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Time Flies

It seems like fall has arrived overnight. Labor Day, the last big weekend of summer came and went with lazy afternoons in the pool and the company of good friends. Immediately on it's heels the weather has turned crisp and the maple trees overhead are beginning to blush at the thought of undressing for the winter. Where has the summer gone? I'm quite sure we're not the only ones who are looking around wondering how we got here and where the first two thirds of the year has evaporated to. I know we're not, because I hear other mothers lamenting the same. The carefree days of summer have passed and with the first days of fall come a lot of other firsts: long sleeves, socks, carmel apples and school books. It has been fun to watch our friends get excited to start the new school year and hear the reports of their first joyous days as everyone is eager to settle down to the business of organized learning, once again. This year has been a little different for us. We have been schooling all summer, to make up for our nomadic existence, and so our kids are solidly into their school routine and are plugging away at their lessons anticipating a few months off this winter.

I don't know if anyone else looks at the calendar with the same sense of desperation that I do. It seems that every year the clock ticks faster and the month is gone before I've even gotten used to writing the date properly. I can't believe that almost six months have passed since we arrived back in the USA. I can't believe there are only three months left in this year. I can't believe there are only six weeks left before we head west. I can't believe there are only four months left until we take off to wander a while again. Tempus Fugit.

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The only thing I know to do when I look at the calendar and feel the waterfall of days rushing between my fingers is to hang on for dear life. To reach into the water and grab today and do my best to dry it off and slow it down, at least for a minute. In spite of the rushing water of time each day still has 24 hours. We awake each morning with a clean slate and at least 12 hours to spend as we choose. I'm trying to be extra mindful of that this fall. To wake unhurried and survey the landscape before my feet hit the floor. I'm trying to walk intentionally through the morning's schooling and spend the afternoons accomplishing a couple of the tasks on the never ending list that is motherhood. I'm trying to stop and smell the flowers for a few minutes each day... or the crisp fall air, in this case. I'm working to make time for a glass of wine and a walk with my husband each evening, even if it's only a ten minute walk to the campground store to buy ice to keep tomorrow's milk cool until morning.

I'm looking at that calendar and feeling like I'm on the slip and slide we make out of construction grade roll plastic on my parents' back hill in the summer time... no stopping, covered with grass clippings and usually resulting in a collision with cedar trees at the bottom of the hill. Life is messy and there's no stopping the slide, for sure. I don't know how we'll get it all in, frankly. The necessary work, the schooling, the mid-west month, a Canadian Christmas and two months of walkabout before spring. But I know we will, somehow. We always do. I seem to have better success when I don't open the calendar, but instead focus on just this one day. Six months is overwhelming. Today is easy. Today I just have to teach Ezra about fact families, Elisha the finer points of identifying and punctuating direct quotes, Gabriel the conversion of fractions and help Hannah identify which of four states has the lowest egg prices for her Geography project. I have to remove some pine sap from Tony's bike seat so he can ride it to work tomorrow without ruining his pants, and make some yogurt for tomorrow's breakfast. I need to sweet talk the campground management out of an extra two weeks after the official close date and make artichoke quiche for dinner. I need to compile the newsletter and work on an article for a travel magazine. I can do that. I can also make time to play Ligretto (our favorite Italian card game!) with the kids and work on a baby gift for Mrs. Green and pack for our weekend with the Klekar Family.. That will be enough for today. I don't dare think too much about tomorrow, never mind next week. If I do, I'll have a hard time enjoying today.

As the school year starts I know life gets busy for everyone. If you're like me and the avalanche of days seems overwhelming, may I encourage you to just close the calendar? Of course we have to plan and once in a while we have to look forward to "what's next," but sometimes we just need to let tomorrow take care of itself and live this one day that we are given fully. It is the only day we really have. Yesterday is gone forever. Tomorrow is not promised. Everyday has it's own trouble and it's own blessings, why do we borrow the one and miss the other for the sake of a calendar? Let's unite as Mothers in this one thing, and enjoy this one day we have.

A Quote

We don't have much room in our camper. It is 21 feet long and there are six of us living in it. Wall space is completely covered with cabinets and mirrors. I have only one small black picture frame balanced on the valance over our dining table. It holds a quote that I found in an import shop in Kingston, Ontario, earlier this year. It helps me with my resolution to live each moment fully, maybe it will help you too.

Remain in the nowhere else.
Be here.

On-line Resources

The following is a list of websites I've run across lately that might be of help to your family:

Farmer's Market Finder: This is a great website that will help you locate your local farmer's markets, no matter where in the USA you live... or how much you travel!

