

CHRISTIAN HOME & SCHOOL

 CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS
INTERNATIONAL

FOR BELIEVERS IN EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2006

**KIDS &
NEWS**

**TAMING
TECHNOLOGY**

**HER OWN
ROOM**

**OPEN
HOUSE**






C O N T E N T S

Volume 84, Number 4

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D E P A R T M E N T S




- Parentstuff** 5
Packing lunches...visiting school
- Clippings** 6
SAT scores...study abroad...pot
- FYI** 7
English...music...biology...soccer...basketball
- Profile** 8
Lakewood Christian School
-  **Social Sites** 25
Is there room for MySpace?
-  **Kids' Books** 26
*Preserving natural resources...
returning artworks...making choices*
- Questions** 29
Helping with homework...navigating sleepovers
- Books** 30
Parent the heart...find hope...stay connected
- Film** 32
*Barnyard; The Ant Bully;
Monster House; Cars;
Pirates of the Caribbean:
Dead Man's Chest;
Superman Returns*
- 

C O L U M N S

- Editorial—New and Old** 4
by Gordon L. Bordewyk
There's change all around, but God remains the same.
- Extra Point—Mottoes, T-shirts, and Tattoos** 34
by Daniel R. Vander Ark
Identifying ourselves as followers of Jesus.

Cover photo by Corbis

F E A T U R E S

- Taming Technology** 10
by Timothy Eimer
Computers, MP3 players, cell phones, and game consoles dominate the lives of many young people. Here are some ways for parents to correct that.
- 
- When the News Comes Knocking** 14
by Sandra Ritsema
Help your children think and act redemptively when reports of troubling world events enter your home.
- 
- Kid Central** 18
by Beverly W. Dillard
Opening your home to your kids' friends may sound threatening, but it provides opportunities to establish relationships.
- 

-  **Room to Grow** 22
by Martha Hynson
This mother listens, learns, and leads as her daughter approaches adolescence.

New and Old

Perhaps it's because I'm acquainted with so many teachers and principals that I think New Year's Eve really happens at the end of the summer rather than at the end of December. The official holiday is marked by lots of revelry in a burst of post-Christmas enthusiasm, but the timing seems fairly arbitrary. After all, nothing much changes on January 1 except for the date. But the shift from the last day of summer vacation to the first day of the school year—that's a watershed.

In anticipation of this new year, kids have been text-messaging each other, asking about what classes they will be taking and what teachers they will have. Parents have been shopping at back-to-school sales, buying new shirts, sweaters, and socks for their kids. Teachers have been putting up bulletin boards, preparing units, arranging desks, and organizing classroom supplies. Maintenance workers have been buffing hallways, repairing cabinets, and cleaning windows. Coaches have been ordering equipment, holding tryouts, and running practices. Administrators have been reviewing enrollment figures, welcoming new families, meeting with staff members, and planning chapels. The buzz of anticipation that surrounds the beginning of school is like a caffeine high that causes some to have a little trouble getting to sleep at night.

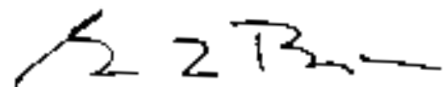
Some students are starting in a new school this fall. Maybe their family moved to a new location over the summer, their school relocated to a new facility, or they graduated from one school to another. Most students will be getting new teachers this year, and there will likely be new classmates as well. The curriculum and textbooks will be different from last year—and probably more challenging. And the mistakes or misbehaviors of last year will be a fading memory because the slate has been wiped clean.

The whole learning environment seems different from

what it was 10 or 15 years ago. For example, computers have changed the look of classrooms and school libraries. The information that used to be contained in a shelf-long set of encyclopedias is now available on a CD or online. Reports used to be done by writing or typing information on paper and pasting photographs on the pages; now they're likely to be multimedia presentations using PowerPoint or similar software. Communication with students from other locations used to involve long gaps because of letters crossing in the mail. Now students can exchange information in real time with others who are thousands of miles away.

But what hasn't changed—especially in Christian schools—is the foundation of learning. Good Christian schools adapt to new technology and a changing culture without losing the perspective that truth is immutable and that God is the source of wisdom. God reveals himself through Scripture and through creation; Christian schools help students gain knowledge and discernment by studying both the Bible and the world that God created and continues to uphold. God's faithfulness is the same in the twenty-first century as it was during the Old Testament era. We and our children are part of the multicultural, multigenerational family of God. And because of Christ's redemptive work, we know that we are new creatures and that creation will also be renewed.

Fashions change and teaching methods change, but the timeless truths of God's creative, redemptive, and regenerative power remain the same. It's because of those truths that we send our children to Christian schools.



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Listen Up

A very important skill that children will need as adults is the ability to listen. Children interrupt, yell, and talk over each other, which often results in misunderstanding.

One mom told how she taught her children to listen. "I use this technique whenever my boys are in conflict over a toy. I sit them down with the toy on the table and say, 'You can play with the toy as soon as you both agree on a plan.' I encourage them each to share an idea and listen to the other's idea. I teach them about compromise, working together, and sharing, but I let them work it out."

—adapted from *Say Goodbye to Whining, Complaining, and Bad Attitudes in You and Your Kids* by Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller

Get Enough Sleep

When adults lose shut-eye, they typically feel lethargic, but when children don't get enough sleep, they can become antsy and jumpy, says Judith Owens, director of the Pediatric Sleep Disorders Clinic in Providence, Rhode Island.

To help your kids sleep, stick to a regular bedtime, limit caffeine consumption—everything from chocolate candy to soda—within six hours of bedtime, and make sure your kids exercise during the day.

Doctors recommend the following amounts of sleep for kids:

Ages 5–9	10–11 hours
Ages 10–14	9–10 hours
Ages 15–18	8¼–9 hours



Back-to-School Lunches

Fuel your kids' education with a heart-healthy lunch that will not only help them achieve in school but will also promote a lifetime of positive eating habits. Consider some of these ideas for their lunchboxes.

- ✓ Build a better sandwich by using whole-grain breads and rolls whenever possible to increase the total fiber in your children's diet.
- ✓ Use leftover chicken or turkey strips to make a cold fajita, and go heavy on the vegetables.
- ✓ Chunky chicken salad made with low-fat mayonnaise, raisins, shredded carrots, and sliced almonds in a pita is a winner.
- ✓ Mix cranberry sauce and low-fat mayonnaise to dress up a turkey sandwich.

