



The Relaxed Home Schooler®s Newsletter

November/December, 2015



Coming Up:

Nov 5, 7:00 at Angela's house in Hickory Flats, area, Cherokee Co, GA...Planning meeting for the event on Jan 23 and also to begin planning/praying about a new resource center in the area, hopefully by fall, 2016. Email me for directions.

Set aside Jan 23 for an all day event at Red Top Mt State Park in Georgia. This will be an encouragement/support day for moms, including a talk by Mary Hood, a luncheon, and afternoon discussion groups and workshops.

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 conven-

tions. For info, go to our website

URL: _____

<http://www.archersfortheLord.org> and

click on the the "speaker's page" or

contact her directly at

mary.e.hood@gmail.com

Welcome! Hope we help you to relax and enjoy life at home with your kids!

From Mary:

Hope you will soon be having a wonderful Thanksgiving/Christmas holiday season!

This issue I asked the members of our facebook group, relaxed homeschoolers-ARCHERS, for suggestions for what I should write about.

It was apparent that there was a general theme regarding "transitions" that people wanted help with.

There are several important times that transition happens. One, of course, is when a family makes the decision to leave the public school (or a private school) and begin homeschooling.

Another transition can occur when a family has been using a more structured, "full curriculum", and decides to switch horses midstream and try out a different approach to homeschooling.

Please note that the special on our website is going away as of Dec 10, so the lucky winner of the quilt can have it by Christmas! It's a great deal on a bunch of MP3s

Another major transition occurs when students reach what I call the "middle school shift", somewhere around the age of twelve or thirteen. This is the subject of the seventh talk in the Relaxed Homeschooling Workshop, available at our website, www.archersfortheLord.org. I highly recommend those of you going through that shift listen to that talk. It is critical to understand what is going on with that age group.

The next transition occurs as students enter the high school years. Often, this is one of the hardest ones for "relaxed homeschoolers" to cope with, especially if there are also younger students still at home.

There is also the transition that young people make when they graduate from homeschooling and go off to college, the military, or a job and new apartment.

And finally, there is the huge transition that we mothers face when all of our kids fly out of the nest and leave us with new frontiers to conquer!

This issue and the next one will tackle some of these transitions.

“Life’s About Changes, Nothing Ever Stays the Same”

Do you remember that old country song? There is a place at the nearby state park where an old oak tree used to stand. When we moved here about twenty-three years ago, just the stump and about ten feet of the tree remained. It had fallen over and formed the perfect place for a picnic lunch. My youngest son and I had many wonderful times there when he was about three or four years old. Now the stump is gone and all that is left is a mound of earth. The three year old is now the general manager of a nearby restaurant, and every time I pass the place, I sing the lyrics to the song. “How can I help you say “goodbye?” It’s okay to hurt...it’s okay to cry.”

Of course, the song was about someone passing away, but the “loss” of your children as they pass over to adulthood has a lot of grief built in, too. Passages are just difficult. Transitions are tough. We have to learn to be tougher if we mean to get through them without crumbling.

When I was in graduate school, I had a scholarship from a program called “Populations in Transition.” It was ostensibly supposed to be studying and helping people that were transitioning from institutional care to the outside world.

I always felt that they should have been studying me! I was in a very tough transition myself at the time, coming from my home environment, which had quite a few challenges built in, to the freedom of moving away from home for the first time. I almost blew it. I came so close to quitting during that time, but somehow managed to persevere, finish a master’s program in social work, and then move on to my adult life, (where I never really worked as a social worker!).

In a popular movie, Clint Eastwood talks about change. He says that it is inevitable and that if we try to think about change that is something that always occurs, we can then see it as a constant, and view it as something we can count on. The female lead character responds, “I guess I’m one of those people it frightens.”

Change frightens a lot of women. There are so many of them built into the very nature of motherhood. There is the change that occurs when you first have children. Then, for many people, there is the change that happens when the kids first go to school, and the changes that take place when they hit middle school, high school, and college.

Then there is the biggest change of all, when they grow up and leave the nest. I’ve known very few women who have handled this change easily. Even those who seem to have their act together, when pressed privately, have admitted how long it took them to “find themselves” once the main job of motherhood was done.

Obviously, with all those changes, we have to learn to master transitions or they will destroy us.

I think Clint Eastwood hit the nail on the head when he said we have to view change as something we can count on. When we realize the transitory nature of our lives, it helps us to focus more on the day that is right in front of us. It can help us to appreciate the good when it is here, and realize that no matter what is happening in our lives, good or bad, it will soon be over and replaced with new challenges.

There is one thing that a lot of Hollywood people tend to forget, though. The number one thing we can all count on is God’s presence in our lives, through all the good times and the bad times and the transitions in between.

