

time went on, I began to add my own touches to my goodies. Now, I feel very good about both areas. So much so, that I have designed my OWN patterns and my OWN recipes. (a REAL accomplishment for me, if you know what I mean!)

In Homeschooling I have found that there are going to be areas that I am simply not as good at as other areas. Yet, this hindrance need not cripple the education of my children. Instead, I have found some keys to help teach these areas! Even drawing!

First, I have put my children in direct contact with artists. Artists LOVE their art AND art by others! Little things that they teach along the way become awesome lessons, not just as techniques, but even more so as a passion for the subject! Second, there is a real reality about art. Some of our favorite artists are either dead or out of reach for day-by-day instruction. Well, except when we get in direct contact with them through their art and through biographies about them. For this reason, we have brought those artists to OUR homes as our teachers through copies of their prints and their biographies. All we have to do is sit down and let the artist teach to us. The lessons are priceless! Finally, nothing can teach drawing like actually having the best tools and using them on a regular basis to create! So, how have we accomplished teaching this study when it is not MY study? When I do not know much about it? We give our children access to artists, past and present. We give them the best curriculum to help them learn techniques of the masters. (See our listing for How Great Thou Art and Visual Manna Curriculums. Both are PERFECT for instructing children in drawing AND in art appreciation!) We give them the best tools and supplies. And we turn them loose! Drawing instruction can be that easy!

### Music Studies...

Sound easy? Well, there are other areas of the Fine Arts that are JUST as easy to teach! One such area is that of Music Studies. Music Studies are a MUST for every homeschool! We are a “music” family. My husband and children are very gifted. I am very APPRECIATIVE—just know that in heaven I will be able to sing **The Star-Spangled Banner** (don’t know why I want to, but it just seems to be THE SONG that every gifted singer should sing!) Music is an integral part of our home and family life. I think that one reason is because of how beautiful music can be. One great example of some of the beauty that comes into the home from Music/Literature is from one of our recent lessons. Here are highlights from our reading in **Gift of Music** on Haydn...

“He respected God and the order in His creation. He saw beyond the momentary excitement of violently changing the present political, religious, and educational systems without putting into the void a real base—found only in true Christianity. Those who deny the truth of Scripture never find freedom. Haydn accepted his life, hard as it was at times, and found it good. He recognized that there are fresh possibilities ahead for those willing to be builders in life rather than destroyers. Haydn wrote some of his richest and happiest music toward the end of his life. He said on one occasion, “God gave me a cheerful heart, so He will surely forgive me if I serve Him cheerfully.” When obstacles came into his life, and he found it hard to persevere, he said that often something within him whispered, “There are but few contented and happy individuals here

below; everywhere grief and care prevail; perhaps your labor may one day be the source from which the weary and worn, or the person burdened with affairs, may derive a few moments of rest and refreshment...Because Haydn did prevail over his hardships with stubborn tenacity and resourcefulness, he became one of the most independent spirits in musical history, and one of the most deliberate and disciplined. He always found composition a labor, and so he set for himself regular hours to compose. When ideas did not come, he prayed for them. When they came, he worked with unremitting industry..."

Haydn worked as a musical director for a country home of Prince Paul Esterhazy. Haydn's explanation for his original compositions for this Hungarian prince was...

"I was cut off from the world; there was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original."

Truly beautiful work like this brings us inspiration to come apart to become truly original as well! Yes, his work and that of many other gifted creators...brings refreshment and rest to weary souls! Want a little beauty, inspiration, refreshment, and rest in your home? Want to subdue and have dominion over this area? Want to bring glory to God? Want to reap all of the blessings that are yours? Bring in Music Studies!

I know! I know! You are thinking, "BUT! Cindy! NOT ANOTHER THING TO DO!! I can barely get the children all bathed and fed each day!" Can't handle one more thing to do? Scared of the "unknown" with those subjects that YOU do not even know about, much less know where to begin teaching them?

Beloved, teaching the Music Studies is perhaps the **EASIEST** to bring into your home with little or no preparation of your own because all we have to do is bring our children in direct contact with the composers and their work. The lessons just happen! Want to know how to bring the Music Studies into your Homeschool in a nutshell?? Well, here are step-by-step how-to's for teaching those Music Lessons. I think you will find these easy for you too!

### Step-by-Step Teaching Music Studies...

- **Pick one composer to study every six months** (You may prefer to cover more composers. Some moms study a different composer every six weeks!). We like to really get to know our composers and all of the works by them that we can find.
- **First, try listening to only one of his/her great works!**
- **When interest peaks, read a biography about the composer and allow the children to narrate a sketch of the composer for their Music Notebooks!**
- **Look for symphonies, concerts, or recitals to hear the music live.**
- **Once the family is pretty familiar with the composer's work, introduce more works by that composer.**
- **Help children to begin their own collections of various types of music: Classical music, Gospel Music, Praise Music, Folk Music, etc.**

- **Turn on music every day.** We begin our days with praise music in our home. It seems to set the tone. We also try to listen every day to Classical Music for about 1/2 hour minimum. We play it gently in the background during chores, naps, as going to sleep, travel, leisure, school-work, meal preparation, playing, drawing, nature walks. Our children truly love ALL kinds of music. There is nothing quite like shopping while they recognize a rare piece of Classical Music. Well, except when they grow to prefer the truly great and beautiful to that which is shallow and ugly!
- **Begin your collection with one great collection** such as Vivaldi's **Four Seasons** or anything by Mozart! You can find collections very reasonable at stores such as Kmart, Wal-mart, Best Buy, or Circuit City!
- **Try copying narratives** from **Color the Classics** into their Music Notebooks. The coloring pages included in their books are PERFECT for adding into the Notebooks too. If you want some easy music lessons for on-the-go, try tapes such as **Classical Kids** or **Moments with the Masters** to teach biographies of composers in a fun way!
- **Read stories written around compositions** such as **The Nutcracker**, **Peter and the Wolf**, **Carnival of the Animals**. Put Narrations of those stories in their Music Notebooks!
- **Having a lack of interest?** Try to get to know your child's favorite music, then they will be more inclined to get to know yours! The depth of relationship that is there when you KNOW that favorite song of your daughter or mother or grandmother, can really cut through the generations. Another thing that may be a necessity is cutting out hindrances that contribute to dividing the family...TV, teen magazines, pop music! Instead focus on making memories and getting to know one another better!

We try to introduce our children to all sorts of music from all throughout history. The depth of study is unbelievable when we bring in the beauty of great music alongside of our studies! Give it a try and you will find it is not just awesome, but it is easy too!

### Step-by-Step Teaching Poetry...

Oh, finding the Fine Arts to be easier to teach than you could have ever dreamed? Well, the next area of Fine Arts is just as easy to teach (if not easier!) as the first two areas. In fact, it was really kinda funny how Poetry Studies made their way into our homeschool without efforts or intentions by me in the least. They snuck in through our Copywork lessons!