—The American Heart Association

Start a Parent-Child Book Group



A parent-child book group can broaden the topics that you read about, provide opportunities to discuss important topics with your child, and create quality time for you, your child, and his or her friends.

Pick four to six parent-child pairs to participate with you. The parent-child pairs take turns organizing and leading the group. When it's your turn, choose a book, set a date, and prepare discussion questions. You lead the discussion for 30–60 minutes and perhaps serve a snack. You could make the invitations and food relate to an idea in the book.

—Kerri Brandsen

"Discipline is a two-sided coin. One side is direction, and the other is correction."

—Karyn Henley



Visits to School

About once a week I walk into the school building to pick up my elementary school children at the end of the day. This helps me build a better relationship with the teachers and school staff and provides an opportunity for their teachers and me to interact, even if there is only time for a smile and a kind word.

Teachers often have topics, ideas, anecdotes, and concerns they are eager to share informally, and it helps me develop a better appreciation for their job. Without these informal meetings, I am sure that communication would be limited to issues they and I felt were monumental enough to require a phone call or note home. These brief appearances also give me the opportunity to catch a candid glimpse of my sons with their classmates and to assess the school atmosphere.

—from *The Christian Mom's Idea Book* by Ellen Banks Elwell

SAT Scores Edge Up

The average SAT math score in the U.S. for 2005 was at an all-time high, up two points to 520. The average verbal score remained level at 508.

Private school students played a significant role in the math uptick. Public school math scores stayed level at 515, religious school students saw their scores rise from 531 to 534, and independent school students made a gain from 574 to 577. In the verbal component of the SAT public school students scored 505, religious school students 539, and independent school students 553.

Self-Discipline Pays Off

A study published in *Psychological Science* claims that self-discipline may be the most important factor contributing to academic success among adolescents. Researchers compared grades, standardized test scores, IQs, school attendance, TV time, and the results of various self-discipline tests to see which components affected academic performance the most. They found that self-discipline outweighs the other factors in predicting success.

Tech Careers, Anyone?

In a survey sponsored by Business Roundtable and Compete America, most parents agreed that educa-



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Archery is a growing sport among Canadian boys.

Emerging Sports, Eh?

Students in Ontario, Canada, are flocking to emerging sports, such as rock climbing, archery, and mountain biking. About 39 percent of Ontario high school students participate in interscholastic sports. The Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations reported that there was a 23 percent increase in participation during the 2004–2005 school year. Emerging sports, however, had a greater increase than traditional sports. New sports with the greatest increase for boys were indoor soccer, archery, and rock climbing. Top new sports for girls included indoor soccer, synchronized swimming, and snowboarding.

tion in math and science is important to keeping the U.S. competitive. However, only 5 percent of parents in the group said that they would try to persuade their children to pursue a job in science and technology. Sixty-five percent of parents opted for letting their children choose whatever career they wished.

Go Green, Save Green

“Green schools”—those specifically designed to provide healthy and productive learning environments—cost only 1.5 to 2.5 percent more to build than conventional schools, concludes a study by the Mas-

sachusetts Technology Collaborative in Westborough. The benefits of the new designs include reduced cases of student asthma and other illnesses, energy and water savings, and a reduction in costs associated with wastes and emissions.

Credit for Study Abroad

High school students planning to study overseas in exchange programs shouldn't assume that they'll get credit at home for study done in another country. Students should meet with a guidance counselor before going overseas, advises David G. Barber, director of admissions and

registrations for Youth for Understanding. He says that students should obtain a written agreement about what they need to learn in the time they are gone and what documentation they need to bring home to prove that they have met the requirements.



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Stay Away from Pot

Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug among American young people and is often a gateway to harder drugs. If teenagers stay away from marijuana, they are less likely to use other drugs.

“If we can get a child to 20 without using marijuana, there is a 98 percent chance that the child will never become addicted to any drug,” says White House Deputy Drug Czar Scott Burns. “While it may come across as an overemphasis on marijuana, you don't wake up when you're 25 and say, 'I want to slam meth!'”

Schooling and Jobs

Staying in school can pay off later on. Looking at the highest level of education, Statistics Canada reports that in 2005 these Canadians held jobs: 21.5 percent of elementary school graduates, 65.7 percent of high school grads, 76.7 percent of persons with a bachelor's degree, and 77.3 percent of people with an advanced degree.

Noteworthy

• **Calvin Christian School** in Drayton, Ontario, and its 135 students in grades K–8 celebrated the school’s 50th anniversary in June.

• **Lois DeVries**, an English teacher at Grand Rapids (Michigan) Christian High



School was named Michigan Council of Teachers of English Educator of the Year by the board of the Michigan Youth Arts Festival. At the festival this past spring 5 of the 11 fiction contest winners were students in DeVries’s creative writing class.

• The cheerleaders from **Contra Costa Christian High School** in Walnut Creek, California, took first place in a competition sponsored by the National Cheerleaders Association at Knott’s Berry Farm. Over 1,500 cheerleaders mainly from the Western states competed.

• Three of the five valedictorians in the graduating class of 162 at Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Lutheran High



Making Music Together

More than 500,000 students across Canada celebrated music education by playing or singing “A Little Music” at the same time, 10 a.m. on May 1. All the students at **Abbotsford (British Columbia) Christian School** participated and formed a large ACS on the field in front of their school.

School in June were graduates of Brookfield Christian School four years earlier. **Kate Du Mez, Luke Fennema**, and **Erika Meekma** earned 4.0 GPAs.



• **David Kool**, a senior from South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was

named Mr. Basketball by the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan. His team won two state cham-

pionships in Class B competition in his four years of play. Coach Ken Hiskes says that David “is a humble, caring kid who conducts himself wonderfully on the court.”

• **Harlan Kredit** is the first person from the state of Washington to be inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. Reflecting on his career of teaching biology at



Lynden (Washington) Christian High School, Kredit says, “God let me live out my dream.” The award includes \$1,000 for educational materials and a \$1,000 scholarship for a student pursuing a career in education.



