

Let Them Fly!

By Kathleen Smith

I'm an average student. Since I was little and before I could read, I had a voracious appetite for learning. I just wanted to learn everything! I learned to read mostly on my own. I watched my older siblings, I was the 6th of twelve, and I just learned to read. I read everything I could get my hands on when I was just very young. Then I went to school. Something happened. I don't know what. But as soon as they started making me read things for assignments, it began to be difficult for me. I found that the more they required, the harder it got. What began as a source of joy, turned into a terrible source of trauma. I could not read! I had to read everything twice, at least, in order for my brain to understand. I read slowly, painfully, laboriously. By the time I was in the third grade, I was tempted to cheat on my book reports. I would read part of a book and try to figure out how it ended, and I would try to make book reports that way. I hated the deadlines, the stress of having to read more and more books that took longer and longer to read. My reading did not improve. I spent many hours laboring over the books and assignments I was given. My older siblings had set a standard of performance that I was having trouble keeping up with. Teachers asked me why I wasn't performing like my brothers and sisters had. I just did not know!

No one knew how to find out what my problem was. And it wasn't until after college that I learned that I was dyslexic. I knew that words were reversed for me when I read them. I just did not know that it wasn't normal. I began a regimen of reading out loud to myself from scripture. I read aloud to my husband. I read more and more that way. It seemed to help my mind to set the words straight. But the worst part was that I had missed so much of learning because I had to spend so much time reading my assignments that I could never read for pleasure. When my husband discovered that I had not read many books that he considered to be 'must read' books, we set out together to help me to gain that education which I had not acquired in my youth.

Now, back two generations to my Grandmother. Grandma was a short, read-headed, feisty, one-room-school teacher. She taught all of her children and many of the neighbors. She had had a high school education plus something like a year of teacher training. From her teaching, her son became a translator for the UN, translating up to 25 languages. Some of her 6 children were the valedictorians of their high school classes and each distinguished themselves in their fields after they left her one room school. Each in their own way showing the value of her teaching in that little prairie school. She was very much a "Laura Ingalls Wilder" there on the prairies of North Dakota.

When I began to home school my children, my first thought was about my Grandmother. Gladys Hegland was her name. So, I called my mom and I asked her about Grandma and what she did in that one-room-school. I wanted to know what it looked like on a daily, hourly basis. I thought that if I could emulate her in some small way, I could be successful. I did not have a curriculum to begin with, I only had a knowledge that this was what I needed to do, and that maybe Grandma held the key to knowing how I could get through it.

Mom gave me a lovely little outline of what a day would look like and, using that as a pattern, I started my first home school. At the time, my sister had come to stay with me. She was pregnant and was bed-ridden. I had to care for her, her other three children and my own four children. The oldest of our children was about 7 at the time. I took a deep breath, said a deep prayer, closed my eyes in deep humility and said, Here I go!

Now, twenty-five years later, my children grown and growing, I can look back and say, OK, I didn't die! Right?

When I began, I had a reason. It was a big reason. I attended a meeting with about 20 other

women, who were talking about schools, children, traumatic events that happen to children in schools, and what to do about them all. My children at the time were 3,2 and new. What I heard that day terrified me. I had come from a rough school in North Dakota. It was considered one of the worst around, as far as immorality, drugs, alcohol and general bad behavior. Going there was one of the most challenging things I have ever had to do. All of my siblings who went there were impacted in a negative way by these surroundings and to this day, I cannot think of that place without a great deal of regret and pain because of things that happened there. But I was not there anymore. I was in Utah. This was supposed to be a better place; a MUCH better place. What I heard from those women that day in that meeting, told me that this was not a different place. School is school. The way it is set up, the way it is run, who runs it, choices made, administrative directives, philosophy of learning, and everything about it, makes it what it is, and that, at least in this country, is fairly universal across the board.

I came away from that meeting with one thing: I cannot send MY children THERE. The thought of putting my sweetest of angelic little girls into a setting where there is the remotest possibility of being the victim of some of the things I had heard about in that meeting, was intolerable to me. If necessary, I would have readily given my life to keep them from such a fate. I realize now, that this was my greatest asset as a home-school beginner. I was committed. Totally committed. I did not know WHAT I would teach, HOW I would teach, WHERE I would teach, or HOW my children would get through it, but I knew one thing: I would NOT send them away.

The biggest challenge women face today is the thing inside themselves that says: I don't think I'm really good enough to do this by myself. They vacillate between knowing they should and feeling incapable. Commitment solves the dilemma by giving you some firm ground to stand on when you feel inadequate or time constraints are getting your goat. If you are not committed, you haven't seen enough, you don't know enough, or haven't suffered enough to get to a commitment. When you see what I have seen, know what I know and have suffered what I have suffered, commitment is easy, natural and automatic.

