

Looking Back: Getting the Most Out of Our Homeschool Years

by Kathy Clement

Our family is in a season of looking back. Four of our five children have completed high school; and, as I write this, our two eldest children are preparing to move into their first apartment. The face of our family is changing. Where our home was once a humming hive of activity, laughter, boisterous interaction and, let's face it, organized chaos, things are starting to settle down. We are keenly aware that we are about to enter a new phase of life, and that always causes one to feel somewhat reflective.

The truth is, these years flew by us. We remember all too well the years of living with small children: the sleepless the earaches, the constant clutter of toys, books and art projects. Endless glasses of spilled drinks, mountains of diapers and laundry, games of peek-a-boo and hide and seek were our daily portion. Sometimes it seemed like it would never come to an end! But, it has. And it happened much more quickly than we anticipated.

It seems to take forever for your first child to reach the teen years. Then, it seems like you blink and the teens in your home have become young adults and they are off on their own. The years between age 13 and age 20 move like a bullet train, leaving you scrambling to keep up with the pace. Then, it hits you. Your job is pretty much finished. You have to redefine your relationships with your children and your life in general. Like I said, it's a thoughtful time.

Our four adult children are delightful in just about every way. They love the Lord, they love people, they are productive members of society, they still love to learn and they still love us. That's pretty good. Many parents of young children have asked us what we did in raising our children that caused them to grow into such great human beings. Obviously, we leaned heavily upon the grace of God. No one is equal to this task without His constant aid! But that question has prompted us to think a lot about parenting and family life. As we've discussed this topic, we've decided that our family grew in God's grace because we made conscious decisions along the way to make the most of our time together.

The things we did were not remarkable in and of themselves, but when woven together over the course of the years, these simple activities and events became like a strong cord that bound our family together in love and unity. Each family is unique, of course, but we thought it might be helpful to share a few of the things we did that helped us create a strong family identity.

The Family Dinner Table

Do you know that most families don't eat together anymore? I read a newspaper article about a month ago that stated that families are lucky if they can eat together once a month! That was shocking to me! Family life has become too busy; the individual members are constantly on the move and generally going in separate directions. If there's one element that made the biggest impact on our life together as a family, it's probably that we ate together more often than not. Our family dinner table has always been a place where we not only share food, but we share our lives. We talk about the books we are reading, politics, God, and the events of the day. It's not unusual for us to linger at the table for an hour or more! The family dinner table is like a little reunion at the end of each day. We don't answer the phone during dinner, and we all stay at the table until each person is finished eating. Of course, when our children were very young we didn't always enjoy the same level of lively conversation that we currently share. But, even when they were little, we encouraged conversation and interaction at the dinner table. Sometimes we talked about bugs, the weather, the things they'd built during the day, or an upcoming holiday. Sometimes my husband or I opened a topic of conversation. Lots of times we were just plain silly and had a good time. Gradually, as our children grew older, the topics of conversation matured. We learned to listen to one another and to hear one another's hearts. Never underestimate the power of supping together!

Quality Time or Quantity Time?

Which do families need more? The answer is simple: Families need large quantities of quality time together! Anything else just doesn't get the job done. My husband and I had to make some

tough decisions in this department. We decided that our family life had to be more important than our church life, more important than our business life, more important than our social life. It has taken unending vigilance to keep things properly balanced. Sometimes, we let things get out of hand and we had to pull in the reins, letting outside obligations go. The truth is, it is more important for Mom and Dad to be available to play a game, read a book, and walk through the bedtime rituals of childhood than it is for them to make a few more dollars or be involved in outside ministry. Children spell "love" like this: T-I-M-E.

Make Time for Each Other

The other really important element in family life is that husbands and wives need to make time for one another. Our family relationships will only be as strong as our relationship with our mate. We need to make time to talk with one another about the things that really matter, and it needs to be more than once a year!

When our children were small, and money was very tight, we used to exchange babysitting duties with our close friends. We'd watch their kids while they had time alone, and then the next time we'd swap. If we had no money, we could always go to the park, sit on a bench or blanket and talk. We have also found that it's very helpful to go away together alone at least once a year. At first glance, this may seem impossible; but I promise you, it can be done, and the payoff is huge!