• The mock trial team from **Timothy Christian High School** in Elmhurst, Illinois, placed first in state competition for the sixth time in nine years. They went on to finish third in national competition, the highest that any team from Illinois has ever placed. The teams of student lawyers and witnesses prepared and tried a court case in which a person was charged with murder in the death of a bucking bronco rider.

Showcase your school! Send news items to RogerS@CSOnline.org



The girls’ soccer team at **Unity Christian High School** in Hudsonville, Michigan, won the state championship for the second consecutive year. Sophomore **Laura Heyboer** (center in photo) was named Miss Soccer by the Michigan High School Soccer Coaches Association, the first for a Division 3 player and the first for a sophomore. During Heyboer’s two years at Unity, the team has amassed a 55-0 record and set a state record for the number of goals scored—195 and 156.

Kuyers Receives Award

At this year’s annual leadership convention, CSI announced a new Distinguished Christian Education Award. Milton Kuyers was honored as the first recipient of this award for his encouragement, leadership, and support of Christian schools.

Kuyers has generously supported many Christian schools and endowed the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin College. He also developed a financial plan that encourages churches to provide Christian school tuition for all children in the church.



Milt and Carol Kuyers are thanked by Jim DeKorne.

Hands-On Schooling in Lake Odessa

As you approach Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ontario, you're impressed with the state-of-the-art facility built within the last five years. But your eyes are soon drawn to the large front entrance, which contains floor tiles set out as a chessboard. And yes, students use large chess pieces to play chess here. This could be a place where students enjoy attending school.

Started by Dutch immigrants 54 years ago, the school attracts a diverse student body today. Children from various churches, ethnicities, and races fill the classrooms, and the school accommodates more ESL and special-needs students than before.



Lakewood's first and second graders study the life cycle of monarch butterflies.

Calvin Christian School Hamilton, Ontario

Opened: 1952

Students: 430 in
preK through
grade 8

Teachers: 15 full-
time, 8 part-time

Principal: Ted J. Postma

Tuition: \$1,600 for preK, \$4,250
for kindergarten, \$7,650 per
family for grades 1-8

Web site: www.ccsHamilton.ca

Mission statement: The mission of Calvin Christian School is to assist parents by providing for each student a Bible-based elementary education in a supportive Christian classroom community that nurtures growth in knowledge, maturity, and commitment to God for sharing in the life and work of his people in the world.



The result is that the school is near its planned maximum enrollment of 450.

Principal Ted Postma asked several persons in the school community what makes their school distinctive, and they gave several reasons: Christian teachers, a program of studies from a Christian perspective, students who are challenged to use their God-given gifts, policies that clearly show obedience to God, and respect for God's creation. For instance, sixth grade teacher Annetta te Velde has her students list the creative ways that people use the resources of the earth. She says that her students are quick to discuss ways that people don't use energy resources wisely. So she asks them "to use a concordance to find out what God says in the Bible about these concerns."

When the second grade classes learned last year that God commands us to care for his creation, some students asked, "Why doesn't our school compost?" Soon compost buckets appeared in each classroom and students filled them regularly with banana peels and apple cores. The healthy flower gardens around the school show the effects of the compost program.

Hannah Vermeer graduated last spring and speaks of the biblical perspective that she learned at Calvin Christian School. "I'm glad I've gone to Calvin Christian School because now I know how to apply my faith to everything I learn," she says. Even the city of Hamilton took note of the school's concern about health and fitness. The public health nurse sent a letter to all schools asking, "What does your school do to promote healthy living in Hamilton?" Calvin Christian compiled a list that included it's outdoor ice rink for students to use during recess and PE, and received a first-place award from the city.

Music plays an important part at this school. Hand bell, recorder, and singing choirs are open to students, and those in grades seven and eight are required to take band. The groups perform at various locations, such as local malls and retirement homes. After a musical this past spring sixth graders displayed a variety of instruments that they had made.

Tuition and other sources of income cover the operating costs of the school, but each year it appeals to the broader Christian community to help

TAMING TECHNOLOGY

Kids in North America spend more time watching TV, using the Internet, playing video games, and listening to music than they spend in school. It's our job as parents to bring these technologies under control.

BY TIMOTHY EIMER

While vacationing in Florida last summer, my 5-year-old son was introduced to video games by his older cousins. On a particularly hot day I allowed him to spend an hour plopped in front of a television and race virtual four-wheelers on a dirt track. Upon returning, I found him in a dark room mesmerized by flickering images of crashing vehicles. During the week my son had experienced amazing adventures—sea kayaking, snorkeling, riding waves, and constructing sandcastles—but after an hour in front of the video game, all that he wanted to do was to drive his imaginary four-wheeler. Needless to say, I hauled him back onto the beach for more summer fun and resolved, yet again, never to have video games in my home.

Anyone who hasn't been living in a cave for the past several years has witnessed technology devices and services bombarding our families with endless choices. As a teacher, I hear growing concerns among parents about the influence

of technology and media on their children. Like other tools developed by humans, technology is neither good nor evil, but the effects of technologies are adding stress and an unnecessary burden to the lives of many Christian families. Here are some ways you can tame technology in your home.

Decide what will enter your home

My wife is a self-confessed TV addict, and I will not miss a European soccer match if it's aired on television. Early in our marriage we realized that subscribing to cable TV would tie us to our television set far too often. So instead, we get only six channels (reception is poor on three of them), and our TV has a small screen. As a result, we watch only a few hours of TV a week and spend a lot of time reading, talking, and playing with our children in the evening.

Many families devote time to planning monthly budgets, vacations, and retirement strategies but spend little or no time thinking about how much influence technology has on their family life. Start with a clean slate, and imagine your home completely free of technology. Then as a family discuss the impact that different technologies would have on your family life. Many technologies quicken the pace of life, and some are addictive and eat into family time. Some



technologies, such as MP3 players and computer games, also create separation among family members instead of uniting them. After evaluating your technology options, select those that would benefit your family, and cut out those that would have a negative impact.

For example, our family has chosen not to have cable TV, video games, or music headphones in our home, but we do have a small TV, digital camera, DVD player, CD player, and one computer with Internet access. Technology choices will vary among families. I know good, solid families that have every possible electronic gadget and others that don't even own a TV. The important thing is to control the adverse effects of technologies and the media instead of allowing them to randomly infiltrate your home.