We began using Copywork for daily Language Arts lessons over 9 years ago. In looking for daily gems, there were mainstays we could always depend upon on those days that we did not find gems in our read alouds. Yep, we always found great Copywork in the Bible and in poems! As matter of fact, I lovingly call our poetry books, "No-Brainer-Language Arts Lessons!" The punctuation is there, the correct spelling is there, good grammar is there, new vocabulary words are there, and usually, great literature is there...all in a poem! Plus, as we have bought great poetry collections through the years, we have great op-

tions for Copywork on most any day for all ages we teach!

The neat thing is that not only do I love the convenience and great models, but my children have gravitated toward Poetry naturally. They both have extensive collections of poetry that have resulted in huge Poetry Notebooks! Want to give this a try for your home? Have no idea how to begin? Well, here are some step-by-step tips for teaching Poetry Studies the EASYWAY...

### Step-by-Step Teaching Poetry...

- **Use Poetry for Reading Aloud.** Take time to enjoy poetry. Make it a part of your family memories. When reading, take turns reading beautifully! There is no greater “reader” for your beginning readers than sweet children’s poetry!
- **Pick a few good Poetry books** (*Famous Poems Old and New*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Child’s Garden of Verses*). Have them in your home. GIVE your children EASY access to them!
- **Use Poetry for Copywork!** Poetry has been our family’s chosen Copywork on those “no-brainer” days when we really are just getting work done and need a quick lesson without having to access too many brain cells! The funny thing has been how our PASSION for poetry has developed as we have found so many fun favorites! Give it a try! Easy Language Arts lessons AND developing a taste for the excellent! Can’t beat that! Don’t forget to ILLUSTRATE! Hang in your home/ give as gifts.
- **Memorize and recite beloved poetry.** This has been an element in a full education for hundreds of years. Over 100 years ago, Charlotte Mason wrote in *Home Education*,  
“All children have it in them to recite; it is an imprisoned gift waiting to be delivered...The child should speak beautiful thoughts so beautifully, with such delicate rendering of each nuance of meaning, that he becomes to the listener the interpreter of the author’s thought...Consider what appreciation, sympathy, power of expression this implies...The child is led to find the just expression of the thought for himself; never is the poor teacher allowed to set a pattern—‘say this as I say it.’ The ideas are kept well within the child’s range, and the expression is his own.”
- **Post copies of poetry around the home!**
- **Make a notebook with collections of beloved poetry for each child!** My daughter has precious collections of Robert Louis Stevenson, her personal favorite. Her collection is so very special to her. It not only has her favorite poet, it also has her precious hand-drawn illustrations for each poem. Too priceless!
- **Focus on one poet at a time!** We did this quite by accident! Our children seemed to naturally gravitate toward MORE poetry by poets that they liked along the way. We also learned more research

skills by looking for more work by those poets.

- **In all of your studies, remember to pull in poetry.** American History study is incomplete without reading Henry Wordsworth Longfellow's poem, **Paul Revere's Ride**. Nature Studies are dull and lifeless without the study of poetry alongside. Bible History is incomplete without the Psalms alongside showing the thoughts of the hearts of men and women during all of history. Just tie in poetry into all studies to give balance and beauty!
- **Study poetry in the Bible.**
- **Study terms** (rhyme, meter, couplet, alliteration, sonnet, limerick, metaphor).
- **Study a poet** (lives, works, worldviews).
- **Try YOUR hand at poetry!**
- **KEEP a Poetry Notebook!** Include poems that are copied in daily Copywork lessons, narrations about poets, timelines showing the lives of poets, research behind the poems, etc!

Easy enough? Yep, it is that easy! We don't have to get bogged down in details. The goal is to bring the children to the best and let them do appreciating for themselves! They will begin to appreciate for themselves the beauty of words fitly spoken, then you will know that poetry is bearing fruit!

### Literature Studies...

Well, last-but-certainly-not-least, Literature Studies! I have to tell you something that you would NEVER believe by knowing me now. I HATED Literature in my school years. The required readings were never what I would have chosen to read or still would choose to read now for that matter! When I began homeschooling, I had no idea what we should read, much less where to begin choosing books so I would be sure not to miss ANY of the best books, especially since I wanted for MY children to have the very best education possible! If that were not enough, I also struggled with my great need for TIME to fit in one more thing into my already busy schedule. That was until I read a very important quote by Charlotte Mason that changed my whole view of education! She wrote in **Home Education**,

"A child has not begun his education until he has acquired the habit of reading to himself, with interest and pleasure, books fully on a level with his intelligence. I am speaking now of his lesson books, which are all to be written in a style of insufferable twaddle, probably because they are written by persons who have never chanced to meet a child. ...Therefore, the selection of their first lesson-books is a matter of grave importance, because it rests with these to give children the idea that knowledge is supremely attractive and that reading is delightful. Once the habit of reading his lesson books with delight is set up in a child, his education is—not completed, but ensured; he will go on for himself in spite of the obstructions which school too commonly throws in his way."

I knew that this was TRUTH! I had walked across the stage to get my diploma having all of the skills I

needed to learn. I had made the grade. And, if you had asked me at the time, I would have told you that I knew **EVERYTHING** that I needed to know! (until I began to homeschool and realized that indeed there was **MORE** to learn!) What was the difference in the education that I had attained and the one that I wanted for my children?

In my education, I could fill in the blanks and make the grades. But, truth was, I did not graduate feeling like I really **KNEW** anything well. I had crammed for the tests and made the grades, but never developed any intimacies with any of the topics on the tests. I had gone through all of the years of my schooling without failing even one class, yet in all of those years, I had never fallen in love with learning! I could not and still cannot articulate the loss in my own education. But, I did know I wanted **MORE** for my children.

You can imagine my delight when I wandered across this awesome quote by Charlotte Mason. I wanted the education that she described in this passage. That was **TRUE** education. It was the beginning of a lifestyle of learning for **LIFE**! Sure, the children learned the skills for learning, but there was more! They also learned at an early age to love learning! They learned to take delight in learning for the sake of feeding their hungry minds, not for merely passing the test! Now, as we have seen the years go by, I can attest to the education that is available for children when we give them an education based upon great literature. It is a **FULL** education! **ALIVING** education! And it is **EASY**!

So, want to know how to implement Literature Studies the **EASYWAY**? Let me share some tips...