What About Dad?

When we first began home schooling, we didn't understand the radical change it would make in our lifestyle. Home schooling meant so much more than just getting our children through a pre-determined curriculum or body of knowledge. We realized that we were being called to teach our children how to live. This meant that everything we did was a lesson in living.

My husband has been very involved in our home school; but not necessarily with the academics of this process. Oh, he's done the "messy" science experiments with our kids and he's helped them with math a good bit, too. And, he's taken the family on some really wonderful and memorable field trips. In my estimation, though, the biggest contribution he's made to our home school has been the vast amount of time he's spent with our children in his "leisure" time. Even though we run a physically demanding family business, Dale has always made the effort to "be there" for the children in the evenings and on the weekends. Many nights, I know he was so exhausted that he would much rather have collapsed on the couch in front of the TV, but he always made an effort to spend time with the kids.

When our children were young, Dale was the dad out in the yard with our kids (and kids from the neighborhood) playing kickball, football, basketball or baseball. He was the dad who got out the guitar and sang with our kids. He was the dad who coached our children's sports teams. He was the dad who played board games with our children and their friends. He was the dad who read aloud in funny voices. He was the dad who tucked the children into bed, prayed with them and kissed them goodnight. He was the dad who was there. Our children know their father; and personally, I think this has a lot to do with the love and confidence they feel for their Heavenly Father.

I know that modern dads are pulled in a thousand different directions. And, we know how hard it is to keep the TV from becoming a one-eyed monster in the home. We have fought that battle ourselves, and we are still fighting it! We've been without TV, put TV in the closet, had cable, gotten rid of cable... on and on it goes. Dale has probably been the one most responsible for keeping the TV in its proper place. He has made a simple choice to use most of his evenings spending time with our clan instead of indulging himself. Years ago, when he asked me how he could help me the most with our home school lifestyle, I knew immediately what I needed him to do. I asked him to play games with the kids when he got home from work. And, I asked him to help me get some time for myself at least a couple of times a month. These two things seem so simple, but let me tell you, they kept me sane and healthy!

My husband has only read one book about home schooling. He has only attended a few conferences with me, though he's often watched the kids so I could have the weekend away. He has, however, spent hundreds of hours talking with me about home school, education, and family life. In this way, he has become a home schooling expert in his own right. He has not merely "supported" me while I home schooled our kids; he's been my sounding board, my shoulder to cry on, and my biggest fan. He's never chosen curriculum or dictated the course of our day. He's rescued me with take-out on bad days, done the laundry when necessary, and he's also

celebrated my victories both large and small. He knows what is going on in our family because he's invested in me and he has invested in our kids. He is the anchor of this family, keeping us safely in this harbor we call home.

Simple Doesn't Mean Easy

These are the simple choices we've made in our family's journey. It is a simple thing to eat dinner together as a family, but it takes some effort to make it a memorable experience. It is a simple thing to make the decision to keep the TV turned off most of the time; it is much more challenging to create an atmosphere in the home that lends itself to real relationships. It is simple to decide to home school; it is much more difficult to adopt a lifestyle of learning. It has been my experience, however, that things we truly value in life are rarely easy to obtain. Nothing in my life—apart from my relationship with my Heavenly Father—holds a higher value than our family. And, as we see our children setting out in their own lives, blazing their own trails, making their own choices, we are so thankful that we made the most of our time together as a homeschooling family.

Resources to Help Us Make the Most of Our Time Together

Need help understanding how to really be a family? These resources are among our personal favorites:

- *Home-Grown Kids* Raymond and Dorothy Moore
- *What is a Family?* Edith Schaeffer
- *For the Children's Sake* Susan Schaeffer Macaulay
- *The Five Love Languages of Children* Gary Chapman
- *How to Really Love Your Child* Ross Campbell, MD
- *What the Bible Says About Child Training* Richard Fugate

Want to read to your children, but feel lost in the library? Our copies of these books are highlighted, tea-stained, dog-eared and much loved. They recommend the very best in children's literature, have tips on what makes a good book a good book, and categorize literature by topic and age groupings.