<http://apps.ams.usda.gov/FarmersMarkets/>

Homeschool Buyers Co-op: This is a FREE resource that will provide discounts on lots of the things you are purchasing anyway, as well as freebies and the opportunity to participate in group buys of special products. Check it out! <http://www.homeschoolbuyersco-op.org/>

Fun School: This website has lots of games for kids to play online that reinforce basic skills... and some that are just plain fun! <http://funschool.kaboose.com/index.html>

Dance Mat Typing: My friend turned me on to this a few years ago... it is a free typing program online by the BBC. While we were in Africa last winter my big kids all learned to type (and type well!) using this program. It's fun and it's free! <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/>

Teaching Writing to Young Children

For many parents, simply the title of this article is enough to strike fear into their hearts. Writing. That hated high school subject. The chore most dreaded following Christmas (WRITING those thank you notes). The most nebulous portion of the SAT (how DO they actually grade those essays?). The college class we all put off until the last possible moment and yawned our way through. Writing. Some say it can be learned. Other's say it's a gift. The truth lies somewhere in the middle, although leaning strongly toward the "learned" camp.

In the new millennium, few people truly write. E-mail doesn't count. Neither does your grocery list, or a note to get your kid out of gym class... no matter how creative your explanation of his sprained ankle is. Most of us don't even write letters, much less memoirs, or articles or books. Most of us sit down at a computer, or stare at a blank paper and ask the same question we asked in tenth grade: "What do I write?" Or, we know what we want to write, but are disappointed with the end product because we lack the mechanics as well as the art to really do our ideas justice. It is difficult.

It is bad enough to struggle with one's own writing. It is entirely another thing to, with great fear and trepidation, try to teach our children to write. It is one of the most frequently asked questions. One of the greatest concerns of home educators: HOW can I teach my child to do this terribly difficult thing that I myself find mortally painful and am only marginally successful at? The answer, is blessedly simple. I call it the three Rs (no, not those 3Rs) They are as follows: Relax, Read, Respond. Of course, this is a highly simplified version, but it will carry you quite a long way.

The first, most necessary thing, is for parents to take a deep breath, and relax. If your children see that you are terrified of this and that you think it is the hardest thing ever, they will adopt your attitude and you'll all be miserable. STOP looking at what curriculum everyone else is using. STOP freaking out about what kind of assignments your child is NOT completing and START engendering positive feelings about writing in yourself and working towards a "print rich environment," as the professional educators among us would call it. Attitude is everything. Relax. You can do this.

Next, read. Read, read, read, READ to your children. If you're pregnant with #1 read to her. If you've got ten around the dinner table, read to them. Whether they are toddlers and it's picture books or they're middle aged kids and it's Ben-Hur and the Colonists (our two right now, though not in the same book, of course!) or whether they're young adults and it's the Wall Street journal for dinner time debate. Read to one another. This is perhaps the single biggest factor in teaching a child to write. Why? Because it is through reading that vocabulary is developed, that the differences in style between Mark Twain and E.B. White are appreciated, and that the flow of good language washes over the ears and into the hearts of young children. Writing styles are not developed in a vacuum. A teacher

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cannot expect a child to find his voice, literarily speaking, if he has not first listened to the voices of many others. It is the same as teaching a toddler to speak. They listen for nearly two years before they find much to say for themselves. Why do we expect children who have not "listened" adequately to be able to "voice" themselves on paper? Do not make the mistake of assuming that once your child is functionally literate and is reading "Captain Underpants" or some such pop-culture nonsense that your job as family reader is over. It is our job as parents not only to direct the literary diet that the child himself consumes, but to continue to spoon feed him (force feed if necessary!) the good stuff as long as he's under our roof. Even adult children like to be read to... I know, I am one!

The third R is Respond. Having been read to in a relaxed environment, the child should, after a period of time, be asked to respond. This does NOT necessarily mean in writing. A four year old can respond to a paragraph long passage from Aesop's Fables by retelling the moral of the story. A seven year old can retell a whole chapter. A nine year old a whole book... if you have enough time to listen! The first response that ought to be required of a child is oral. Have your little children narrate (re-tell) what they have heard you read. Then ask them what they liked best and why. In this way they will parrot the style of the author, use new vocabulary in context and form a personal connection with the literature. Make it relaxed, light hearted, and fun. When children get a little older, say seven or eight, they can begin writing short paragraphs. It is at this point that most kids start to cry, and some mothers too. The child, if he has been read to enough, will have lots to say and an active imagination... but the mechanics of writing will still be difficult. What's a mom to do? Stand over the child and yell? Steal the joy of writing by making him rewrite fifteen times to dot all the Is and fix punctuation? No! It's so much simpler... have the child tell you what he wants to write, you faithfully transcribe his words, and then, he copies it neatly into his writing book. In this way a child enjoys the creative aspect of writing. He learns proper form (by copying yours). And he has none of the negative reinforcement of that dreaded red pen that haunts you to this day. This approach should take you through the first several years. After fourth or fifth grade, the child will quite naturally start writing on his own, for fun, and at that point, you can begin a formal writing course, without fear. Until then, Relax, Read and allow your child to Respond. Relax.