Count the costs

As a newly married couple in 1990, my wife and I budgeted for rent, utilities, contributions, transportation, food—and not much else. Today it's one thing to lay out money to purchase large-screen TVs, digital cam-

eras, video game systems, computers, MP3 players, and a growing list of other techno-gadgets. It's another thing to pay skyrocketing monthly fees for cell phones, pagers, Internet access, and cable TV.

In 2005 personal savings as a percentage of disposable personal income was -0.4 for the average American family. Canadian families were slightly more conservative at -0.2 percent. We're spending more than we earn. My family tries to keep our technology purchases at a minimum. For example, we purchase inexpensive computers with no bells and whistles, and we'll keep our 7-year-old computer as long as it works. When our cell phone company could no longer offer us basic service for \$20 a month, we canceled our contract. Now our monthly technology expense is a \$9.99 dial-up Internet-access fee.

When choosing technologies for your family, also consider the potential financial costs to your children in the future. Young people today are growing up with a host of technological options that will burden them with extra expenses when they begin

living on their own. Weaning your children from these technologies now can help them make wiser financial decisions after they leave home.

Create no-technology zones

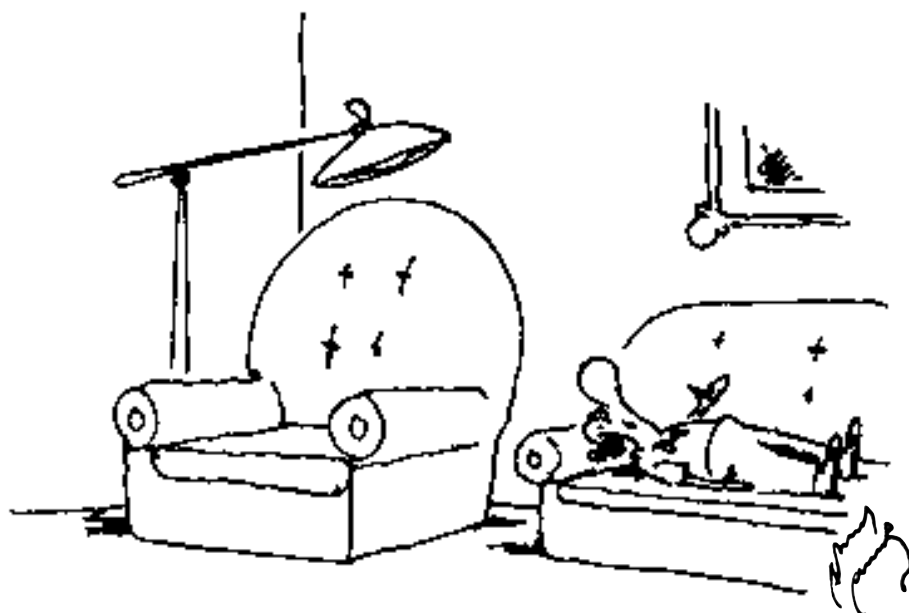
Good technologies can have negative effects when placed in the wrong location. For example, the Internet is a powerful educational tool, but many parents complain to me that their children are wasting time surfing the Web in their bedrooms, which causes them to stay up late in order to finish their homework.

Designate areas in your house that will remain technology free. For instance, set aside a room for family activities such as playing board games and reading instead of watching TV. Restrict computers with Internet access to a central location where you can monitor your child's use of the Web. Also consider making your child's bedroom a technology-free zone. Many studies have shown a wide variety of unwanted effects on kids with TVs, video games, and Internet access in their rooms.

Create no-technology times

The average child in North America spends 5½ hours every day of the week watching TV, using the Internet, playing video games, and listening to music. On average, children spend more time using these technologies than they spend in school. The effects of this trend are well known, including increasing childhood obesity, excessive exposure to violence, and gaping holes in kids' mental and physical development. Obviously, parents need to limit their children's exposure to technology.

Consider establishing times when you limit the use of technology. Experts recommend turning off the TV during mealtimes, so families can reconnect, talk about the day, and iden-



“At some point, the invisible friend thing spun out of control.”

tify potential problems. Many educators recommend eliminating TV, video games, and noneducational Internet use on school nights. Children can fill this time with schoolwork, sports, music lessons, pleasure reading, and good old-fashioned play.

Find a different babysitter

It's tempting to use technology as a babysitter at times. For example, I purchased a portable DVD player for a long road trip last year, and our boys spent most of the ride enraptured by Dr. Seuss and Thomas the Tank Engine. But once we reached our destination, I put the DVD player away for the week.

Many parents occasionally plug in a DVD or allow a child to play a half-hour video game while they prepare the evening meal. But when I come home, I try to engage my kids in activities that develop their mental, physical, and spiritual maturity. In a typical week my sons and I collect firewood, read books, write stories, play sports, practice boxing, play strategy games, create toy train setups, draw pictures, and fight off imaginary mountain lions while hiking. Before you use technology as a babysitter, consider all the things your child is missing when watching TV or playing computer games.

Shut the back door

A mother at my son's bus stop shared with me that her 5-year-old is a video game addict and spends hours a day playing the latest games. This mother never wanted video games in her home, and now she's having difficulty setting limits on her son's use of them. I asked her why she bought a video game in the first place, and she told me that her son's first game was a gift from a cousin.

Since talking to this parent, I have heard similar stories about well-

meaning gifts bringing an undesirable technology into a home. Recently, generous neighbors offered our family their large TV because they had purchased a big-screen television. My wife and I politely declined the offer because we knew a better TV set would cause us to watch more television.

Most people would think twice about accepting the gift of a dog, because of the added responsibility and burden on their family, but many feel compelled to accept a high-priced technology item. Don't hesitate to turn down such a gift if you believe it will have a negative impact on your family.

Evaluate media messages

When the new season of *American Idol* aired last year, I talked with my eighth graders about the reasons that they liked the show. Primarily, they enjoyed watching people make fools of themselves. I explained to my students that they were sitting in the seat of mockers, a behavior we are warned

against in Psalm 1:1. That verse hit home with them, and they couldn't refute its wisdom. We must evaluate the flood of media messages flowing into our homes via technology and rely upon the wisdom of Scripture to expose and root out sinful messages.

