



# The Relaxed Home Schooler® Newsletter

Sept/Oct, 2014



## Coming Up:

Mary recently spoke on blogtalk radio for Operation Jericho. It is archived and you can listen by going to:  
<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/operationjerichoprojectradio>

Relaxed Homeschooling Workshop: Oct 24-25, 2014

Friendship Church, 1240 N. Beck Rd, Canton, MI 48187

Fri for teens and parents; Sat is the general RHS workshop for parents. For more info, email [chepaemail@yahoo.com](mailto:chepaemail@yahoo.com)

**Mary is available to do Relaxed Home Schooling Workshops, talks on Common Core, SAT prep workshops for teens, or workshops or keynote addresses at homeschool conventions. For info, go to our website [URL: http://www.archersforthe lord.org](http://www.archersforthe lord.org) and click on the the "speaker's page" or contact her directly at [mary.e.hood@gmail.com](mailto:mary.e.hood@gmail.com)**

## Welcome everybody! Hope you are enjoying fall weather and cooler temps!

### From Mary:

Hello again!

Welcome to the fourth issue of our e-newsletter. This is a replacement for our long-running snail mail newsletter, which started in the early 90s and was shut down in 2006. If you'd like to read the first three issues, you can find them on our website, [www.archersforthe lord.org](http://www.archersforthe lord.org).

After working for six years in the real estate business, God has led me to return to working with homeschoolers full time as a ministry. With the increased time, I made the decision to start this newsletter up again. We also have a facebook group if you'd like to join...[relaxedhomeschoolers-ARCHERS](https://www.facebook.com/relaxedhomeschoolers-ARCHERS). If you have trouble finding it, friend me and I'll invite you.

If you have an idea or would like to submit something for our spotlight section, email me at [mary.e.hood@gmail.com](mailto:mary.e.hood@gmail.com).

Hope you enjoy this issue!

Time for our annual calendar fundraiser!

Each year at this time, we sell calendars to raise funds for ongoing projects. This year it is especially important because we are trying to open a model program in the Georgia area next fall which could be duplicated in other areas.

These calendars are great Christmas presents! They are study, spiral bound, can lay flat in a notebook or on the wall; beautiful pictures, KJV bible verses, and non-glossy so you write on them. If you'd like to help us out, send \$15 (includes shipping) to ARCHERS, P. O. Box 2524, Cartersville GA 30120 to get yours today! If you'd like to get more than 1, or to help us sell them in some other way, contact me at [mary.e.hood@gmail.com](mailto:mary.e.hood@gmail.com). Some people buy a box of 25 to give as customer/client presents for their business. You can also help with our fundraising by donating or purchasing items at any time on our website. Many thanks for helping us grow our programs! As you know, we are a nonprofit organization and all monies raised go to helping our educational programs.

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So glad you are all here! Please also come and visit us at our website

URL:  
<http://archersforthe lord.org>

Also feel free to email me at [mary.e.hood@gmail.com](mailto:mary.e.hood@gmail.com)

## **Spotlight On:** **Valerie Bendt, Homeschooling Author & Speaker**

For those of you who are drawn to unit studies, I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce you to the ideas of Valerie Bendt. Valerie and I have known each other for many years. She and her husband, Bruce, have been active in the movement since the early days.

Personally, I was always drawn to the idea of unit studies but a little put off by the amount of hands-on activities that seemed to be a staple of this method of instruction. Valerie's books, however, tended to emphasize the use of literature, with a few projects thrown in for good measure, and fit much better with my own "relaxed homeschooling" philosophy.

In the early days, her book, "How to Create Your Own Unit Studies", along with "The Unit Study Idea Book" helped me find a methodology that fit with our own family. These books are still available, but they have been combined into a larger one, which is now called "Unit Studies Made Easy".

Most of her unit studies start with a good book or two, add in some hands-on learning, make use of a bit of Scripture, and throw in a little art or music for good measure. She has one series of units that is all ready to use based on the "Frances" books by Russell Hoban.

In addition to her unit studies, she wrote a book called "Creating Books with Children". This is a rather involved unit which helps children to take a story they write and actually create a hardcover book by themselves (well, actually, with quite a bit of help from an adult!) I used to love looking at the books that her own children created. She brought them along when she set up a booth at a curriculum fair, and they were amazing! We tried it ourselves once, with somewhat less amazing results. However, my daughter really loved to write and this study fueled her desire to get something into print.