### Tips for Teaching Your Children Through Great Literature...

- **Read aloud as a family!** Choose the most quiet, relaxing, uninterrupted time of your day. Curl up and read to your little ones. You will build memories...teach lessons without having to follow long, difficult, frustrating lesson plans...and learn together! We have chosen right before bedtime. We have captive audiences...less interruptions...and if we want to read longer, we can read as long as we want without interfering with other to-do's!
- **Always keep a read aloud going.** Follow the pace and interests of your family. Choose those books that instill the qualities and character that needs to be developed in your family members. Use books that help to teach lessons that are number one on your list of priorities. We love books that challenge us toward greatness. My picks are reprints from the past. Lamplighter Books, Bethlehem Books, Beautiful Feet Books, and Wallbuilders are just a few of the companies that are committed to bringing us the best literature from the past. We read these as a family **AND** we bring these titles to other families through our book store. Limited on your budget? Just buy one at a time. Pick the ones that will encourage your family to step heavenward!
- **Read whole books that are introduced in Literature books!** Literature books usually only have snippets of the **WHOLE** book included. Why not dig up the original versions so you can have the whole book? Most libraries have the **WHOLE BOOK** available for you to check out at any time!
- **Wrap your literature around a person you would like to study.** Look at an author, inventor,

theologian, historical figure, etc. Dig into the lives of great people! Look at the time period they lived in, a topic of their interest, their favorite books, etc. Dig deep! The deeper you dig, the more that is taken into the depths of the heart, soul, and mind of your child!

- **Wrap your literature around a topic you would like to study in your lessons.** There is no need for a textbook, a great book is the perfect teacher!
- **Match reading with history time periods!** Take a look at books that were written before or during the period you are studying. Discern the effect that literature had on that period of history. OR...take a look at that period of time through the eyes of the author.
- **Bring in all subjects through great literature!** (Guess you have an assurance of how EASY that is by now!)
- **Don't quit reading when they get older!** Several years ago I was reading in *What is a Family?* By Edith Schaeffer. She was writing about her tradition of reading to her children when they come home as adults to visit her. I kinda got a visual in my mind of ME going home to see my mother and how beautiful that would be for all of us to still curl up to hear Momma read, even with our children around our feet! I was ready to commit to reading aloud to my children, but there was more! As Mrs. Schaeffer continued sharing, she began to talk about her children's children bringing those lovely great grandchildren to see her—and hear HER read to them! You get it too? Isn't this awesome??? I want this! I want to have this precious tradition for all the generations that I will be blessed to see, but I want even more! I want to pass this tradition of bringing beauty into the home to my children. And to imagine that they are LEARNING as we build memories! This is truly THE EASY WAY to educate our children!

### Why Do We Give Our Children This Type of Education???

So, what is the big deal? There are other options to education. Why this one? Well, I think that Gladys Hunt, the author of *Honey for a Child's Heart*, shares my heart better than I can on paper. She writes,

“As Christian parents we are concerned about building whole people—people who are alive emotionally, spiritually, intellectually. The instruction to train up a child in the way he should go encompasses so much more than teaching him the facts of the gospel. It is to train the child's character, to give him high ideals, and to encourage integrity. It is to provide largeness of thought, creative thinking, imaginative wondering—an adequate view of God and His world. He can never really appreciate the finest without personal redemption. But many a redeemed person lives in a small, insecure world because he has never walked with God into a larger place, which is His domain.”

Isn't this awesome? I have to agree with Mrs. Hunt. When God created this world, He gave Adam and Eve a very interesting command to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue the earth, and have dominion over all in and on the earth. As I consider this command, which is ours today as we are living and preparing our children for their calling, there is no greater way to prepare our children for their calling than to give them a full education complete with EVEN studies that include the Fine Arts.

So many in our culture live purposeless, meaningless lives. Even Christians live in a “small, insecure

world” as Mrs. Hunt describes above. Yet, this is not how it HAS to be! Our children can be fruitful, multiply, replenish our culture, subdue their world, and have dominion over the ideas and information available to them. What a difference they can make in the lives of others!

### What About You???

So, where are you? Are there hindrances that need to be pushed through? Do you just need to begin in an area of difficulty...then, add those other areas of study as you gain confidence? Are you needing to just dig in and build upon the foundation of great literature? I will conclude with the rest of that quote above by Gladys Hunt,

“We have books and The Book at our disposal to use wisely for God’s glory. A young child, a fresh uncluttered mind, a world before him—to what treasures will you lead him? With what will you furnish his spirit?”

Happy Homeschooling THE EASY Way!



Excerpted From *Homeschooling The Easy Way Volume 1*

Need more help? See our companion tape later in our listing!

# Nature Study... The Easy Way!

By Cindy Rushton

*It is so neat to go back to articles and books that I have written over the years to see where God has taken me and how far we have already come. I lovingly bring this chapter from my book Nature Study the Easy Way as a treat for you during this season that always brings our hearts and minds (and BOD-IES) to God's creation. If you need more help in the basics of teaching science through nature study and great books, I urge you to take advantage of our monthly specials to get your own copy of our Nature Study the Easy Way book and audio tapes! PLUS! We have other great resources that you simply MUST have! Have fun...and enjoy God's awesome Creation!*

*Love, Cindy*



*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world!" Psalms*

*19: 1-4*

Could it be? Nature declares the glory of God? How awesome! Truly there could not be any speech...language...voice...or space on earth that could not hear nature utter its speech and knowledge of God. Well, except with me!

We began homeschooling eight years ago (now 12 years ago). My priority was to train up my children to serve and glorify God in all they do as children and throughout their entire lives. I wanted for my children to *know* my Lord! I set about to give my children a "Christian" education...funny to think how *OFF* I was! I equated "Christian" education with Prayer and Bible study in school when there was so much more that God could do in our home with our entire family if I would just trust Him. This is where our "ride" begins!

I say ride because all I have been able to do is hold on for dear life as God has directed us through all the turns...valleys...hills...and sometimes deserts of our journey Homeschooling. We have been blessed abundantly in the little things. We have grown in understanding of our dear Lord in all areas, but none more than Nature Study!

I had no idea going into Homeschooling that there were so many hidden treasures in nature that could show me the glory of God, much less that nature could speak truths about my Lord. I had gone all my life thinking that "outside" was just full of bugs and dirt. Except for the occasional day at the beach with my

family (I went to sunbathe!), I had very few excursions centered around nature after my childhood adventures of feeding mud-pies to my siblings and making pine-straw houses. I had no clue of all that I had been missing...until we learned about Nature Study!

You have got it! We began to venture out into nature step by step! I loved it! The only thing I knew was that trees are trees...birds are birds...and deer are those things that Harold and his friends spent money preparing to kill, but never killed! Can you believe that I felt totally ignorant and completely unqualified to teach my children about nature? Oh, but I was beginning to find that God really could teach about Himself as we just slowed down to enjoy His bounty! The rest is all history...or well, Nature Study in an easy and natural way!

### Out-of-Doors Daily!

The first thing that we implemented toward Nature Study in a more natural and easy manner was simply getting out of doors each day! Sound simple? It is really profound!