Many video games and DVDs encourage children to delight in violence and rejoice in the perverseness of evil. But Solomon warns us not to "envy a violent man or choose any of his ways" (Proverbs 3:31). It's our job to keep our children from harm, but the widespread tolerance for unlimited amounts of violence, rudeness, and sinful acts exhibited in the media makes it difficult for parents to take a stand. So filter media messages through the Scriptures, and have the boldness to cull out the evil influences on your children so that they can use technology to honor God. ■

Timothy Eimer teaches at Phil-Mont Christian Academy in Erdenheim, Pennsylvania, and is an author of CSI science curriculum materials.

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When the News Comes Knocking

We are bombarded with news from around the globe, and not all of it is good. How can we help our kids stay informed about current events, care about people from other places, and develop a confident, kingdom perspective?

BY SANDRA RITSEMA

T

he world has come to your doorstep. News of a devastating tsunami, powerful hurricanes, shattering earthquakes, and terrorist attacks spreads in ways that were barely imagined a decade ago. How can you help your children process what they learn about suffering people all over the globe and develop a heart of compassion? How can you help your children observe current events with an eye for

where and how God is at work rather than with a sense of defeat, fear, or indifference?

We can't promise our children exemption from suffering, but we can help them learn to live redemptively. We want our children to learn about God's world so that they may better know, worship, and love their Creator and then reach out in love toward their neighbors near and far. Here are some ways to help our children achieve that.

Instill a biblical worldview

Children are always interpreting and assessing what they observe, trying to make sense of the world around them. We have an important job of helping them develop a Christian worldview.

We begin to build a biblical framework for our children as we help them find their identity, comfort, and safety in belonging to Christ. This creates a grid through which they can accurately view and make sense of life. Our children should understand that God is writing their personal story in the context of his great redemptive story. God has a loving plan to provide a "hope and a future" for our children (Jeremiah 29:11), just as he has had a glorious plan throughout all of history to redeem his people and his world.

Teach your children about God's character. He is good, loving, faithful, compassionate, just, and merciful. Help your children think about the suffering, injustice, and evil

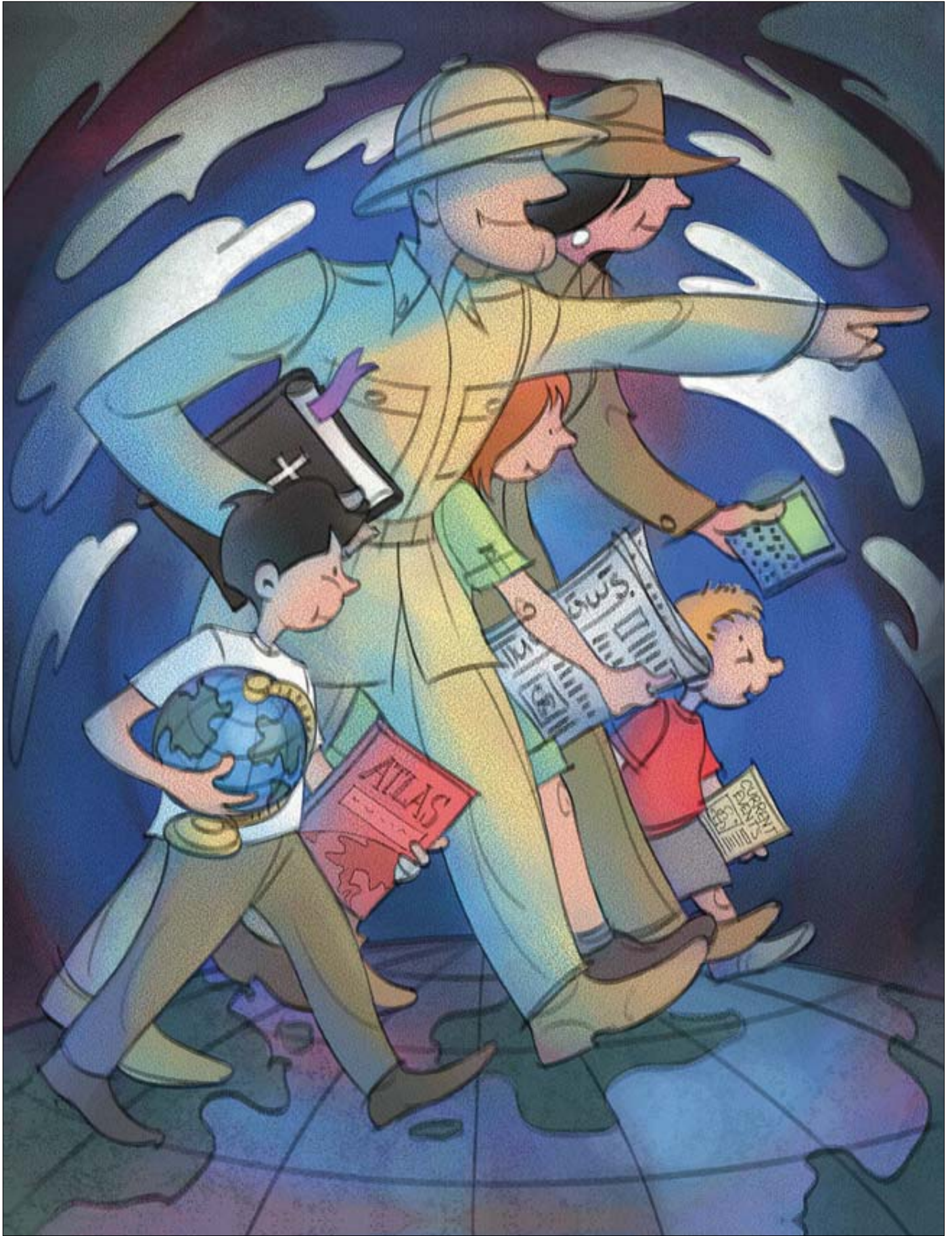


ILLUSTRATION BY RICH BISHOP

in this world in light of what they know about God. Teach your children that no matter what happens, no matter what others mean for evil, God is in control and will use it for good in the lives of his children.