Valerie has also developed a reading program called "Reading Made Easy". While I never used it with my own children, I've heard very good things about it. It is basically a parent's manual, with children's activity sheets to go with it. It is phonics-based, and uses three lessons a week that each take less than a half an hour to complete.

She calls it a "sit on the couch and snuggle program", which of course appeals to me! However, it actually also includes a bit of writing work, including an introduction to capitalization and punctuation.

For those of you with young children, Valerie has also developed materials on puppetry, including a book called Successful Puppet Making and another that teaches how to make Bible puppets. I haven't personally used these, but have heard others rave about them!

In addition, Valerie is well-known for the materials she has created for preschoolers. One of her books is called "Making the Most of the Preschool Years". It contains one hundred activities for preschoolers, as well as suggestions for including your preschoolers in your activities when you are trying to work with the older students in your home.

Nowadays, Valerie is changing gears a bit. Like me, her youngest child has already grown up and graduated. She is just completing both a master's degree in education with an emphasis in children's literature and TEFL certification, and is about to spend some time in South Korea with one of her grown children. She continues to be interested in curriculum development and has been helping homeschoolers down in the Tampa, FL area with an umbrella school. She says that she has "retired" from speaking after twenty years, but I'm hoping at some point I can still talk her into coming up here to the Georgia area to speak at an event with our organization.

Be sure to go check out her materials at [www.ValerieBendt.com](http://www.ValerieBendt.com). Especially those of you with younger children should find a great deal of helpful materials there. They are all for sale in either digital or paperback book form.



Above is a picture of the front of the calendar that we are selling as a fundraiser. The inside has beautiful pictures and KJV verses, too. See the first page for information on ordering yours. They make great Christmas gifts!

# Old-Fashioned Notebooking

I first learned about notebooking in the eighth grade in a public school class. Miss Ross was our teacher for language arts and social studies. She was one of the crankiest teachers I ever had. She even forced my mother to come to school once to remove a remark she had placed on my permanent record over a misunderstanding! Yet the things I learned from her have stuck with me for fifty years now, proving that a great, enthusiastic teacher can exert a major effect on a student, no matter what the educational setting! Among other things, she willingly gave up many of her Saturdays to take us on field trips to historical sites all over Wisconsin and fueled my lifelong love of history. She also sent us each individual postcards from her summer travels to Europe, and had obviously selected the countries carefully based on her knowledge of each of us as individuals.

The notebooks she had us do formed the backbone of her educational methodology while in the classroom. I used this method many times with my own children while homeschooling them, and share it now with you in hopes you will also find it helpful.

The one I remember most was my poetry notebook. This was a simple three ring paperback notebook with pockets in it. It was sectioned using dividers into all the poets we studied that year; one per week. The section with Robert Frost, my favorite, will serve as an example of the rest.

The first thing in the section was a short biography of Robert Frost, which I was asked to research and write. The second page was a list of some of his most memorable poems.

Next came a poem which I was given the freedom to choose. I believe mine was “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. Another favorite was “Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood”. I believe we were encouraged to include as many poems as we wanted, but were only required to have one per poet. As I recall, there were certain poets I did the bare minimum, but with those I was learning to love, including Frost and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, I often included several.

Miss Ross also encouraged us to use our artistic skills to provide some “flair”. Susie was the artsy one in our class. She poured through old magazines, cut out little items and pasted them carefully among the poems, adding little squiggles and flowers along the edges. The rest of us were green with envy. I remember trying hard to do the same, but the paste always squished out through the artwork and the pages wound up sticking together until I gave up on this part and just stuck to the writing and an occasional drawing to go along with it. I do remember being proud of the cover I created, using calligraphy and oil pastels.

The entire class was assigned a poem to memorize and recite together. We were required to learn the first stanza, and then could do more if we wanted for extra credit. We all stood together, and people sat down one at a time as they finished. I was always the last one standing! Susie might have been the best artist, but nobody could beat me with memorizing. I still recite some of these poems regularly all these years later!

The notebook idea can be used in so many areas. We did Bible notebooks, science notebooks, history notebooks, geography notebooks, and famous artist notebooks at various times during our homeschooling years.

Nowadays, a lot of people enjoy what is called “lapbooking”, which is somewhat similar, but seems to me to be more teacher or parent-directed, and a little more oriented to craftsy kids. Susie would have loved it.