This was a simple idea that I gleaned from Charlotte Mason. Charlotte Mason, an educator of the late 1800's, advocated short lessons finished early into the day just so that the children could have plenty of time out-of-doors. She felt that children needed several hours each and every day just to do the things that simply cannot be done inside...explore, climb trees and mountains, exercise, hike, run, jump rocks, watch clouds, learn about weather, collect nature (rocks, flowers, leaves...), sing, shout, paint, watch animals, hunt tracks, learn natural geography, so on! Miss Mason won my heart as she shared in her book that every opportunity should be seized to get out of doors, regardless of the time of year or the weather...she even felt that meals and tea should be taken outside as much as possible! A woman after my heart!

This time out of doors was not limited to the children, though! Charlotte recommended that the parents and teachers take a blanket outside along with a project to do (needlework, books, writing, and sketchbooks...) while the children explored around them. She wanted for this time of the day to be a leisurely time for children and adults. This time was not meant for lectures or lessons per say...the answer to those of us with limited knowledge and understanding! Rather, this time was meant for the children to have access to mom as they leisurely brought back their finds or described the intricate details of what they saw outside. The focus was to be simple recognition of nature all throughout the year in all different seasons...to learn the life cycle of plants and animals informally as they go along...and to grow in appreciation and attentiveness to the tiny details of God's creation! These ideas slowly began to teach me a different way to teach my children about Nature! They also encouraged me to become a "student" again!

### Weekly Nature Walk...

One of the first things that intrigued me was her idea of having a weekly Nature Walk. In the PNEU (Parent's National Education Union) schools set up by Charlotte Mason, the students were taken each week on a nature walk. I have to be honest here as I share with you that while this idea intrigued me, it also

intimidated me! We are intensely busy people. I could not figure any way to take more time for one more thing...well, until...

I ran across a book by Anna Comstock. She writes in her book *Handbook of Nature Study* about what she called a field excursion (try that one for your record keeping!), "It is a mistake to think that a half day is necessary for a field lesson, since a very efficient field trip may be made during the ten or fifteen minutes at recess." This was the key! My major folly! In the busyness of our daily lives, I was the very one to put off Nature Walks and hikes because I simply did not always have a whole afternoon to devote to Nature Study each week. Not to mention, we live in the Southern United States where HEAT and HUMIDITY can stifle out any hope of a Nature Walk if you are as wimpy as I am! But, comfort of all comfort... Nature walks can be just as simple or just as complex as we have time and energy for! They can take place at any time of the day and they do not have to take all day to instill the lessons that they provide! Yes, even I could do this!

The Nature walk is meant to be leisurely. Again, it is not a time for lectures or lessons by the parent. Rather, it is a time for parents and children to break away from the old-grind to get out in God's beautiful world. Just today, we only took 20 minutes to walk down the road and collect some Queen Anne's Lace and Poison Hemlock. We brought them back home, discussing and comparing them all the way. At home, I brought out my *Handbook of Nature Studies* while they were looking at the two flowers. I simply asked them to notice more carefully the differences such as the leaves on the stems...what made them look like lace from afar...the roots...and the tiny flowers, which make up the entire cluster. We read about this gorgeous "weed" and were thankful that it was brought to America from Europe!

Although our walk resulted in a lesson, lessons are not necessary. In fact, ours only resulted from our quest for more knowledge. I know I shared above about my complete ignorance in the area of nature. This is actually all for the best. It limits my lectures and my explanations while teaching the children how mom finds out what she wants to know...I look it up! You know it is really much, much better since my lack of knowledge forces me to disciple my children in how to learn as we go along!

#### Hindrances to Studying Nature...

Just as this ignorance is a great strength, it has also been a hindrance. I have often felt so overwhelmed by Nature Studies. I have read so much about Nature Notebooks which all seemed to terrify me...SO much work! My mother always seemed to just "know" all about trees, flowers, plants, animals, and birds! I felt so dumb that it was very difficult to get interested in this one area that I so much wanted to learn about! So, my one hindrance has now become my biggest *plus* as I have learned that it is perfect that I am learning with the children. This whole process is showing them where to get facts, how to learn, and at the same time developing deep bonds with them as we learn all of these treasures together for the very first time...even I can do this!

This first hindrance leads me to another hindrance...too much planning! I know you are saying, "Did I read this right? Too much planning?" Yes, I do believe that this is one of my greatest hindrances. With a true study of Nature, planning is difficult. I always think of the Scripture, *"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."* (Proverbs 19:21, NIV) This seems to be my life lesson! The struggle between my plans and God's best is no less of a struggle in the area of Nature Studies than the rest of my life! For the greatest benefit, we simply must have random, teachable moments in our study of God's Creation! There is always something new that needs to be noticed. Planning gets in the way of learning as we go along the way.

I know what a stickler I am for going by the plan that is in motion. Want to knock me off my rocker...test my character? Change the plan to look at a bug rather than collect leaves! (*Hehe! I am really getting better you all!*) We have simply put away the plans in exchange for letting the children discover the treasures of God that are to be our study! So far, this is bringing more than just delight in learning; we are learning recognition while becoming attentive to the little treasures in life! God's best is truly better than all of my best "laid" plans!

Another major hindrance has been my time! I am often guilty of planning so much in our lives that I stay on the go unless I make a conscious effort to watch our schedule. If not, the first area that suffers is our time for the beautiful things in life.

I had a common misconception about Nature Studies. I have always thought that I needed to plan for an afternoon set aside just for our hikes, experiments, sketching, or enjoyment of nature. This is just another hindrance from getting in touch with God's creation! We do need a slow pace in order to have time for anything beautiful in our homes, but it really does not require a planned outing to get the benefits of a Nature Walk! We can simply take the children along on our daily walk around our neighborhood (*Good news! I read the other day that we can shape up just as well if we take a leisurely stroll through our neighborhood as we can if we do a power walk! Why not develop relationships while developing those legs!*).

We can also go to the local park. We love our local parks here in the Quad Cities. The Spring Park (Tuscumbia) has gorgeous ducks, geese, birds, and squirrels, which are very eager to take *all* of your scraps off of your hands. The Gatman Park (Muscle Shoals) and Veteran's Memorial Park (Florence) both have a wide variety of plants, trees, and birds. We saw a very rare (in our area!) Woodpecker and his sweetheart courting at the Gatman Park last summer. Don't be fooled by the traffic of humans, these animals hardly notice all of us for their interest in all the goodies they find after we leave. We often take a picnic lunch or even fast food for a moment out of doors at our parks. We found out that our local bread store gives "day-old" bread away to those going to the park. We usually stop by there for goodies to take along with us. We can have a relaxing time at the park while taking advantage of the lessons waiting for us!

All that is really needed for Nature Study is consistency in using our time wisely so that we can see all of the beauty as the season's change before our eyes! Whether a walk around our neighborhood, a picnic, or a formal hike, we can have the benefits as we consistently take the time to get out-doors with God's Creation!