- *Honey For a Child's Heart* Gladys Hunt
- *Books Children Love* Elizabeth Wilson

These titles are books that we feel are essential in our home library:

- *20th Century Children's Book Treasury* This beautifully illustrated anthology contains the very best in literature for children between ages 3-8.
- *The Favorite Uncle Remus* Dale used to read these books out loud to our children, complete with "voices" and animated gestures. Sometimes they would fall off the couch, they'd be laughing so hard! This is truly one of our favorite "read-alouds."
- *The Chronicles of Narnia* I know I've read this series aloud to our children at least 5 times! And that's not counting the number of times they've read it to themselves! Some books are just worth purchasing in hardback editions. This is one of those sets. We wore out 2 paperback sets before I finally broke down and bought it in hardback. I can't wait 'til we have grandchildren so I can read them aloud again.
- *The Little House Series* by Laura Ingalls Wilder These are simply some of the best books ever written by an American author. Our children used to "play" Little House in the backyard. I've read this series multiple times to our children: boys and girls alike.
- Books by Ralph Moody (*Little Britches*, *Man of the Family*, *The Home Ranch*, *Mary Emma & Company*, *The Fields of Home*, *Shaking The Nickel Tree*, and *The Dry Divide*) If you have boys, you simply have to read these books aloud! (My girls loved them, too!) One minute we'd be laughing hilariously, the next minute we'd be crying. The stories are all true, which makes them even more moving.
- *The Jubilee DK Illustrated Family Bible* We didn't have a copy of this beautiful book, but I wish we had. This is simply the most gorgeous book I've ever laid eyes on! The stories are exactly the right length for family devotions, lavishly illustrated, and the text is directly from the NIV, so there is no "editorializing" of the Bible stories. This is another resource I'll use with grandchildren (someday).

Want to embrace a lifestyle of learning but you don't quite understand how? These are the resources that helped us the most in our endeavor to understand what education was really all about. We like these resources because they helped us to grasp the difference between

education (which is about learning) and schooling (which is about conforming to someone else's mould.)

- Davis Seminar Tapes
- *The Relaxed Home School* Mary Hood
- *The Joyful Home Schooler* Mary Hood
- *Educating the Wholehearted Child* Clay and Sally Clarkson
- *A Different Kind of Teacher* John Taylor Gatto
- *Wisdom's Way of Learning* Marilyn Howshall

Want to have fun without the TV, but don't know where to start? Family game time is still an honored tradition in our home. Even though our children are, for the most part, fully-grown, we still love to gather around the kitchen table at least once a week (more often if busy schedules permit) to play our favorite games. And don't forget to enjoy the great outdoors with your children while they are young!

- *Cashflow 101* and *Cashflow for Kids* We purchased *Cashflow 101* for our family last year, and have played it over and over and over again. Our kids love the game, we love the things we've learned about the way money works! Even though we have owned our own family business for the past 19 years, playing this game opened avenues of understanding for us. It's like an economics course cleverly disguised as a game. We all love to play it! If your children are under age 10, start with *Cashflow for Kids*.
- *The Kid's Nature Book* This book has so many fun ideas to help families interact with nature. We spent a lot of time at parks, at the beach and in the outdoors with our kids when they were little, even though we've always lived in more "urban" areas.
- (or Pocket Guides for younger children.) Take these with you on your trips to the park. Kids like to know what things are.
- *A Kid's Guide to Building Forts* I simply cannot tell you how much fun kids have building their own hideaways! Dale built great playhouses and tree houses for our children, but the places our kids loved the best were the ones they built themselves.
- *Hopscotch, Hangman, Hot Potato, Ha Ha Ha* Our home was often the place where our children's friends chose to gather for fun. This book is loaded with the rules for over 250 games and sports for kids. These are the games my husband and I played in our neighborhoods when we were kids.

There are 3 ways you can order these Recommended Resources:

First, print out the list of Recommended Resources (you may have to print the entire article.)

THEN

a. By clicking on [Elijah Company Online Store](#) you can look at and order each title you want and send the order online.

OR

b. When you go to the Online Store, click on "Check out using our blank Order Form" and you can fill in the titles yourself.

c. Call our Order Line and place the order by phone (8-4 CST)
1-888-2-ELIJAH/1-888-235-4524 within the 48 States or 931-456-6284.