Christ calls us and our children to live boldly as his ambassadors, bringing a message of hope and reconciliation to this broken world. It's "as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Teach your kids to recognize and reject what's wrong in our world and to seek to make things right. Encourage them to value and pursue the things that God loves: peace, justice, truth, mercy, and righteousness. That will help them shine the light of the gospel in your home, in your community, and to the nations.

Teach your children God's Word and how to use biblical truth to filter what they see and hear. Ask questions that encourage them to think biblically, and listen to their questions so that you can shape their thinking.

As your children learn what God has done, is doing, and will do, they'll learn to live with hope rather than fear. And they'll be moved to care for and respond to the world around them.

Model godly responsiveness

How do your children see you responding to the evening news? Take the opportunity to pray with your children about things that are happening in the world. If your kids see you give of your time, talents, and finances, you'll encourage them to give and to serve. Model compassion and love for your neighbor. Teach your kids to love what God loves and to hate what he hates.

Encourage honest dialogue

Of course you need to consider what's appropriate for your children.

What can they handle without becoming excessively fearful? Children may worry, What if something like what I see on TV happens to me or my family? Fears may manifest themselves in the form of nightmares, loss of appetite, inattentiveness, or other changes in your children's habits.

With one devastating natural disaster following another in the last couple of years, children may also wonder if this the end of the world. And if your children are familiar with the Left Behind book series or are fascinated with events that some people claim signify the end of the world, they need to be able to speak openly about the opinions they're forming. Talk with them to understand their perceptions and misconceptions about what they see and hear. If they don't come to you, go to them, and ask questions that will help you know if your children are fearful—and of what.

Monitor the messages

The car radio, TV broadcasts, Internet sites, newspapers, and magazines bombard your children with information. Be aware of what they're exposed to at home and away from home, and make decisions about what's appropriate for their level of maturity.

You can also teach your children to monitor the news for themselves. There may be times when you aren't present to filter news or stop your kids from listening to or looking at things that scare them or make them uncomfortable.

Look for how God can bring good out of evil

Be on the lookout for stories about what God has done or is doing in the midst of what may be devastating circumstances. Teach your children to focus on who is helping, how many

people are helping, and why people are helping. Natural disasters often bring out both the good and the bad in the hearts of people; use these events as opportunities to talk about that.

Foster an interest in God's world

Children know only a limited number of people and places, so be creative in looking for opportunities to foster their interest in more of the world.

- Read a newspaper or a news-magazine, watch a TV news broadcast, or catch up on the news on the Internet in your children's presence.

- Keep a world map or globe in a place where you can refer to it as you talk with your children. Plastic place-mats that feature a world map on one side and a map of your country on the other side are available in many educational and toy stores and can be marked to show where you, friends, family members, and missionaries live.

- Read stories about other cultures with your child, pointing out similarities and differences among people around the world.

- Show your children how to check food, clothing, and other items for labels that tell where those items were grown or made. Help your kids locate these places on a map, and talk about what life is like in those countries.

- Point out bumper stickers, campaign posters, and lawn signs in order to teach your child about government officials and offices. Take your child with you when you vote.

- When you travel with your children, use a map to show them distances and directions.

- Prayerfully consider opportunities for your teen to travel overseas with school or church groups. Experiencing another culture can make a

huge impact on your child.

- Learn all you can about missionaries that your church supports, or check out Web sites for updates and newsletters from missionaries around the globe.

- Support a child through one of the many Christian organizations with orphan sponsorship programs. Learn about the child's country, write to the child, and pray for the child regularly.

- Subscribe to a children's version of a newsmagazine, such as *God's World News*, *National Geographic Kids*, or *Time for Kids*.

- Go to an ethnic restaurant, or cook an ethnic meal at home. Learn about the culture as well as the food.

- In *You Can Change the World: Learning to Pray for People in Other Countries* Jill Johnstone describes the culture and spiritual condition of many countries in an engaging manner and lists ways you can pray for their residents. The adult version, *Operation World: When We Pray God Works* by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, would be a valuable resource for you and your older children. You could easily incorporate these resources into family devotions.

Keep a redemptive view

We are called to be agents of redemption in this world—to shine the light of the gospel to all nations, to speak up for the poor and oppressed, and to pursue justice and mercy. When Christ returns, we'll live in the new heaven and earth for eternity, worshiping with people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Help your children catch a glimpse of this glorious, future reality in our world today. ■

Sandra Ritsema teaches sixth grade at Forcey Christian Middle School in Silver Spring, Maryland.

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Kid Central

A houseful of kids may seem chaotic, but it presents an opportunity to practice hospitality, to keep track of your kids, and to demonstrate Christian love.

BY BEVERLY W. DILLARD

A couple of giggling, 11-year-old girls are under my living room couch, three teenagers are baking a cake in my kitchen, and I can't see my living room floor for the mountain of sleeping bags. It's just a typical Saturday at our house.

Strictly speaking, we are an average family of four: two parents, two kids. However, at any given time our house is bursting with three times that many occupants, mostly under the age of 16. Our children's friends seem to naturally gravitate to our house, so it isn't uncommon for each of

our daughters to have three or four friends over at the same time.

It may sound chaotic (and occasionally it is), but my husband and I are always happy to play host to a houseful of young people. Doing so keeps our kids nearby, so we know what they're doing and with whom. We get an opportunity to establish a relationship with their friends, who play a major role during this stage of our children's lives. And as we welcome and show love to these children—some of whom come from less-than-perfect homes—we are modeling Christ, which is our highest calling.

But loving the masses and having them live with you—even part time—are two different things. Hosting hordes of kids without losing your sanity can be tricky. Children are naturally loud, messy, active, and needy. Sometimes you'd like a break from your own offspring, let alone guests. We've found, however, that if you follow a few simple guidelines, hosting a lot of kids becomes practically painless.



BRAND X

Communicate with other parents

Before inviting a child over, get to know his or her parents. When our kids were young, we knew the parents of all of their playmates. Most of their friends were the children of our friends, so it was easy. As our daughters have gotten older, however, they have developed friendships with children from other families. I am deliberate in my attempt to acquaint myself with these households.

The easiest way to contact parents is to make a phone call. Introduce yourself, and spend a few minutes making small talk before inviting their child to your home. Since your children obviously have something in common, it should be easy to find a shared topic of interest. Most parents will appreciate your friendliness and are also eager to get to know the families of their children's friends.