Time to Catch On!

by Stephanie Payton

My mind thinks in terms of lists. Everything I want to do on a daily basis or over the longer haul of life is on a list somewhere in my head. One of the lists that I visit frequently is the list of things that I want to teach my children. These things include simple tasks, such as cleaning their bathroom and bedroom appropriately. It also includes good manners and academia. Highest on the list, though, would be character qualities—things such as goodness, gentleness, compassion, kindness, and unselfishness. Now I know that many things in life are better “caught, than taught.” As much as I wish my words alone could bring about change, it is my actions that speak the loudest. Recently, I had this point driven home in my heart.

Scott and I took the girls to visit their Great-Grandpa and Great-Grandma Lucas. These great grandparents live in a nursing home. They have Alzheimer’s, but live in different areas because Grandma is in a wheelchair, and Grandpa is not. As I looked around, I was struck again by the circle of life. As my three precious girls, ages 6, 4, and 3, walked through the halls, you might have thought the President had arrived. Eyes that were dull just moments before, began to light up at this glimpse of youth. There were smiles galore, and more than a few hands reaching out for a touch of this youthful innocence. One woman could hardly contain (and in the end didn’t!) her need to wrap her arms around these vibrant little bodies.

As all this was happening, I stole a glimpse at my daughters to see how THEY were reacting. No surprise there. They were hesitant, shy, and not at all comprehending why their presence was causing such a stir. And they were just a little afraid. I also noticed they were looking to me, as if to say, “How are we supposed to be acting here—show us, PLEASE!”

Do you ever feel battle-weary, constantly trying to fight cultural norms? It seems as if so much of my instruction to my children is teaching them to NOT be a way that they are seeing modeled around them. In most ways, I think I’m writing new “stuff” on the tablet of their heart. But I am also working to mark out other things that have snuck in there, and replace them with



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godly virtues. One thing I desire for them to have, which is hard to find in the world around us, is a heart of compassion. As I looked at these men and women in the nursing home, let me tell you what I saw.

There was a woman, probably around age 50, sitting in a wheelchair while working on a puzzle. I don't know this woman's story of how she came to be there. But the girls and I went over to talk to her and admire her work. After discussing her latest puzzle, we talked about the weekly manicures she gets. She had beautiful nails, of the like that I will never have, and the girls were positively enamored with the deep pink shade. It was a color that little girls' dreams are made of!

There was another woman, sitting in a special chair to accommodate the fact that she had no legs. I've seen her there before, and these amputations have been somewhat recent. She never says much, but her alert eyes look on with interest, and she follows our movement around the room. I wonder if anyone gets a glimpse of the soul behind the eyes?

Another woman sat waiting for her dinner, talking to someone that no one else in the room could see. She was adamant that Mother Mary would be her guest at this meal, and also that "they" were coming soon to take her out of there. I wonder what lies trapped in a mind so vivid with color? If she had the capacity to overrule her own mind, what stories would she tell?

Then there was my husband's sweet grandma. A woman who used to absolutely love to see our children, and hold them. A woman who used to buy special drinks that she always wanted to share when we came to visit. A woman who now doesn't even know her own daughter, let alone anyone more remotely removed from the family. What goes on in her heart and mind? And does she know how God is caring for her, even now?

We visited Grandpa, who was sitting in a room with 8 women, all looking curiously at the girls. Grandpa was so tired, all he could do was lay his head down on the table. No recognition in his eyes, this man whose hospital visit brought my husband and I together for the first time. There was a time he was convinced that he got sick for the sole purpose of bringing Scott and I together. Now he lives in a world where sounds are all muffled, and his weariness makes it hard to desire life. He was the spiritual patriarch of the family. Does he still know God's touch on his life? And does he still offer up his wonderful prayers?

I believe that God surely holds a special place in his heart for those who are sick and fragile among us. Which brings me back to my original thought that so much of life is caught, not taught. That is so profound, and yet so easily forgotten. I could stand before my children, and talk until I'm blue in the face about what they should feel in their hearts. I could give them lists of character qualities, and things that God says are good, and have it fall on hearts that cannot hear. Trust me, there is a very real part of my character that simply wants to beat the information into them, and have them parrot it back to me like good little students!