Personally, I will always prefer the notebooks. My own preference is to have a single notebook for each topic, the type with pockets and three clips in the middle, and add pages and dividers as necessary. That way, the notebook gradually grows during the school term and gives a sense of accomplishment as the number of pages grow.

In a geography notebook, you could have dividers for the individual states, or for the different continents. Bible notebooks could be divided by Bible stories, books of the Bible, or favorite Bible characters. Science notebooks could be divided by unit studies you are doing, with sections for birds, or insects, or rocks and minerals.

We sometimes also combined notebooks with collections. We made a leaf notebook (which was kind of difficult to do), by cutting wax paper to notebook size sheets, ironing the leaves between sheets of the wax paper, adding notes about the trees, the species, or the accompanying nuts or seeds.

The beauty about notebooks is they can easily be adjusted to individual tastes. As for me, I could have done an entire notebook on just Longfellow or Frost. My son could have done one on dinosaurs, instead of just having a single divider in the science notebook on that topic.

My one regret is that I didn't save all these notebooks, both the ones I did myself in eighth grade so many years ago, and the ones my children did over the years. I recently ran into one created by my youngest son. It was a story about the trip that a letter makes from the time it is written until the time it got to the intended recipient. I believe it was written and illustrated following a field trip to the post office. It brought back so many great memories, and for once in my life, made me wish I was a pack rat like my mother! She even saved my braids that were cut off when I was ten. But why, oh why, didn't she save my notebooks?

# From the Archives:

## Working with Middle Schoolers

### Excerpted from Spring, 2006, issue of our newsletter

The years from about fifth grade through eighth grade are meant as a transition from the carefree, family-style existence I've been portraying to the somewhat more structured high school scene.

This is an age for filling in gaps. Take a look at your long-range goals and see what happened naturally when they were younger, and what looks like weaknesses or areas where they have no interest whatsoever. Then think through the relative importance of those areas, and decide what needs attention.

At our resource center (note: this was shut down in 2006), the middle school classes are all designed to fill in gaps and prepare for high school. One of our classes, for example, is a creative writing class, because as many of you know, writing comes easily to some and is very tough for others. Another class is called "preparation for algebra", and is meant to solidify basic concepts like fractions, decimals, percents, and consumer math before moving on to abstractions.

The middle years are also a good time for moving gradually out from the shelter of the family cocoon and finding ways to interact with members of a larger community. Volunteer experiences, mentorships, and apprenticeships might be things to consider, especially after the age of 12 or 13. Some kids that age begin their own businesses. My son Steve is 12, and has his own "pet-sitting business", where he takes care of people's pets when they go away on vacation.

This may also be a good time to consider doing some of the things you didn't have time for earlier, like sports programs, or outside classes. Above all, recognize that these kids are becoming young adults as they pass that "12 year old line", and have needs that are changing. You must adjust your philosophy as necessary.

If you still have younger children, you need to keep them in balance, too, but those older kids are not going to be satisfied anymore being dragged around to little kid's activities and assigned too many babysitting duties. They need to get out of the house on their own once in awhile, even if it is just being dropped off at the library to have some time alone. (I'm talking about a seventh grader, now, when I'm talking about leaving them alone...not a fifth grader...big difference in those two ages, both in terms of reality and society's perception. )

In the seventh cd/mp3 of the Relaxed Homeschooling Workshop series, (which is also available individually), I discuss a lot of the changes that children are going through when they pass over the line that divides childhood from young adulthood...typically somewhere around the age of 12 or 13. These include cognitive changes, social/emotional changes, and physical changes. If you haven't ever listened to that talk, I'd strongly recommend it if you have a child who is just going through this phase.

Among other things, it is important to recognize that children can't grasp algebraic concepts until they have passed through into the cognitive stage of abstract thinking, and that this shift happens at slightly different ages for different people. This same cognitive shift is why I personally don't believe in studying abstract concepts such as evolution/creation before the age of twelve, since the ability to discern and reason has not really developed before that time.

Most people either love or hate teaching middle school...it is a very special time of life! Some kids pass through easily, bypassing all the hormonal upsets, and some kids hit it hard! If you have the opportunity to listen to that talk of mine, please do...it discusses in detail all of these changes that they are going through and gives practical tips.



All of Mary's talks are now also available as MP3s!