As much as we enjoy our times that we have taken away for a Nature Break, I really think that the biggest hindrance to having a set, consistent Nature Study time has been my heart. In my heart, I have really not thought that Nature Studies were as vital and important as all of the other things which we "make" time for! I now believe that Nature Study is vital to all of us if we ever want to get to know God intimately. I believe that Satan would love to keep us from nature. I say this because he knows that God reveals so much of His Character through His creation. If he can discourage us from getting acquainted with Nature, then he can in turn discourage us from really getting to know God!

I thought about this a couple of weeks ago as I watched our hen with her baby chicks. One of the names of God in Hebrew is El Shaddai or in our language, Almighty. This name teaches us of God's quality of taking us under the shadow of His wing much like a hen does with her chicks when in danger or just to nurture them as they grow safely. This name also means "breasted one" much like a mother taking her little infant to her breast for sustenance, nourishment, and comfort. As we take time to ponder God's creation, we are able to see a part of God that is revealed not by mighty words or lectures or sermons, but rather only in the quietness of nature. We miss a powerful message by not taking time to ponder creation. We miss that message that when we are weary, God is our Sustenance. When storms of life are raging, God is our Protector from the winds and rains and dangers. When we are hungry and do not know where to turn, that God is our Provider giving total provision of our every need. Yes, my heart was the hindrance from being able to access the very revelation of Almighty God!

What about you? Do you have a vision for getting to know God better through His creation? Nature Studies are a must! They are a rich heritage from the throne of God! They are not an option that we can just fit in *if* we have time. They are necessary to teach our children a full understanding about God. They are necessary if we are to have time with our children to pass on *who* we are as we go along the way. Nature Studies are even necessary if we are to develop relationships with God, nature, and one another! May we catch a vision of the importance of getting to know God, God's creation and one another as we enter into Nature Study...The EASY Way!



Excerpted From *Homeschooling The Easy Way Volume 1*, but we have LOTS of resources for those of you needing a bit more help! Take a peek at our popular book *Nature Study...The Easy Way*. Plus, the book could not hold it all, so we also recommend our tape set by the same title! PLUS! We have other workshop tapes and even reproducible packs! See our listing for more details!!

# Ideas for Nature Study...

By Cindy Rushton

Excerpted from *Time for Tea Reprint Book Volume One*



OK...Hindrances aside, you are fully convinced and now want to know how to do it? Let's jump into some ideas for Nature Studies. Keep in mind that you might want to begin with just ONE thing...the rest are here just for an abundance of many ideas! Have fun!

- ♥ **Find a spot to observe Nature that all of your family will enjoy...** Your Neighborhood, A Biking Trail, Zoo, Botanical Garden, A Canyon, A Mountain Trail, The Local Park, The River, Planetarium, Aquarium, Wild Life Refuge, Arboretum, Vacation Spot, Living History Museum, A Friend's Neighborhood, Grandma's Back Yard... Just start small. You can start with your own yard, a local park, an arboretum, hiking trails, or vacation spots. The public places usually have a hiking map or have the trees marked so there is no guesswork for novices! Don't forget to always ask for any teacher lesson plans wherever you go. Our local aquarium gives wonderful handouts with coloring sheets, information pages galore, and actual study lessons just for the asking! We also acquired fantastic booklets, books, posters, and information pages from local, state, and federal agencies. They are thrilled by the interest and will even tell you about (or take you!) to wonderful trails or sites in your area! The foresters are always looking for little helpers to go plant trees or help with their projects! All of these are wonderful outlets but it is just as fun to start in your own yard because there are millions of treasures there just for the noticing!
- ♥ **Develop a Nature Notebook...** This need not be difficult. We struggled for years with the desire to have beautiful sketchbooks like Edith *Holden's A Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*. Finally, we decided to just keep a Notebook that is much like a cross between a scrapbook and our copy-books. (Look in the back of this issue for more about the How-to's of a Nature Notebook!)
- ♥ **Start a Collection!** Collections teach much informally. They teach how to organize, label, display, and date materials gathered! This is a natural project that you will find the children doing on their own! Your collections can be of anything! You may like to collect rocks, leaves, butterflies, flowers, pictures of the sunset or sunrise, feathers, nature poetry...the list is unlimited! You can also swap or sell extras from your collection to friends or family long distance! They may not have the same treasures in their back yard that you have!

- ♥ **Set up a Seasonal Table.** There are some great ideas in *Victorian Family Celebrations* By Sarah Ban Breathnach. This is a **MUST** for Mother Culture!!! For your seasonal table...just set up a table or a shelf in your home that is just for the display of treasures found outside throughout the various seasons, books that are favored read alouds each year during that particular season, or special crafts made especially during that season! Decorate the table in different colors to go along with the seasons! Let this be a project for the children to keep up throughout the year!
- ♥ **Keep a Nature bag/backpack ready to go!** Essentials are your nature notebooks, field guides, paints, pencils, camera...and snacks!
- ♥ **Do a Tree Study!** Trees are easy to begin with. Pick a tree and sketch the tree, its leaves, and its blooms into your sketchbook. If you are like me and not so good at sketching, just take a picture! In your notebook add special details like the date, where you found it, common name and Latin name for the tree, and a description of the tree. You may want to describe the branches, bark, birds/insects living in the tree, and the purpose of the tree!
- ♥ **Do an indoor terrarium or aquarium!** *Pets in a Jar* By Seymour Simon has lots of ideas for how to set up a home and care for special pets such as Hydras, Planarians, Pond Snails, Water Bugs, Tadpoles, Newts, Toads, Earthworms, Ants, Crickets, Praying Mantles, Butterflies, Moths, Brine Shrimp, Hermit Crabs, and Starfish. You can find it at your local library! We currently have a caterpillar and two BumbleBees in captivity! These critters are so neat to watch that you hardly know you are learning!
- ♥ **Learn out of door Geography!** Get to know firsthand about rivers, forests, mountains, beaches, streams, wetlands, pastures, creeks! This will come as you simply get out-doors!
- ♥ **Keep lists!** As you go along, you will see many things only once. Keep lists of animals, birds, life cycles, observations of animals, times for the rising and setting of the sun, temperatures, weather, records of experiments. Just keep each list in the back of your nature notebook.
- ♥ **Keep a Calendar!** This is a good project for the beginning naturalist! Just keep a simple calendar of what is found/observed each day. It may be the first flower of the year, the first leaf to fall, the day the puppies were born, and the day you got a goat...keep these memories!
- ♥ **Begin a Window Sill Garden!** Even if you are not on your own land or in your own home, you can keep a window sill garden and enjoy watching nature! The children can have their own garden of herbs, carrots, impatiens, geraniums, and marigolds right in your window! It is such a delight to watch flowers come up from seeds into their full fruit! We have also planted flowers and herbs around the house and around the base of our trees. These are fun to watch and enjoy!
- ♥ **Want to teach direction?** Just buy those little ones a compass and turn them loose outside!

