

Living Education

by Steve & Carol Ryerson

Countless discussions have taken place, and many articles have been written on the importance of training our children according to Scripture. We in the Christian home education community commonly place emphasis on the importance of training our children to walk with God first and foremost as we also train them in daily life skills and necessary academics.

Sometimes we can get so caught up in the books or even in the hands-on activities of home schooling that we forget one very important resource all around us: People. Oh, we may call upon people to share their expertise in various areas such as carpentry, or chemistry, but what about the people themselves?

We still remember the day in 1987 when we took our sons to visit a dear lady in our church who was 99 years old. It was so interesting to hear her tell of her days as a young child and then as a newlywed. The first president she could remember was Grover Cleveland. She told of taking a train from one town to another for a nickel, of moving to the big city as a young bride, and of her husband getting his first car in a day when few people had cars.

When asked about Neil Armstrong's landing on the moon, she replied that many people her age did not believe it actually happened. In contrast, she believed it really took place, but thought "It was the silliest thing I'd ever heard of." She could not see any point to it.

Toward the end of the visit, this dear lady insisted that we stay for lunch, stating, "Who ever heard of going to Grandma's and not eating?" Even though her children had bought her a microwave over her protests, she had come to enjoy the convenience and used it to heat hotdogs for us. We were privileged to be at her funeral 5 years later when she went to be with the Lord at the age of 104.

Another time some relatives took us to visit a friend of theirs who had been raised in a sod house in Nebraska. What fascinating stories he related about his early life!

One of our sons did a project in which he interviewed people about their lives during the depression years. Several of these people were in our church ~ people we had known for years, yet had never really taken this time to learn about them. How fascinating it was to hear these people tell of their experiences that were so vastly different from the way people live today!

There are elderly people all around us who would love to share their experiences. When you sit down to ask people about their early years, ask their permission to tape the conversation. This allows you to go back and listen to the conversation over and over. We have also given blank tapes to relatives and asked them to record memories of their lives as children. Those memories are priceless, especially after the speaker has passed on or no longer has the memory to recall those events.

People don't need to be "elderly" to relate experiences that are exciting to children. While Steve was in his thirties and teaching in a Christian high school, a 17-year old student came up to him after class and was relating a very interesting story he had been reading about from Ohio's history. During the riots of the Viet Nam era in the spring of 1970, the Ohio National Guard was called in to quell a disturbance on the Ohio State University Campus. This Columbus teen told Steve that from what he read, the National Guard had marched up High Street (the main north-south corridor in Columbus) in the campus area. His eyes really bulged when Steve said, "That's right; I was there." We should qualify this comment in saying that he was an OSU student just trying to get to his classes, unaware that they had been cancelled at the last minute; he was in no way involved in the rioting.

This teen acted as though he had found a gold mine in talking to someone who had actually been there. There are, in fact, gold mines all around us in the lives of people who have lived through major historical events. If we talk with them about their experiences, we will learn some interesting things not found in textbooks. Those nuggets can help us greatly to understand history as the unfolding of God's plan in the lives of real people.

In today's culture of frequent relocations, it is not difficult to find people who were raised in a distant part of our country. Take advantage of opportunities to invite such people to dinner and ask them about what their lives were like where they lived.

In fact, you don't even need to limit yourself to our country. Many places have people who have immigrated from other parts of the world. We have a sizeable Hispanic population in our city. In addition to that, the local University has a large international student population. Many people from other countries want to make friends with Americans who are willing to help them learn English and other aspects of our culture.

One summer day about a year ago Carol was outside when a young lady from India walked past. She stopped and asked if we could help her find housing. This led to our running her on some errands and spending some time just getting to know her. Unfortunately, her situation was such that she only stayed in town a short time. She will be back later to continue her studies. In fact, we still have some of her things stored in our garage and look forward to her return so we can continue our friendship.

Inviting people to dinner is one way to begin getting to know people ~ whether they are from a different age group or a different part of the world. You will certainly click with some people more than others, but Let the Lord lead you as you decide how much time to put into these friendships. The Lord Jesus may work in these situations in ways you did not expect.

We had no idea that God was changing our lives forever the day not long ago when we received a phone call from a friend, a former missionary to Korea. He told us that the son of a Korean friend was coming to study at the University of Findlay and asked if we could help him get settled. God was about to bless and enrich us greatly.

This young man had studied much English in Korea, but none of it was with Americans. So, when he came to this country, he found that he could not understand us. The first few days were very interesting, to say the least, as we figured out how to communicate while helping him find a place to live, register for classes in intensive English language study, and sundry other tasks. After ten days, he rented a house just two doors from us because his father told him to "Stay close to the pastor."

We helped him learn English, sometimes going over homework assignments, other times just talking. We spent many hours teaching him songs that we sing in services. We reminded ourselves that we were not just "shooting the breeze," since he must have conversation practice to become fluent. It was during these times, though that we got to know and love him. (By the way, idiomatic expressions like "shooting the breeze" are very difficult to explain to a non-English speaker—what pictures would go through their minds on that one?)

Helping him to open a checking account led to discussions about how Koreans handle their money. Helping him navigate grocery stores and learn what our American foods are were very interesting. Meals together were some great times to learn about the differences between Korean and American diets. He cooked several foods for us, allowing us to sample foods that just a few short months ago we had never heard of. As we got to know him better, we learned many things about Korean life and customs. As he learned about the vastly different ways of Americans, everything was open to question. As we went about our daily chores, we might hear the question, "What are you doing? Why?" Things we take for granted seemed new and strange to him. You might recoil at the

thought of laying your life so bare before someone else, but remember that our lives are laid out openly before God. If we have things in our lives that we want to hide, we must remember that God can still see those things. Is He pleased with those things? What a tremendous reminder that we must live our lives openly before our Maker! What a great opportunity to give our children broader perspectives on why they do things and to teach them the need for self-examination!

God has greatly blessed us and enriched our lives through getting to know this young man who has become like a son. Many more great times took place after his wife and daughter arrived from Korea.

You may hear some tired, exasperated person half jokingly say, "Boy! Things would be a whole lot easier without people in the world!" We understand the frustrations that people bring, but we also see that God works through people to bless you and teach you how His Body works. Don't miss opportunities to let your children learn from people with varied experiences. Your entire family will learn valuable lessons and be blessed.