



The Relaxed Home Schooler® Newsletter

July/August, 2014



Coming Up:

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

Tentative RHS Workshop in Detroit, MI area in October.

Watch website for details.

Probable dates: Saturday, October 11 or 18.

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> and click on the the "speaker's page" or contact her directly at mary.e.hood@gmail.com

Welcome to all our new readers! Hope we help you to relax and enjoy life at home!

From Mary:

Hello again!

Welcome to the third 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 two issues, you can find them on our website, 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. 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.

In this issue, I am spotlighting the work of Charlotte Mason, an English educator whose ideas have been popularized in the homeschooling community through such authors as Karen Andreola, and Catherine Levison.

My own philosophy was greatly influenced by the ideas of Charlotte Mason. As happens with most people, I found that certain ideas resonated deeply within me, but I needed to alter the methods a little when the needs of my family didn't quite fit the method. Hence the title, "Charlotte Mason and Relaxed Home Schooling: They Fit Like a Mitten"...like a glove, only with room to wiggle!

Notice that I have a tentative workshop set up in Michigan in mid-October. If anyone has a group between Atlanta and Michigan, or possibly somewhere in Illinois or Wisconsin, that would be interested in having me swing by for an evening or an all-day workshop, contact me at mary.e.hood@gmail.com

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

Spotlight On:

Charlotte Mason & Relaxed Homeschooling: They Fit Like a Mitten!

Lately I've been thinking a lot about Charlotte Mason and how her ideas fit in with the goals and methods associated with relaxed homeschooling.

When I was just starting out, I was influenced by reading Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book, "For the Children's Sake", which provides an overview of the ideas of Charlotte Mason. It is still an excellent place to begin for those of you interested in learning more about her philosophy.

Because a number of people and companies have begun to sell curriculum materials that are supposedly aligned with CM's philosophy, I believe a lot of the new people just coming into the movement are becoming confused by whether CM is a philosophy, a method, or a full curriculum. On several facebook groups, there are debates between those who consider themselves purists and those who like to dabble in the methods they perceive as being CM related, while incorporating pieces of other philosophies into their homeschools as well.

One of the reasons I've been thinking and re-reading some of the CM books and materials is that we are considering starting a school, and we are likely to incorporate a good bit of CM in that setting. While relaxed homeschooling works really well in a family environment, I believe it would need to be changed up a bit to fit the environment of a school, and the ideas of CM fit much better with my ideas than going back to an emphasis on textbooks and workbooks. Of course, any school we started wouldn't be traditional, anyway...no desks, little to no homework, much of the learning done in the out-of-doors, and a lot of emphasis on the arts, project-based learning, and nature study.

Anyway, I've been thinking a lot about the similarities and differences, and wanted to share my thoughts with you.

Some of the similarities I see are:

We both believe in the use of real, living books, instead of a reliance on textbooks, especially in the younger years.

We both believe in the importance of play, and of having a balanced childhood. In order to accomplish that, we both believe in the use of the morning for academics and the afternoon (at least part of it!) for free, child-led, unstructured play.

We both believe in the importance of time spent in the out-of-doors, and incorporate a lot of nature study into our days, using it as the basis for much of our learning in the areas of art, music, and writing.

We both believe in the importance of art and music appreciation.'

We both believe in the importance of respecting children and giving them "meat" instead of "twaddle".

However, I've always believed it is important to remember that Miss Mason was not a homeschooling mom. Her ideas have always had to be "tweaked", at least a little, to fit my own ideas of a relaxed homeschool.

Some of the differences that I notice are:

Although I like the concept of narration much better than testing, it can still become a "technique" if overdone. We used it occasionally, but not as much as a CM school would do.

We wouldn't have done well with the concept of 20 minute "class periods". Many times, a project required sustained time, and it was not uncommon to cover only one topic or subject a day.

My own methods tend to stress modern art and music appreciation in addition to classical appreciation, and I believe in incorporating a lot of "doing" in the area of the arts, not just listening or appreciating the works that other people have done.

In general, my thinking is that "Charlotte Mason and relaxed homeschooling fit together like a mitten...in other words, like a glove, with a whole lot of wiggle room!

For those interested in learning more, I highly recommend reading "A Charlotte Mason Companion", by Karen Andreola. Catherine Levison's books, "A Charlotte Mason Education", and "More Charlotte Mason Education" are also very interesting. CM's own books are difficult reading, but necessary if you really want to understand the heart of the woman. My favorite is "Towards a Christian Philosophy of Education". (Unfortunately, the word "Christian" is often removed from the title.) Her books come in a boxed set of 6. The others I enjoyed the most were "Home Education" and "School Education". Also, again, for a brief, interesting introduction, read Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's "For the Children's Sake", one of my favorite hs'ing books ever!

Charlotte Mason, Relaxed Homeschooling and... High School?

Charlotte Mason concentrated most of her efforts on working with young children. Nevertheless, some of the concepts she believed in have applicability to high school as well.

People often ask me if it is possible to be too relaxed. In general, when families with young children have a basic structure to their days, and the parents have thought through their own goals and are working towards them, I think few people will wind up being “too relaxed”. Generally, the tendency is the opposite...people usually wind up trying to do too much, and to look too much like a school, generating frazzled nerves.

But what about during the high school years? It has been my experience that it is entirely possible for a teenager to wind up being “too relaxed”!

This usually happens when the teenager has not become engaged in managing his own learning and growth...often because he or she has not been allowed significant input into goal-setting, planning, and selection of materials.