By communicating with other parents I have developed some wonderful friendships and garnered some valuable information. Sometimes I have commiserated with parents about shared situations. Often I have grown comfortable about allowing my child to visit a certain home. Other times I have discovered that a child might benefit from

some time in a stable Christian environment or I have been alerted to homes where I wouldn't allow my child to visit. No matter what I find, after talking directly to the parents, I feel better about inviting their child into our home.

Keep control

If you ever feel that things are too calm or settled on the homefront, just agree to host a slumber party. The noise and activity from a gang of kids can quickly get out of hand. So to make playing host pleasant, learn to maintain control of the masses. The first step in doing this is to set some rules, but keep them simple, reasonable, and few.

We cover the basics in our house with these rules: no running or roughhousing inside, clean up your messes, and treat people and property with respect. The fine print includes two specific rules: take your shoes off when entering the house, and don't take food into the living room.

Before friends come to visit, I always review the house rules with my kids. They know that I expect them to follow these rules and pass them on to their friends as the need arises. They also know that if the rules are ignored, it will

be a while before they're allowed to have company again. Of course, I occasionally have to step in with a reminder, but once kids know the rules, they do a pretty good job of policing themselves. And when you don't need to bark out orders the entire time, the hosting experience becomes much more relaxing.

Embrace the chaos

Once you've set your rules, you might expect that everyone will follow them. But will your home will be a place of peace and tranquility? Probably not. Kids are anything but tranquil, and when you multiply their number by a factor of three or four, you've got the makings of a three-ring circus!

That doesn't mean you should throw the keep-control guideline out the window, but don't expect that by setting some ground rules you'll immediately turn your children and their friends into mature adults. For instance, consider the rule of taking off your shoes before walking around the house. Now picture your entryway. If everyone follows that rule, they'll leave behind a mound of shoes. And teenage girls require a lot of baggage for a sleepover, stuff that will find its way all through your house. In other words, extra kids will inevitably mean extra mess and confusion. Expect it and accept it, and life will be a lot less stressful.

In our home we have a framed poem that reminds us not to wish our children to be more grown-up today, because one day they will be. I read the poem occasionally to remind myself to appreciate our current stage of life as a family. We may live in barely controlled chaos at the moment, but that's fine. The playing, the laughter, and even the mess are signs of a warm, Spirit-filled home full of happy, healthy children. Soon enough

my house will be quiet and orderly—and a little sad.

Show love

Jesus loved to spend time with children. In fact, Scripture tells us that he took the time to place his hands on them and pray for them, saying that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to

such as these" (Matthew 19:14). Clearly, he thinks that children are worth the investment of time.

As children visit your home, their eyes are watching you live out the fruits of the Spirit. And as they grow into adolescence, they're searching for their purpose and their place. Some of the children, especially those who see

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a stark difference between your household and their own, may want to tag along with your family to church and begin to ask questions about faith. .

So the next time your child asks if he or she can have a friend (or two or three) over, try not to think of the mess, the noise, and the disorder. Instead, use these four guidelines, and concentrate on the opportunity that playing host will give you to make a difference in the life of a child. After all, Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37). Who could turn down a guest like that? ■

Beverly W. Dillard is a freelance writer in Whitesburg, Georgia.



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Room to Grow

The transition from childhood to adolescence can be a seesaw experience. Here's one mom's story about her daughter growing up and moving into a new room.

BY MARTHA HYNSON

"How about putting your CD player here?" I ask.

"Sure, Mom, that's great," responds my daughter, barely looking up from the box of stuff that she's sorting through.

I'm helping Ally get settled into her new digs, which happen to be just down the hall from her old digs. The room she'll now occupy was destined to be lived in by every member of our family at one time or another, and moving into it has become somewhat of a rite of passage. Designed as a master suite, the room is spacious, with two large closets and a private bath. Our oldest child, Jaynee, inherited the room from her dad and me when we built an addition on the house. It was a quiet retreat from a pesky preteen brother and a sister, who, although totally adorable, was also totally into the terrible twos. A gifted artist and writer, Jaynee adorned the walls with her poetry and artwork but eventually went off to college, leaving the

coveted room to her brother, who sanded the walls and filled the room with sports equipment and video games. Now that he's away at college, it's Ally's turn to make the room her own.

My husband has painted the walls purple, which has been Ally's favorite color for as long as anyone can remember. We agree that the shade, which is lighter than she wanted and darker than I preferred, has turned out just right. Now all we need to do is to decide what will go into the room. God has blessed Ally with a lively imagination, and for years she has dreamed of the day she could move into the big room and fill it with toys. The bathroom would make a lovely spa for Barbie, and Ally's stuffed-animal collection would have plenty of room to grow in the two closets. Now that her chance has finally come, however, she's not quite sure how to proceed. At 10 years old she's reached that in-between stage. Childhood is feeling a bit tight, but adolescence still hangs on her like dress-up clothes.

"Will you keep my old room exactly the same?" she asks. Her question triggers a memory from my own childhood. I was about Ally's age, and my great-aunt Joyce, who lived with us from the time I was a baby, had moved to live with my grandmother. Aunt Joyce's old room, which was now



CORBIS

mine, had been repainted yellow, and new butterfly curtains were hung at the window. It was definitely decorated with a young girl in mind. When we went to visit Aunt Joyce, however, she seemed to believe that her old room was exactly as she had left it. Even though she probably realized that she wouldn't be coming back, believing that she could return was important to her. I hear Ally's question and think that she probably feels the same way.

"For now," I say, pushing aside my plans for a sewing and workout room, "we'll leave your old room just as it is."

I put Ally's pink Hello Kitty boom box on a shelf next to a CD by a popular preteen performer and find myself thinking of Ecclesiastes 3:1: "There is a time for everything." It's true, of course, but sometimes we find ourselves hopping back and forth between seasons of life before settling in. I look over at my daughter, still going through her box of stuff. She's making two piles—to-keep and not-to-keep. Not-to-keep is made up of a broken crayon and some empty candy wrappers. Everything else is in the to-keep pile—Beanie Babies, eight fake fingernails, and some gold-glitter eye shadow that lately she's been begging to wear.