- ♥ **Keep on the look out for Nature Art!** Our favorites are Tasha Tudor, Beatrix Potter, and Audobon!
- ♥ **Make bird feeders or just throw out bird feed!** Our birds, squirrels and even chickens LOVE whole wheat bread crumbs! Every morning I have a fan club meet me at the door expecting their nutrition for the day! There are some wonderful ideas for making bird feeders in Kathryn Howshall's book Nature Projects or in any of the Boy Scouts of America literature!
- ♥ **Hunt for Nature Hymns!** Make a special section of your Nature Notebook or Copybook just for Hymns about God's beautiful creation! Don't forget to illustrate!
- ♥ **Picnic anyone?** Nothing is any more fun than a picnic! Just pack a basket full of lunch or a simple afternoon tea to go! Head out to your favorite spot with just your own sweet family! Of course...you should also think of your dear friends occasionally...yes, this is a hint! I am always up for a picnic! Picnics can also be outside your very own door...we LOVE a picnic on our deck! We curl up on the swing afterwards and enjoy the beauty of nature while enjoying great conversation or our books!
- ♥ **Speaking of a book...Don't forget to grab a book to read out-of-doors!** You may want to read a biography about the great men and women of science! Go to your non-fiction section of the children's section of the library and load up on their neat books about animals...space... plants...geography! Also, do not forget the treasures found in the fiction section by authors such as Gene Stratton Porter, Tasha Tudor, Beatrix Potter, Jean Craighead George and Sterling North!
- ♥ **Get a new pet!** In my "You know you are homeschooling when..." column, I jokingly shared that You know you are homeschooling when you have acquired a strange pet since you started homeschooling. Well, we have had the joy of acquiring and growing to love quite a bunch of critters! We have had dogs, cats, goats, birds (Cockatoo and Cockatiels), hermit crabs, rabbits, chickens...the list is getting so long I am afraid you may start singing Old MacRushton's had a farm! Pets are such an awesome way to teach about God's handiwork while learning all about Nature informally! Go ahead, join the ranks of tried and true homeschoolers and adopt a pet!
- ♥ **Spend a day with the grandparents!** What a treasure house of wisdom about nature! It may be a day of fishing...or a day working bees...or a day in the garden...or a picnic or helping out with the chickens. I guarantee that these memories will be the most treasured as they get older! I will always treasure moments with Mamaw picking berries or tending the chickens or working in the flowers! Moments that are a rich heritage!

Rich heritage...that is just what Nature Studies really are. They are not an option that we can just fit in if we have time. They are necessary to teach our children a fullness about God. They are necessary if we are to have time with our children to pass on who we are as we go along the way. Nature Studies are even necessary if we are to develop relationships. Yes, a rich heritage is one of relationships...Nature studies develops relationships with God, nature, and one another! Happy Trails!

# Nature Notebooks

By Cindy Rushton



Anyone familiar with the Rushtons is definitely familiar with our wide and varied use of notebooks in our homeschool. Nature Studies is no different! For a long time I was frustrated when I would read about the neat ideas for Nature Journals/Notebooks. I think it was because I did not take the ideas and apply it to how we already do our notebooks with our children! We took the ideas from our usual copybooks mixed it with some great ideas from Nature Journals of the past and scrapbooks of today...and wala! We have our own Nature Notebook, which is very simple to begin and to keep up!

Here are some ideas for making one of your own...

- ♥ **Let Notebooking become a natural part of life.** Recording may be encouraged at the beginning, but let it become their own personal journal and scrapbook! They may work in it every day or just a few times a month depending on their interest!
- ♥ **Decide on your type of notebook that you would like to use.** Many families keep sketchbooks, which enable them to use watercolors or write. We tried these but they were difficult to add our Copywork, poems, and pressed specimens to. We decided to use the pages from our sketchbooks for pictures and just mount them in our 3-ring binder. We bought a binder with the see-through plastic covers that you can slide your own cover picture into. We let the children design their own cover for their notebook by using these notebooks! They loved it! We also gave them plenty of page protectors to slide their work into to protect it from smudges and too much handling! They added pages from their original copybook that had quotes, scripture verses, and poems with a Nature Subject. We are now really having fun as we see them using their new ideas from scrap-booking to add their own special touch to their Notebooks!
- ♥ **Let your children set up their notebooks like their very own Scrapbook of Nature!** Chances are you already have many things that could be included in a notebook around your home without their own special place! I remember a dear friend's mother who always instilled in her children (and me!) that there must be a place for everything and everything in its place! This is the perfect opportunity to develop a place for those Nature goodies while developing a nice product for displaying all that knowledge and keeping memorabilia!

- ◆ You may want to include the following in your notebooks...
  - ◆ Snapshots
  - ◆ Sketches...don't forget to include date, time, place, Latin Name, and Common Name!
  - ◆ Pressed Flowers, Leaves, Feathers, Butterflies, etc.
  - ◆ Reading Lists
  - ◆ Glossary of Terms Studied
  - ◆ Poetry
  - ◆ Information about discoveries
  - ◆ Lists of new findings
  - ◆ Handouts from trips
  - ◆ Narrations from trips, outings, hikes, Nature walks, books read about nature or scientists/naturalists.
  - ◆ Instruction Sheets on "How to Care for..." or "How to Collect..." etc. (Kathryn Howshall has an entire set of her Instruction Sheets called *Nature Projects* which is great for the novice like me...but also a great idea for communicating all the children know about a topic in Nature!
  - ◆ Booklets...My children began their Nature Studies by making Booklets on topics such as *Birds in My Backyard*, which was a collection of sketches of birds we spotted right in our front yard! They researched the names of the birds, the nesting habits of the birds, and their favorite foods. They sketched the birds and put the information about the birds into their little booklets, which were made from ideas in Dinah Zike's *Big Book of Books and Activities*. We soon had several to put into their own binder for science! It may be that your child has such a deep interest in one part of nature that they want to develop a notebook just for that such as Kathryn *Howshall's Bird Book* and *Butterfly Book*. That is perfectly fine! Just pick a topic and go!
  - ◆ Project Data...this may be from any experiments or from just watching something for a few seasons to watch the changes!
  - ◆ Bible Verses...We include our Copywork and memory work that relates to nature. You may also want to include any word studies that they do as they get older on Bible

Verses. They may have Journalled meditations from their Quiet time and want to include them!

