

"We the People" have become "We the 'fraidy cats." and our fear is doing more than crippling us and keeping us from living life fully, it is being used to control us and we are using it to control our children. Let me give a few examples from the past couple of weeks: The Minnesota bridge collapse. Truly, a tragedy. We learned about it on our way to Orlando, sitting in the lobby of a hotel as CNN replayed, over and over, scenes of people and cars stranded on the wreckage, a mother clutching her baby, people strapped to back boards being loaded into an ambulance. The reporter rehashed the events, grasping at straws for some new detail to keep people hanging on. Then she said it. The words I couldn't believe I was hearing. The words which supported my theory: "I don't mean to scare you further, but do you know just how many bridges just like this one that collapsed exist in YOUR state?" She went on to show maps with every bridge in the nation marked with a star. Of course it was meant to scare us. Hannah, with big eyes, turned to me

with exactly the response the news people hoped for, "Mom, I hope none of the bridges we cross today collapse... that could happen to us!" And so, the fear is perpetuated. This led to many hours of discussion in the car about everything from our decaying infrastructure in the USA, which is sorely in need of attention and which WILL continue to collapse if left unattended to the necessity of governing our lives and minds with logic. To not being controlled by our emotions, which can be easily manipulated by a newscaster who most certainly does mean to scare us.

Example number two: Sitting in the kiddie pool, soaking in the sun, watching my big kids splash and laugh with a whole pool full of folks they didn't know last week. The Mom I'm sitting next to shouts to her four year old, "You can play on that play gym, but remember not to talk to strangers! You could be snatched up in a minute!" The child nods solemnly and toddles off toward the slide where several other children, and their obviously dangerous looking Mommies, are laughing and playing. She turns to me and says, "The world is so dangerous now, it makes me afraid for my kid." I smile and nod. When she asks, I tell her that we've never told our kids not to talk to strangers. We have told them that they aren't ever to GO with a stranger anywhere. We've told them they aren't to GO with anyone we haven't told them first will be coming for them. Statistically, strangers are much safer than friends. This Mama was ruled by fear, which was passed on to her from somewhere else, which she is passing on to her daughter and using to control her daughter's behavior. All with the best of

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intentions, of course, who doesn't want their children to be safe?

We are a people ruled by fear: We're afraid to fly because terrorists hijacked a couple of planes. We're afraid to send our kids to school because occasionally some crazy person takes a gun to school. We are afraid to let our kids talk to people we don't know at the pool, but we regularly encourage them to talk to the stranger at the Wal-Mart check out. Why is one safer than the other? We are afraid to visit other countries because we've "heard" that the people there are dangerous. Now we're afraid to cross the Tappan Zee Bridge on our way home through New York because it might crumble from beneath it.

Marketing takes advantage of all of these lovely fears, selling us products that will protect us from imagined dangers lurking just around the corner. Politicians take advantage of the same fears and otherwise incompetent people end up in public office because they've convinced us that they will protect us from our worst fears. Well meaning parents take advantage of the fear as well, and even plant new seeds of fear... you've seen it just this week I'll bet... some parent yelling over his shoulder, "Bye Johnny, we're leaving. You're going to be left here if you don't...." fill in the blank. Control by fear manipulation. It isn't healthy, folks.

"But," you say, "The world is getting so much worse! There is so much more to be afraid of! There ARE crazy people who abduct children and do terrible things to them. There ARE people who take guns to school and hijack airplanes. That bridge DID collapse and it is the

same age as the one down the street!" You're right. Bad things happen. Bad things have always happened. There have always been terrorists of one sort or another (or "freedom fighters" depending on which side of the conflict you fall). There have always been mentally imbalanced people who have gone on violent sprees. It is a tragic fact of humanity. It may be that there are "more" of these types of things happening in the modern era. However, it may just be that we are hearing about them more. If one child is harmed, on the other side of the continent coverage will be nationwide and on every news network broadcast until every parent knows and fears the same fate for her child. If one plane crashes, by accident, landing on a too short runway in Brazil, every person in every airport, at every boarding gate will be watching and rewatching the terrible footage as they shuffle through the line to board their own, surely doomed, flight... better take a valium to ease the fear. That crash does not change the fact that, statistically, flying is far safer than driving to church... yet few of us are terrified of heading out to our Wednesday night service, in spite of the danger drunk drivers present between here and there. Why is that? Why do we fear the less dangerous thing and ignore the greater risk?

