

“Glad I Listened”

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Boca Home School Kick-Off Meeting

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In the haunting way people recall their precise location when they first heard the tragic news of President Kennedy’s assassination, I remember distinctly where I was 22 years ago when the notion of home schooling first filtered across my radar screen. The idea sounded revolutionary and ingenious and the teacher’s remarks remained Elmer-glued into my consciousness for weeks. Afterwards, the Lord orchestrated his messengers to reinforce this outrageous notion and I was convinced He was calling me to a grand adventure of teaching our children at home.

But I didn’t care to listen. I refused actually, choosing instead to register our four year old son for school. I was allowing the scaredy-cat side of me to miss out on what the Lion of Judah wanted for our family. I forgot that He works best in our weakness and that feeling inadequate is only the perfect pre-requisite for needing him desperately and allowing His strength to produce what our will never can. But God graciously persisted and three years later I finally surrendered. “OK, Lord. I’ll do it, but only for one year. I’ll try this home schooling thing for one year.”

This week we began our 18th consecutive year of home schooling. And I am here tonight to let you know a few reasons why I am thankful I listened and obeyed the Father for He wanted to give our family incredible gifts that could come no other way.

We love to operate out of our strengths. We enjoy adding new and improved curriculum to our home school repertoire and signing up for all the latest classes to make our students excel and proficient. We celebrate when our bills are paid and our kids receive medals and our home school day runs like a well oiled bread machine.

But I think often, **God works best in weakness.** He is all about taking away, allowing us to know inadequacies and struggles until we realize like John the Baptist that, “He must become greater; I must become less.” In the painful places we long to flee where we can have some semblance of control and power and independence, with all our chicks in a row and our “t’s” crossed with just the perfect cursive flair.

At the outset of our home school experience, most of us believe we will teach our children impressive lessons and carve out godly character along the way. Aren’t they so fortunate that we are choosing to sacrifice our time and talents to make them into educated, upstanding citizens for the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of earth? But the longer I teach the clearer is my impression that this process of home schooling is often about God educating and instructing me in His ways and illuminating in bright lights my severe shortcomings and how desperately I need Him for everything.

I shrink from struggle; He brings brilliance out of bleakness. Let me give you some examples.

After banging my head against the wall for years and trying every reading/phonics curriculum on the market and feeling like a perfect failure that I could not teach one of our children to read, we finally tested him and discovered he had a learning disability - Visual Perception Disorder. In the meantime, since reading was an impossible assignment for him and banging my head was proving to be quite painful, I read aloud for hours and hours every day. I read all those Newberry Medal books and all those grouped in the Beautiful Feet catalog and all those highlighted in my Library Bible, “Honey for a Child’s Heart.” As I read our son would sit quietly and build – small objects at first and then gigantic structures: bridges, castles and Ferris wheels that actually worked. He was not trapped in a classroom setting and labeled him as “slow”, no one teased him and he never realized how far behind he was. We kept plodding along slowly, begging God for wisdom, and reading to him constantly.

And of course God was at work the whole time. What I perceived as a gigantic handicap, God used to develop a brilliant mind. In the thousand hours of reading to him, while he built with his hands, both sides of his brain drew nourishment. Because he was not locked into regular text books and traditional methods of learning, his mind blossomed like a tender plant given generous time and perfect fertilizer to flourish. The end result of what I perceived as a learning disability was that his listening comprehension sky-rocketed and he could recall almost anything he heard verbally. Because his imagination had been awakened through all that great literature, he eventually fell whole heartedly in love with books and after the age of 13 began

devouring books himself. And because nothing had come easy for him, because he had to work very hard at his assignments, he developed tenacity, diligence and perseverance.

Now those character qualities are serving him well as he works on his history degree and prepares for law school. And all who know him benefit from those Lego and K-Nex concoctions because with his hands he can build, fix, and repair just about anything. His mind is logical and structured, all the pieces of history fit into a pattern, like all those enormous buildings he created, while we read and while I fumbled my way through the difficult place we were in.

Life is often packed with disappointments.

It was a busy Monday afternoon. Lunch was late, books were strewn everywhere, laundry was piled higher than Mt. Everest and everybody was whining from hunger. I was spinning across the kitchen trying to pull something together from the weekend leftovers before we had to dash out to piano lessons when seven year old Billy peered at me from behind the kitchen counter.

“Mom, I need to tell you something.”

I thought he was going to file a complaint about the lunch menu but I stopped long enough to look into his eyes and the Spirit of God must have prompted me to stop my Monday madness and listen for a change.