In Genesis 28:15, God promises Jacob, “I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest...I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

What has God spoken to you of? Whatever His promises to you, He will never leave you to handle it all alone. I know that He has promised me that this time of my life will be a full one, that He will help me to found programs to help homeschoolers and maybe even start a private school. Right now it seems so far off and impossible. Right now I’d like to curl up sometimes and cry when I miss my kids and feel like everything I’m doing is pointless and that my “reach” and influence is small.

I’m holding onto Psalm 37 right now with both hands and both feet, plus my heart and my head. “Commit they way unto the Lord...Trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass”

You’ll notice I’m altering the format of this newsletter a bit while I work on this series about transitions. In this issue, I’ll be talking about the transition that occurs when a family decides to pull out of public school and start homeschooling, or when a homeschooling family decides to forgo the use of a structured, pre-packaged curriculum and go out on a limb, learning to set goals and put together materials on their own.

I’ll also discuss the shift that occurs when a relaxed homeschooling family approaches high school. Then, in the next issue, we’ll talk some of the other transitions students face, plus the one that mothers face when they enter their “empty nest years”.

Above all, when facing struggles that involve changes in your life, it is important to remember to count your blessings and spend some time going inward to understand yourself better, and also time going outward to tie into God’s plan for your life and connect with the people that God sends your way. You’re not alone. We’re all going through this together.

Transitioning to a Relaxed Home School Setting

I belong to two facebook groups, Christian Homeschool Families and Crossing over to Homeschooling. I joined these groups in order to keep an eye on what new homeschoolers are discussing, and also to occasionally insert my two cents worth into the conversation.

One trend I see these days is an emphasis on something they are calling “deschooling”. As they are using the term, they mean to just stop everything for awhile when they get their kids home, to give them time to “detox”. Unfortunately, the trend also seems to be to step right back into a structured, school-like environment whenever they decide that the time for deschooling is over.

First, although I admit the meaning of words can change over time, they really are mis-using the term deschooling, at least the way the term has been used since the beginning of the movement. It originally came from the book, “Deschooling Society”, by Ivan Illich, and entered the homeschooling movement when Illich influenced John Holt. That book really was talking more about the need for de-institutionalizing our entire society. It certainly didn’t refer to a short period of time in between school and home school!

I agree that students coming straight out of the school system need the ability to chill for awhile in order to regain their own motivation. However, this should be a transition to a family style of learning, not a brief respite before the family steps back into the institutional mold of high structured curriculum materials, designed and controlled by outsiders.

When making a sudden move into homeschooling, I recommend instead that the parents share with the children that they need a little time to get organized, and, in the meantime, are taking a short break from schooling. During this time, it is still important to maintain some structure to the day and to have some expectations for the students, even if they are just expectations of helping with chores around the house. It is not a time to make bad habits that they will have to break later, such as spending all day with computer games, or sleeping away the entire morning.

During this time, which shouldn’t last more than a couple of weeks, the parents should spend a good bit of time reading about homeschooling to familiarize themselves with the possibilities; looking into what opportunities are available for them in their communities, and thinking through (and writing down) their long range goals for their children.

A good place to start reading is using back issues of “The Old Schoolhouse Magazine”, which are available for free online. When setting goals, I always use the following categories: values, habits, attitudes, skills, talents/interests, and knowledge. Be as specific as possible within each category, since this list will be used as a guide when determining how much success you are having in your efforts to educate your children.

Depending on their age, involve your children as much as possible during this planning period. Ask them questions like, “Is there something special you would like to learn about that you never got around to in school?” “What subject did you find most difficult in school?” “What were your favorite subjects in school?”

If you are looking through catalogues of materials, or going to the library, or attending a curriculum fair or going to a book store to look at materials, bring the children along if they are able to focus enough to be helpful. When they express interest in things, pay attention! It used to drive me crazy when I had a larger store/booth at the fairs, and the kids used to get all excited about a book about horses, or a particular math game, and the parents would basically say, “Uh-huh”, while glancing at it briefly and then returning to their own pre-determined list of items to purchase without considering the kid’s own ideas.

One of my most important pieces of advice for new people is to avoid buying expensive curriculum materials right away, especially large packages which have not been written to conform to your goals. Many of these packages were designed for private schools, and may be difficult to implement within the home school. Start out small. You can use the public library for most reading, writing, social studies, and fine arts instruction at the beginning. The only thing I think you really need to purchase to start out with is something for math. Even math can start with little workbooks from the Dollar Store. Err on the easy side to begin with. As you start to recognize the level of understanding your children have in the area of math, it will guide you to the right curriculum materials in that subject.

When you don’t spend a lot of money up front, you will still have it in your budget to purchase things when the need really arises. As the student’s begin to express interest in things, or as you begin to assess their learning styles, their knowledge level, and their interests, purchase items for specific reasons for specific children.