- ◆ Hymns
  - ◆ Stories...Nature, Pets, Metaphors, about Outings!
  - ◆ Journal Entries
  - ◆ Details from Outings
  - ◆ Favorite Quotes about Nature
  - ◆ Reading Lists
  - ◆ Research...for the older students! Let them keep an additional copy of all research papers and notes in their notebook.
  - ◆ Reports...again this is for the older students. Narrations are preferable for the younger students since they will build their skills for writing and prepare them the best for Reports and Research in the later years!
- ♥ **Get Your Supplies...** You will need a notebook, plastic sleeve protectors, paper (Use Card stock for mounting specimens or lined for Journaling, Copywork, quotes, notes, or lists! You may want to consider Acid free/lignin free paper if you are mounting pictures of your walks and findings!), sketch paper for watercolor pictures or sketches from nature, top quality sketch pencils, top quality watercolors and brushes, index cards for data entries, and scissors! We are taking our Science/Nature Notebooks one step further now. Elisabeth and I went to a Scrapbooking Workshop (which was fantastic!) and got so many ideas for our homeschool notebooks! We decided that since MONEY is an object for us that we would use our skills to add to our notebooks until we had the money for full memory albums of our family! We bought some pens, templates, scissors, stickers, and acid-free paper from Hobby Lobby, and Wal-Mart and got started! Maybe wild was the word! You can add a lot of life to your notebook with their special supplies! It really adds a sparkle to your notebooks and my children are hooked! You can use Die-cuts, Frames, Stencils, Shapes, and edgings galore to make your notebooks fun and beautiful! My children now beg each weekend to work on our binders/scrapbooks!

I sure hope this gives you plenty of ideas so that you can make up Notebooks for your own family. There is no certain way to do the "right" notebook/sketchbook except your own way for your family! I hope this jump-starts you so you can have fun and make a notebook that is just right for your family!

Catch Ya Outside!

# Making Memories At The Mall!

By Cindy Rushton



There is something about this time of year that always seems to do this to me...I begin to wear red or green EVERY day! I HAVE to have “cinnamon” wafting through the air from the time I wake up until those last moments I have every day dosing off to sleep!

Even right now, I am sitting in a big comfy couch, cuddled up with Harold, Elisabeth, and my darling laptop...right smack dab in the middle of our new coffee shop in historic Tusculumbia as gorgeous Christmas music plays on the piano and I sip from my AWESOME Strawberry-White Mocha LATTE(!!!!). I love the colors. I love the smells. I love the “cozyness” of this time of year!

## Just SWEET Memories...

I think it is because of the sweet memories that have been made over the years during this time of year. As far as I can remember, my mother has ALWAYS made the WHOLE holiday season special—every single day of it! Growing up, our family has always become their very best at the holidays! Laughter. Those family stories that I would DIE over as a teen when they were told, yet something now CRAVES to hear them every single year! Those same old dishes, that now symbolize MY LIFE!

Oh, that is not all! I remember that first day I saw my darling sweetheart—two days before Christmas back in 1984! Our first date was on Christmas Eve, just as soon as we could break away from our separate families (Who would figure that we were actually beginning our OWN family tradition that year?!). Harold proposed to me over Christmas 1985! We found out that we were expecting our little Matthew only days before Christmas 1986! AND Elisabeth was even conceived during the Christmas season of 1989!

The giggles. The stories. The adventures finding Christmas trees. The hours baking. The long car rides looking at Christmas lights on the way to see Grandparents. Oh, the memories!

What about your holiday time? Does it move your heart to think back over the memories? To want to MAKE sweet memories?

Well, this year, I don't know if I was getting the holiday spirit early OR maybe God has just been

working on my heart all year round, but Back in the early Fall, God renewed my entire weary spirit as He showed me the importance of making memories ALL year long...and in the oddest of places, even the MALL!

### A Big Year! Big Surprises!

This past year has been simply beyond wonderful! We have had a nice balance of traveling and time to relax, spend time together, and even time devoted to allowing me to write (we hope to have even more time NEXT year!): Our children have grown up SO much! We have been slowly transitioning into Harold coming home in retirement (so he thinks!!!!) to join our ministry full time as our new CEO! And, we even end this year building our new offices that we have dreamed of building for ten years on our property!

Mid-year we did have a snag! Actually we did not know it was a snag until the end. And even now, we only view it all as a blessing...well, let me explain. We were thrilled to find out in June that we were expecting a little Rushton. Our whole family was ecstatic! We immediately began treatments with our infertility doctor so we would ensure that every detail was being monitored. In the midst of treatment, our bloodwork revealed that I would need Progesterone therapy (as I did with other pregnancies that had ended in losses) and the stunning news that I had Lupus Anticoagulant Antibodies resulting in a need for additional therapy and accounting for many of the past losses. We were SO thankful to find this culprit and to be treating it early in this pregnancy. All was going great. We went through all of the treatments and tests only to once again lose another little baby.

As you can imagine my heart was crushed. I was wore out. The loss was extremely painful and exhausting. But, that was not all. I was also faced with a need for surgery that would end this season of childbearing. It was all almost too much! My cup was empty and sitting under the tap was not seeming to fill it fast enough!!

I am so thankful for the ministry of others at times like those. The cards. The big hugs. The shared tears. The letters. The prayers. They are all so precious in the midst of the storms of life. Pain is just so much more bearable when you can lean on others.

Once again, the greatest ministry of all came from those the closest to me, my precious husband and children. They were so good to MAKE me rest and talk and even cry! But, the sweetest thing was a little vacation...and the life lesson that came my way during the trip!

### A Little Vacation...

One of the things that Harold did in the midst of my recovery was to bring me along on his trip to Florida, where he took (and passed! Hoot! Hoot!) his private pilot test. The trip meant a WHOLE

week of rest and renewal, but I had no idea how much I would be renewed! I had no idea that revival for my weary soul was coming on this journey!

The trip was wonderful. The whole way down to Orlando, we plugged in and listened through several audio tapes that we had wanted to hear as a family. We brainstormed through future plans for our family, ministry, and business (Harold will officially retire in December and join our ministry as the **BIG BOSS!**). It was incredible to have uninterrupted time to “pow-wow” as a family! But, the best happened while we were in Orlando!

Harold got permission for Matthew to attend the classes with him. During the classes, a passion was birthed in Matthew for aviation! (more on that in another article sometime!) He mentioned to us last week that the Lord was really moving in his heart to finish training and serve missionaries with that skill! (Hallelujah!) The guys had a blast—father and son learning together and developing intimacies together! But, that was not all!

We still have Elisabeth and ME (and the point of this article!)! My goal for the trip was to rest and really just spend time with God and my family. I took several writing projects to work on. Plus, **LOTS** of books to read. (I always over-plan!) I did nothing but the primary goal—refreshing huh? Only I did more of it than I even could ever dream!