I believe that the key to relaxed homeschooling a high schooler has less to do with specific methods and materials, and more to do with helping the teenager set goals and understand the connections between current actions and future plans so that he will be engaged in his own learning.

The best thing to do is to sit down with the teens and talk about their goals for the future...helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, especially if they haven't yet formed a concrete occupational goal.

Then they need to learn about the various paths to those goals, and decide whether or not college is in the plan. If so, the best thing to do is go to that college and sit down with an admission's officer so that the teenager has an understanding of which high school subjects will be required. (If college is not in the plan, then perhaps a visit to a vocational training institute or a military recruiter might be more in order.)

Once a basic plan is in place, it is important for parents to be flexible in their ideas about how to help the teenager meet his or her goals. For example, if it appears that biology is necessary, it doesn't necessarily have to mean dissections at the kitchen table. Since botany is a sub-set of biology, perhaps a high level greenhouse project might fit the bill instead.

Some teens might prefer to learn about political science during a actual election, or to learn a foreign language through a practical internship, rather than using textbooks.

This is where the “Charlotte Mason ideas” come into play in the high school. It is still possible to use good quality literature rather than using anthologies, and even the other subjects can be made more interesting through the use of living books and real life experiences.

For English, I see no reason for a “curriculum”, even in high school. Just read real literature, and write about subjects of interest, hopefully working with an editor (who may or may not be the homeschooling parent). For history, topics can be identified and interesting books and videos can be taken out from the library.

Economics can be studied by reading real books on capitalism, communism, and socialism. Science can be studied by contrasting the ideas of evolutionary scientists like Charles Darwin and Stephen Hawking, and those of real creationist researchers, like Steven Austin and Kurt Wise.

If textbooks are to be used in upper level science, I recommend finding one, (such as Apologia) that is written by one or two clearly identified authors, who have clearly identified underlying beliefs, rather than using anything that has been written and “cleared” by a committee. The closer to a “living book” a textbook is, the better.

Upper level math is probably the hardest subject to learn without using a textbook. Frankly, I didn't do it! We used the materials from chalk dust, and they worked fine for us. However, I have known braver souls than me who managed to somehow teach the concepts in a way that had a more natural context (such as in entrepreneurial enterprises).

Teenagers often like to sleep late, and stay up late at night. I always told mine that if they had a different schedule than I did, that was ok, as long as they were being productive and meeting their goals. I wanted them to be able to stay balanced and to be treated as individuals...but not so relaxed that they stayed in bed all morning and then used the late night hours to lounge around watching television! The more responsibility they showed, the more they were allowed to plan their own schedules. When the responsibility waned, Mom and Dad had to step in for a bit. Over time, as they refined their own plans for the future, less and less parental oversight was needed.

From the Archives:

“Relaxed Home Schooling with Young Children, Part II”

Excerpted from Spring, 2006, issue of our newsletter

This is a continuation from the last “archive”, and is discussing specific subject matters during the early years. Back in 2006, I wrote:

What about math? In the early years, up through about fourth grade, I see no real need for curriculum at all. Instead, focus on real life math skills. Cook together, measure things, make a garden, go to the grocery store, buy them real watches, give them allowances and help them learn how to save, tithe, and spend, and all the math they really need at this age will come naturally. If you all enjoy them, a few math games can be a great addition to the curriculum. There are a lot of them around, and many aren't even labeled “math games”, such as Monopoly.

If you happen to have a child who genuinely enjoys workbooks, go to a local discount store and get something colorful, preferably with stickers.

In social studies and science, consider losing all the textbooks, (which are often boring and don't cover things in detail), and use a “relaxed unit studies” approach instead. You can either plan something in advance or just go with the flow. When your child finds a spider web, go to the library and get a book on spiders. Don't forget the fiction stories, either! Sometimes I think I relate better to animals than I do to people, and I credit it all to reading too many stories about animals which I was a kid.

Consider what kinds of hands-on experiences you can do for science. Make bird feeders, create collections, go for nature walks, do nature journals or drawings, make a trail through a nearby woody area and create markers or a trail notebook to go with it.

Do the same thing for history/social studies. Follow the news together, and learn about faraway places. Get videos about different countries or time periods. Read lots of historical fiction and/or biographies of famous people. Find some fun field trips to go on and go with just your own family or maybe one other. (Avoid the crowds!)

For geography, we used to use puzzle maps and outline maps that we could color in our own way. We also had a reference library with an atlas, many different road maps, and both a stationary globe and a globe beach ball. Whenever we learned of a new spot, we would take out these items and find out where it was in the world.

We also liked to read stories about missionaries, especially those from Youth With a Mission (YWAM).

Language arts were not taught as a separate subject. As described in my talk, “Reading and Writing the Natural Way”, available on the website, I believe that reading develops naturally when parents understand a few things about readiness, learning styles, and motivation. I never consciously “taught a child to read” in my life! However, at various stages, I did make a variety of materials available to the children, including phonics workbooks, and I read to them endlessly.

Writing also developed gradually, and was not treated as a separate subject. However, each child learned to read and write on his or her own timetable. My oldest son was an early reader and a late writer. My daughters both tended to write longer pieces than my sons. We wrote letters to grandparents, corresponded with pen pals, and wrote short stories and reports on topics of interest. Later, my daughter entered and won a story writing contest in Cricket Magazine. She also began to write for publication at about the age of twelve, including a stint as a teenage columnist with Growing Without Schooling Magazine. This was an invaluable experience, since she had to work with a real life editor, and it wasn't me for a change!

Next issue I will continue excerpting from this article, and we will be discussing the middle school years.



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