This idea of basically creating your own curriculum seems daunting to many new homeschoolers. It seems like it would be easier to just buy something ready-made. It seem easier to use whatever you can get for free, no matter what it is, without considering if it is something that will lead you down the path to your own goals.

Trust me, it isn’t easier! Ultimately, you will find that materials and curriculum designed by others, whether cheap, free, or expensive, are more likely to frustrate you and fail to address the real needs of your family.

What about outside activities? Like curriculum materials, choose those that fit with your own goals, and that treat you, as the parents, as the ones in charge. Make sure you maintain your own balance and sanity. Remember that every outside activity one of the children have is a trip you must usually make in the car, often dragging younger kids with you. Keep everything simple to start with. You can always add other things in later.

What Does “Relaxed” Look Like in High School?

By Mary Hood, Ph.D.

This may be the number one question I get when I speak at fairs or workshops! Everybody can understand what a relaxed, family-oriented homeschool environment looks like during the early years. But can such an environment be sustained into high school?

The answer, as it often is, is “yes and no”. Some teenagers, left to their own devices, might be tempted to sleep all morning and well into the afternoon, and watch television all night. We are still their parents, and if they aren’t responsible enough yet to make wise decisions, we still have to set the boundaries for what is acceptable in our own homes.

The goals we set for them when they were younger haven’t gone away. We still want them to become competent adults and still have quite a bit of work to do at this point, molding their character, helping them develop skills, and preparing them for life beyond the home.

However, it is almost impossible to work well with teenagers unless you also understand that they are now “young, transitional adults”, and should no longer be treated the same as they were when they were children. Their own goals should be given equal attention.

Young adults should have something to say about their daily schedules and the work that they are doing. Without understanding the need for certain subjects, they are apt to rebel, either blatantly, or, more commonly, passive-aggressively. (Sure, I’ll finish this algebra assignment...in about six hours I’ll finish it.)

In my opinion, it is very hard to be too relaxed when working with young children, provided you have a basic structure to your day and order in your lives, including a well-thought out list of long-range goals that guide your daily activities.

On the other hand, it is definitely possible to be too relaxed with teenagers. Again, left alone, some teens can appear to be doing very little with their days or their lives. Sometimes that is because much of the growth is actually taking place internally, where you can’t see it.

Part of the problem is that the whole concept of “teenage” is a rather new one. In most other societies, “kids” this age would be a part of the larger world already, being mothers or fathers, apprentices or tradesmen, university students or bricklayers.

Deep down, they all know this. Therefore, the more you can help them get motivated themselves, and turn them loose to plan and move towards their own futures, the better it will be.

When planning for high school, the following are the things that are most important:

First, if they are capable, let them do the planning, under your guidance. If they aren’t yet capable of doing this, plan together as a team, and make it your goal to help them develop the level of responsibility that would enable them to eventually do it themselves. College, or a trade school, or the military, aren’t that far away, and you won’t be there to do it for them!

Second, remind yourself of what your own goals were for them at age eighteen. If you’ve never sat down to do this, do it now. Focus your attention on these goals, rather than some external list of courses developed by an outsider. For me, the goals of character development and skills acquisition were more important than a list of subjects or the acquisition of specific knowledge.

When planning, look beyond high school to what will come next. If your teenager has a specific college in mind, talk to their admission’s office. If military is in the future, go talk to a recruiter together.

Discuss the possible ways to approach high school with your teen and be sure that they understand that their choices may have consequences at this point. If they are the type who can “play the game” well enough to wind up with the “right” list of courses, it will make college entrance easier. However, if you have one like my oldest, who learns in a different manner, I would allow them some freedom to be individuals, as long as they understand the bigger picture. In that case, I’d focus even more on the skills/character issues, and trust that, with God’s help, they will make good choices and be given grace when the time comes to make their next move. (Remember that there are back doors to college, and many students make a transition to college when they are in their twenties, or even beyond.)

If you do attempt to have a standard transcript, with all the “right” classes, remember that you can still be a little creative with how you approach them. For example, foreign language could be learned with tapes in the car, (I use Pimsleur), with community service in a Hispanic area, or by being an “au pair” for a semester in France or Germany.

Laboratory classes in the sciences need to have a hands-on component, rather than being limited to textbooks and workbooks, but, again, you can allow them to think outside the box. Biology has two subsets, zoology and botany. Just because the public schools focus on zoology doesn’t mean you have to. How about a high level greenhouse project, instead? How about an apprenticeship in marine mammals at Sea World, or at a nearby zoo?

Above all, don’t dismiss their concerns and slavishly follow the customs of others. Plan cooperatively and watch their motivation soar!



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