One thing I would recommend at this point is to talk to someone who is in school right now. Really talk to them. Find out how they feel. Ask them how they like what they are asked to do. Ask them how they enjoy being compelled. After all, this is "Compulsory Education". Compulsory is: Obligatory; required; coercive. Think about the word: Coercive. Then the word Compulsory. The implication is that you either do it, or else. What is the or else? Does that mean that I will be FORCED to do this? I HAVE to?

Two centuries ago, education was a privilege. People wanted an education because it represented an advantage in our world. And now they say: You MUST be educated? Why? Who says I must? And who says I MUST do this YOUR way? Can a man educate himself? Certainly. In this age of information, what knowledge cannot be obtained at the click of a mouse or the tapping of a keyboard? Isn't knowledge our privilege, or is it something we have to force down someone's throat? Yes, it's force. Coercion, Compulsion, Force. The children of the same parents. People today say: If I don't MAKE my child learn, he won't. They justify the compulsion because they are afraid. They are afraid that their children will end up ignorant, indolent and useless. They use that fear to justify the FORCE needed to MAKE children learn, MAKE children behave, and MAKE them BE something. Make, make make. Force, force, force, Control, control, control. Compel, compel, compel.

This lends itself very well to the practice of medicating children into obedience. If your children are uncooperative, disobedient, antsy, energetic or any number of other natural behaviors, modern man has said that we must find what chemical is missing in their brain and supply it. Give them a drug to MAKE them obey, MAKE them cooperate, MAKE them sit still. They do the same thing to themselves. If they feel lethargic, they want something that will MAKE them feel better.

These are merely the small symptoms of a very large, very common ailment. No one wants to take responsibility for the results of their life. They want to blame and illness, a person, a specialist,

genetics, life, circumstances, anyone but themselves. I lived 25 years with 12 children with no doctor visits except well-baby checks and physicals for scout camp and missions. We ate good food and did not expect our doctor to keep us healthy, but we studied the laws of health and practiced them on a budget that was limited in the extreme. It was not only possible, but I believe, the best of all possible ways to live with children. My brother was taking his children every week to one doctor or another, spending thousands of dollars a month, and every year, just to keep up with the bills, medications and hospital visits. They did not care to research the laws of health and practice them, but they wanted to pay someone else to do it for them. What they did not know was that you cannot pay someone to **MAKE** you healthy. There's that word again.

When I took responsibility for the health of myself and my children, I set in motion a principle that has given me the most sure foundation for a home school that I could ever have wished for. That is: Self-motivated learning. I wanted to learn because I wanted my life to be better. When my husband lost his job and we lost our health insurance, I said to myself and to God: OK, if I'm going to have to do this myself, I guess I'd better learn some things and do it right. I studied, practiced, prayed, studied some more, tried, failed, tried again and through the years I found an easy, inexpensive way to keep my children healthy, happy and out of the hospital, which is more than I can say for ANY of my siblings. I have watched with regret as all of my siblings have suffered through the illnesses of their children. Leukemia, Cancer, Diabetes, Mental illnesses, Suicide, Heart trouble etc. There is no end to the many ways the body can go wrong. But keeping it right is relatively simple.

Just so with education. If you want to educate your children, give them wings to fly. In other words: Learn, learn learn. Practice, practice, practice. Love, love, love. Sing, sing, sing. If you want your children to eat well, you only purchase **GOOD** food and you only **EAT** good food, yourself. If you want your children to learn, and learn to fly on their own, then **YOU FLY. YOU LEARN. YOU GROW.** They will do what you do. Of course there is a certain amount, (and it is very small) that you will wish to regiment their time. Pray, say a pledge, sings hymns and songs, read aloud to them. After that, and it should be less than two hours a day, then you put them to work on regular assignments, like math worksheets, Khan Academy, reading lessons and the like. Be there, watch them, hover just a bit, like a good librarian. But **LET** them.

The key to my home school and my life is to **LET** children learn. **LET** them fly. **LET** them live. Allowing gives both you and your child the freedom to learn without the darkening effects of compulsion, fear, grades, force, punishment and all the negative impact these things have. **NONE** of this should be any part of what you do in your home. I do not consider that I have to **TEACH** my children everything I wish them to learn. I teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves. We read a lot, I let them learn and I learn for myself. Thus far it has produced the best results I could wish for. Give yourself this chance. Give your children this chance. **LET** them learn. **LET** them govern themselves. **LET** them be who they were meant to be. **LET THEM FLY!**