“Mom, do you remember yesterday when Dad preached the sermon?”

Of course I remembered. My husband had been invited to speak at a little church and had spent countless hours preparing and refining his message. I looked across at the meager congregation of 25 people and left that little church grieved that Bill had worked so hard and yet so few had shown up to appreciate his effort. The message had seemed compelling as he shared about knowing your calling and pursuing that call to bring great glory to God. My disappointment at my husband wasting his time at that little church lingered with me still even on Monday.

“Yes, Billy. I remember.”

“Well, during Daddy’s talk I felt God calling me to be a pastor, too.”

I wanted to slip off my shoes for it felt like I was standing on Holy Ground.

Where I had been disappointed, God was working out His plan. Where I saw failure, He was drawing a little boy’s heart to His own. That little boy never forgot His call. A few weeks ago I was invited to listen to a new pastor in town. It was his first sermon at the new church. I listened carefully and I learned a great deal and I felt again the urge to slip off my shoes for I was on Holy Ground. As I looked up into the pastor’s face, I saw the same face that had peered at me from behind that cluttered kitchen counter, all those years before and I knew a level of indescribable joy.

In the areas of our greatest disappointments, God is usually doing his greatest work. And I know that from experience.

A few months ago I heard about a mom who upon discovering her child had cardiac deformities, chose an abortion. I heard that story and blurted out loudly without even realizing it, “She threw away a James.” I understood why she acted as she did. She

was afraid of the risks involved, afraid of the sacrifices ahead, afraid of the unknown, the abnormal and the struggles they would be forced to face. And she allowed her fears to cause her to miss out on what might have been for her and her family a most incredible blessing.

James was that blessing to us. He came bundled with cardiac deformities that should have slayed him on his first day of life. His life was marked by struggle, by abnormalities, by sacrifice and challenge and hurdles and crushing adversity. He had every right to be ornery and wimpy and melancholy and self-centered and insipid. But he was designed by his Creator to defy almost every medical odd stacked against him. Bundled within the blessing of James was the enormous mandate to life live gloriously grateful, to spend every ounce of himself bringing pleasure to the Father and joy to anyone fortunate enough to know him. He came to us to demonstrate that tough times need not make you tough, that laughter mined through adversity is the sweetest sound on earth and that regardless of the insurmountable hurdles placed before you that you charge ahead, straddle as many of those hurdles as you can and when one knocks you down and you lie flat on your face in the dirt you pick yourself up, wipe away the grime and keep running forward.

I will be forever grateful God called me to home school because I was given all those extra hours with James. All those hours in our home, as his teacher, with his brothers and sisters where we read biographies, studied Scripture, learned about God's creations, developed creativity in art and life, memorized verses, laughed out loud,

learned diligence in chores and selflessness because you had to share everything with 7 other people.

And one day after God had called James home I sat with my journal reminding myself of his life and I was struck with the wonderful thought that James had arrived in heaven fully prepared. He came with Scripture in his soul, the Savior in his heart and his mind filled with knowledge of the saints from the Old and New Testaments. And I believe he now stands with that triumphant cloud of witnesses cheering us on.

We have the distinct privilege of preparing our children for life, for building godly character within their souls, for creating in them a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. We are called to make a difference in the lives of these little people and we do not have so much as one clue as to what God will do with them and how He will use them. He just asks us every day to be obedient to His voice, to respond to His love, to realize afresh and anew that our children are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works and we get to play a part in preparing them for His service, here on earth and later in heaven.

I will always be grateful I listened when God called me to this grand adventure of teaching our kids at home. To think that we are given the privilege to influence the world for Jesus sake by our simple, daily, ordinary acts of obedience. What we get to do sometimes only feels like plain, hard work with no sightings of commendation from anyone. Some days we long for that bright yellow school bus to pull near our house so we can cheerfully sweep the whole gang out of our hair and from under our feet. But God is always at work right there in the middle of the grime, the disappointments and the

struggle. You be all about the listening and the obeying part of the equation. Leave the grand results in His capable, majestic hands.

Don't allow the feelings of inadequacies, the challenges, the difficulties, the unknown risks deter you from the task He has called you to. Make certain that He has called you and that you are not doing this home school thing to impress anyone or appear super spiritual. You'll burn out fast if that's your motivation. Pray with the psalmist, "Show me your ways O Lord, teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me. For you are God my Savior and my hope is in you all day long."