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As much as I would like to do that, I must examine my own heart and see what things I am showing them. Am I showing them a heart that loves others, no matter what their "status?" Am I showing a heart that finds joy in doing the mundane things of life? Am I showing them that there are things that bring much more joy and value than just what money can buy?

In this particular situation, I walked along beside them. Hopefully, I showed them how God cares for these people. Hopefully, they saw a bit of God's love and compassion for these fragile ones. Together we smiled, we laughed, we admired necklaces and nails. We allowed our youth to touch these men and women's aged frailty. I pray that God's love was poured out on these people that we came in contact with.

Well, my lists continue. Always will, I suppose. It's hard to be organized without multiple lists, right? And there are plenty of lists laid out for us in the Bible, so I'm sure it's a Biblical quality to have! But when it comes to teaching my children, I hope my actions will set the example over my words. Because I think, if I would just step out of the way and quit TEACHING all the time, they just might CATCH ON!

A Recipe: Vegetarian Tacos

2 large tomatoes, chopped

1 red onion, chopped

1 red pepper, chopped

1 green pepper, chopped

2 avacadoe, peeled and chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 bunch cilantro, chopped

1 can corn, drained

1 can black beans, drained and rinsed

juice of two limes

grated cheddar, or monterey jack cheese

tortillas

Combine all of the chopped ingredients with the canned ingredients in a bowl. Squeeze the juice of two limes over the ingredients and stir to combine well. Serve in tortillas topped with cheese.

**We're about 60% vegetarian at our house and this is one of our favorite quick, inexpensive and very nutritious meals that doesn't even require heating up the stove! How great is that on a rushed weeknight?!

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.

Book Reviews... on a variety of topics!

This Country of Ours by H.E. Marshall (Published by Yesterday's Classics, Chapel Hill, NC)
Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall wrote prolifically for young people on the histories of various countries at the turn of the last century. This particular book chronicles the history of the United States, beginning with early exploration, through the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. It is highly readable, very interesting and makes a great "overview" book for early American History. We are using it as a read-aloud this fall and the children beg for the next chapter over lunch each day!

Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan

This has been a popular book in recent years and I'm a bit behind the curve in just now reading it. Pollan takes an in depth look at the origins of four meals and in the process gives us a thorough introduction to the American way of eating, and introduces us to our own food manufacturing systems, the good, the bad and the ugly. I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in better nutrition and the machinations behind the piles of shiny veggies and neatly stacked boxes of food in the supermarket.

Moby Dick by Herman Melville

Until Tony started reading this book aloud to the kids last month I forgot how FUNNY it is. Everyone knows the famous opening lines, but if you haven't read the whole story, may I encourage you to pick up a copy at the library and join us on the seafaring adventure of a lifetime in search of that elusive white whale? It's a classic!

The Mission of Motherhood by Sally Clarkson

Need a shot in the arm from time to time? Me too. Sally Clarkson is one of my favorite authors on this curvy path of motherhood. Her joyful, encouraging approach to our role as washers, sweepers, boo-boo kissers, educators, cooks, and taxi drivers always helps me to lift my eyes from the particular mess that overwhelms me on any given day and see the "big picture." If you haven't read any of Sally's books, I recommend that you start with this one. It will be a breath of fresh air in your world, I promise!

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices by Paul Fleischman

this beautiful book contains poems to be read by two people at once. One person reads the column on the left, one on the right, where there are words in both columns, they read them together. Paul Fleischman won a Newberry Award for this lovely book. It would make a great addition to your bookshelf and to any child's collection of poetry. You'll get so much joy out of reading these together, a poetry duet! Here's the first poem in the book to whet your whistle.

Grasshoppers

		leaf to leaf	
Sap's rising		stem to stem	leaf to leaf
	Ground's warming	plant to plant	stem to stem
Grasshoppers are	Grasshoppers are		Grass
hatching out	hatching out	leapers	leapers
Autumn laid eggs		Grass	
	splitting	bounders	bounders
Young stepping			Grass
	into spring	springers	springers
Grasshoppers	Grasshoppers	Grass	
hopping	hopping	soarers	soarers
high		Leapfrogging	Leapfrogging
Grassjumpers	Grassjumpers	longjumping	longjumping
jumping	jumping	grasshoppers	grasshoppers
	far		
Vaulting from			

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Is our attempt to share an amazing adventure with other families. Through our web-site you can follow along with our progress through the travelogue, listen to podcasts of the sounds of the people and places we visit, contact us to ask questions and suggest route changes as well as create a unique learning experience for your children. Check it out at:

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