### The Girls on the Loose...

The first day, we got up, took the guys to breakfast, came back to the room and I did some writing while Elisabeth did her daily lessons—found out later that she did them all for the week! At lunch, we “spiffied up” (Don’t think there is a spelling for that word. It is a word my mom used to mean “got all dolled up”) and picked the guys up for a nice lunch. After we took them back, we decided to drive to Starbucks for coffee, but we got sidetracked by a Scrapbooking Store on the way! The most heavenly stop you could imagine! Oh, we were not side-tracked that long, after that stop we were able to manage coffee for two and a wonderful local Christian bookstore. We were able to take our time and stop at **ALL** of the places we **WANTED** to stop at all along the way. We giggled. We talked. We had a “girl-day!” Or, so we thought!

Elisabeth is always the child of mine who has been more spontaneous than any child in the world could ever be. Actually, I think that her idea of heaven is a **MALL**...yes, mine is a **BOOKSTORE!** Oh, I used to love the mall, when I could fit in the clothes they had for sale! Now...well...it is just a job now...not that fun...I think it is those insulting numbers on the tag!

Elisabeth, as I said, **LOVES** the mall. Every birthday for the last 12 years has been met with one request—go to the mall! I never “got” the mall thing. In fact, I wondered where she even learned there was a

mall—she HAS been homeschooled all of these years! Something in her just fell in love with the whole atmosphere. I never understood it. Well, until the trip to Orlando!

I did not mention that the first day, we saw the mall, but did not have time to stop at it. Elisabeth begged to just go to the mall the next day. Since it was OUR pick for what would fill our days that week, we decided to venture to the mall.

Well, we got up the second day early again to carry the guys to breakfast, then their class. Getting back in the car with ANOTHER “girl-day” before us, I asked my little “queen-for-the-day” what she wanted to do. I have to tell you that I just KNEW the day would be spent at the mall if she had a choice!

Yes, there I was with silent dread as I asked her what SHE wanted to do! She looked deep in my eyes, smiled that precious little smile of hers, and said, “Well, I was thinking about...going back to sleep!” Hoot! Hoot! For the first time in I guess years, I went back to bed after I was perfectly dressed and going for the day. We sleepily dosed off while watching the oldest movie on the cable television at that moment.

You will giggle when you hear what was next! Nope, not the mall! But, instead, we woke up and had only 10 minutes to get all the way to the guys for their lunch date with us!

We freshened up, but completely unable to hide the visible “look” of just waking up, we picked up the guys and I could tell they were puzzled. You see, we looked like the image the world has of homemakers. You know, sleeping till noon, waking up just in time for the soaps, and eating bon-bons at the MALL! AND, we did not even watch a Soap...or get to the mall...YET! In fact, I don't even know WHAT a bon-bon is, but I will take a Strawberry White Mocha Latte ANY time of the day!

There was something almost giggly about me. Goodness, you know like a teen who did not have the responsibility for educating her Jr. High and High School student OR writing about the life of the godly Homeschool mom. We did not even crack a book that morning! We both snuggled up and just simply SLEPT IN!

I have to admit. I DID feel guilty. Always do when I do not match up to my “image” of what I should do in a day. Well, I felt guilty until the guys asked us over lunch, “Sooo, what have you two done all day?” To REALLY get the context of this question, you would have to go back in time to Rushton Family History BC... Before Children. Before Homeschooling the Children! Those words were big no-no's back then! In fact, imagine that western drawl saying, “Them's fightin words, cowboy!” It just always seemed that my days were never filled with anything worthy of an answer to such a HARD question, well until we began to homeschool! After that point, all I had to do was review my journal for lots of worthwhile answers.

There we were, all four of us. The guys were studying “deep things” like fundamentals of aerodynamics, meteorology, federal aviation rules and regulations, pilotage, navigation, aircraft systems, reciprocating engine design and performance, and so on. We went back to sleep...until maybe 12 minutes before THE question!

I did it! I told them the whole empty story! Matthew, my 15-year-old teenager, was stunned. Never heard such a thing as ME sleeping! Harold sat there and blessed me through and through when he hugged me tight and said, “Good for you! That is wonderful! I am SO glad!” He knew that if there was one thing that I NEVER did, it was to get enough rest, much less without being sick! He was so proud that we were having fun and really getting a real live break! Well, beloved, he had not seen nothing yet!

We had a wonderful meal, then we took the guys back to the old grind, then back in the car... I looked at our little princess and asked that question AGAIN. Oh, yea! This time when I asked, “So what do YOU want to do?” Elisabeth promptly squealed, “GO TO THE MALL!” I took off for a trip to the mall that would change my perspective of mothering and life in general! I had no idea of the merits in a trip to the mall! Your whole life can be changed at the mall—really! Well, let me continue...

All ready for a shopping adventure down to our walking shoes and “fanny packs,” Elisabeth and I began our journey of her dreams. It did not take 20 minutes inside before we began to giggle about some of the new “styles.” I was excited that we were laughing AT them...they were so ugly that I would have died if she had liked them! Then, it began!

The memories! Imparting my heart to hers. Hearing, uninterrupted by the whole world around me, hearing her heart! The more I heard her, the more she soaked me up! I was about in tears, this was what I really wanted in our relationship and so often I am too busy to have it!

I saw her through and through. My little girl is growing up so fast! I don't have very much more time with her at home. Our relationship will not always be like it is today. I want a firm foundation for her to grow upon. I want a strong tie between us as best-friends as she steps into womanhood. I just forget what I really want in the middle of my every day life. I get so caught up in the STUFF on my calendar and in the daily routine that I do not have time, that kinda TIME, with her. It all gets mundane, empty, a passing of days...days without making a memory for life! There I was in the middle of the MALL, experiencing REVIVAL!

Oh, we had a blast! Time went by so fast that we were ALMOST late again to get the guys! No worries, I made it there on time, on two of the four wheels—saving tread???

When we showed up, it was written ALL over our face! I knew from the moment that Harold saw me that he could tell what I had been up to!

He asked that question again, this time with a sparkle in his eyes that said he was very, very pleased, you know THAT question, "Soooo, what have you two done all day?" I giggled and slowly recapped, "Got up...took you guys to breakfast...went back to bed—ALL MORNING....took you two to lunch and back to class...thennnnn....we went to the MALL!" He leaned over and gave me a great big kiss and said, "Good girl! I am proud of you! So very proud!" He could tell that his prayers for my week were being answered!

What did we do the rest of the week? Well, the next day...we got up and did it all again! We made memories!

I really think that looking back over our entire marriage...over all the years of motherhood...over all of the special "days" that we have made memories throughout the years...that week was one of my favorites ever! No agendas. No expectations. No responsibilities. No plans. No real preferences. Just my family. Just doing "our" thing!

I have thought about it over the last few months. I do not go to the mall enough! I do not cuddle up to sleep in enough! I do not laugh enough. I do not let the world go by while I make the memories that will be with me long after the rest of life goes by.

This New Year, know what MY first resolution is? To make MORE memories, more often...maybe even IN THE MALL!!

**"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."**

Matthew 18: 2b-4