It would be difficult to deny that there is a culture of fear in America. It doesn't even matter too much why we have it, or how we got here, there is likely no changing it, over all. The question is, do we have to participate? Should we be ruled by irrational fears marketed to us by people with an agenda (selling a product, getting elected, increasing broadcast

REFORM IN EDUCATION AND LIVING INSTRUCTION FOR THE YOUNG

ratings, selling books...). Of course not. Romans 8:15 comes to mind: "For you have not received a spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba father." Bondage, another translation said slavery, causes us to fall back into fear. Bondage to what? To the media, to what other people are telling us to believe instead of meditating on what Scripture tells us to believe (about ourselves, others, the world at large...) to any number of things, I suppose. Bondage in our minds and hearts, slavery in our minds and heart leads to fear. Mental bondage: slavery to the way we've been taught to think... or not think. The antidote? Logic. Emotional bondage: slavery to the way we've been conditioned to respond emotionally. Both lead to fear. Scripture says we have not been given a spirit of fear... so if that fear isn't from God, where is it from? We've been given a spirit of adoption, of sonship with Jesus Christ himself. What is there to fear?

A friend gave me a book recently: Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You. It's a short book about growing up. It is a book for parents, pastors, counselors, anyone really, who might come in contact with a person on the process to maturity, or who is maturing herself. This book discusses many things, but one particular point that stuck out to me was the two types of relationships we have: Those ruled by love bonds (in which we are motivated by love for the other person, or that person's love for us) and the other sort, ruled by fear bonds (in which fear of rejection, retaliation, manipulation, guilt etc... is the impetus for maintaining the relationship). As a parent, this made me very conscious of the way in which I interact

with and motivate my children. I don't want to perpetuate this Culture of Fear by directly, or indirectly causing my children to develop fear based relationships. I don't want to raise my children to be manipulated by the emotional triggers used by ad agencies to sell products by developing fears just below the conscious level. I want my children to be free people, emotionally. I want them to be logical thinkers and to exercise discernment with a full realization of the spirit of adoption which God has graciously granted to them.

There is so much more that could be said. That has been said, by folks who've thought more deeply about this than I have. However, as a Mom, speaking to other Moms, I think it is important to be conscious of this pervasive Culture of Fear in which we live. It is not that we should have NO fear, but those things which we fear should be just fears... such as fear for a child falling off the edge of the Grand Canyon when he's climbing on the OUTSIDE of the guard rail. That is a just fear. We, as parents, need to exercise discernment regarding just fears. If Grandpa molested Mama, then of course he gets no unsupervised time with the grandkids, no matter how much "better" he seems. That's just common sense and certainly just fear. However, we don't need to cause our children to carry these heavy fears within their own hearts. It would be like asking a six year old to carry a huge suitcase of books up a flight of stairs... it is too heavy for him and the weight could crush him if he falls. The same is true of grown up, just fears, their weight is heavy, and we risk crushing little hearts and spirits.

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My constant effort in this arena is to step outside the Culture of Fear and THINK instead of just reacting. To this end, I rarely watch TV news. The same information can be had on line without being bombarded with ramped up, intentionally fear inducing images. It allows me to read (maybe from several perspectives) the same information and draw my own conclusions about the sensible course of action based on the new information. This same effort also causes me to take a big step back from much of the "modern" parenting information and think carefully about what to include in the day to day lives of our children. They may talk to strangers, but they may never go with anyone who isn't Mama or Daddy approved. They may play out of sight of the house, but they must stay together and take radios... they have no idea that this is partially due to the risk of abduction, they just know it is safer if there is an accident... the other part is too heavy for them to carry right now. They know that if they get lost in a store or a subway station that they sit right down and don't move a muscle, we'll come get them. They've never, ever been introduced to the idea that we might LEAVE them somewhere, on purpose, because they were uncooperative. In short, I swallow big lumps of culturally induced fear that I KNOW in my mind to be illogical in order to allow my children a carefree, fearless, 1950's style childhood. It is an effort. It requires me to carry their heavy suitcases. However, it is my hope (and so far this seems to be bearing out) that they will become persons who are also capable of swallowing their lumps of knee jerk reaction cultural fear in order to live purposefully peaceful, joyful lives. If we are afraid of

everything, and everyone is a potential "bad guy" then how do we ever extend the hand of Christ to those people when we're separated by a brick wall of "I'm afraid of you?" I repeat to myself, and others, a maxim of my father's which has become a mantra of mine: "99.9% of people are good folks, just doing the best they can with what they've got." In my experience, this has been proven true.

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