"Everybody wears it," she informs me daily. (Everybody also has a cell phone and is allowed to stay home alone.)

I stick to my guns. "You're much too young to wear

makeup, and, besides, you're too pretty to need it," I say, sounding like my mother.

"Go wash your face" was Mom's response. "You're too young to wear makeup. Besides, you're much prettier without it." I removed the makeup—but reapplied it on the school bus, determined to look as ridiculous as all the other girls. Suddenly it occurs to me that Ally's gold-glitter eye shadow was a gift from her grandma. All these years I suppose Mom's been quietly biding her time, waiting to get even.

Ally pulls a Mini Bratz out of the box. (Barbies are no longer cool, I'm told, but Bratz are still okay.) We've agreed that these fashion icons and all their accessories will return to the old room. I expect that over the next year they'll gradually follow in Barbie's footsteps, due more to peer pressure than loss of interest. Middle school girls don't play with dolls. They stay home alone, wearing gold-glitter eye shadow while talking on cell phones. Another memory from my childhood suddenly surfaces. It's the summer before seventh grade, and my best friend and I are sneaking into my basement—not to put on blue eye shadow but to play Barbies undetected.

Ally's to-keep pile has grown to include a dog-eared copy of *Charlotte's Web* and several brightly colored bangle

bracelets. The not-to-keep collection has shrunk, thanks to our dog, who has carried away the candy wrappers.

"Where should I put this stuff?" asks Ally, referring to the items in the to-keep heap. I look at the pile. In it I see the past and the future, and I'm thankful that for the moment, at least, my daughter believes that I'm wise enough to know what to do with both. I toss her a wicker basket.

"Why don't you put the Beanie Babies in this and the glitter in a drawer by the sink?" I say, praying that all my parenting decisions would be so easy.

It's beginning to get late, and we decide that we've done enough moving for one day. I feel an overwhelming desire to whisk my daughter back up the hall to her twin bed but force myself to turn down the full-sized comforter. "Your first night in your new room! How does it feel?" I ask.

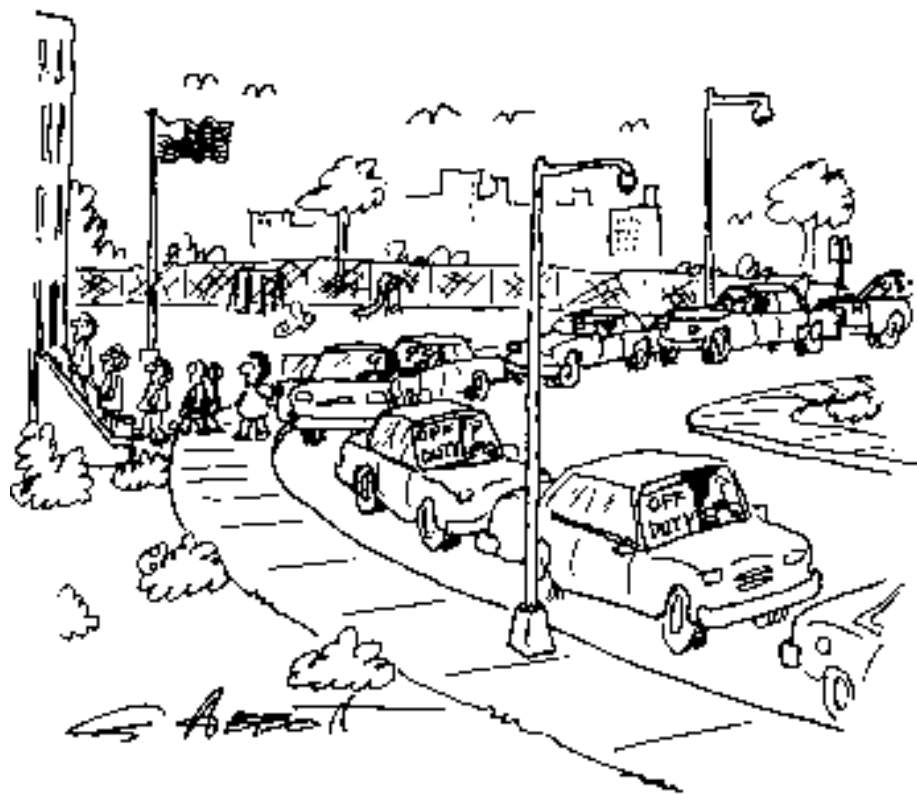
"Great!" she says, climbing in and snuggling under the covers with

Puppy, the stuffed dog she's had since she was two. I kiss her, remind her to say her prayers, and start to leave. "Mom," she says, "Will you lie down with me?" I know that if I do, I'll be asleep in a couple of minutes. I'm not yet done with the day's work, and my husband will be turning in soon and expecting me to join him, but something makes me hesitate. I look at my daughter in her new bed in her new room with the just-right purple paint, and I wonder how many more invitations like this there will be.

"Okay," I say, "scoot over." We snuggle together between purple sheets. I say a silent prayer of thanks as I rest my head on an oversized stuffed animal that has served as Ally's pillow for years, "Good night," I whisper.

"Good night," Ally whispers back. "Tomorrow can I shave my legs?" ■

Martha Hynson is a freelance writer in Sharpsburg, Georgia.



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Many teens use the Internet as their primary communication tool.

MySpace, School Space, and Personal Space

by Quentin J. Schultze

Last spring many people were shocked to hear on the news that a 16-year-old Michigan girl had secretly flown to the Middle East to marry a high school dropout. According to the man, the girl was going to convert to Islam. They had met and fallen in love on one of the Internet's social networking sites, MySpace.com. The new wave of online relationships is hardly a fad. The Internet has gone the way of the cell phone and mall as a place for teens to connect with others.

Check the yellow pages

Think of MySpace, Friendster, Xanga, Facebook, and similar Web sites as online yellow pages. You go to these online sites to create an ad for yourself—to tell others who you are, what you like and don't like, who your friends are, and what you look like. Perhaps most im-

portantly, you let others know how to get in touch with you so that you can converse via e-mail or instant messaging.

Each of the social networking Web sites has its own, changing twist. MySpace, now with 72 million users, originally provided a way to post sample clips of your musical compositions and to publish information about your artistry and concerts. Other sites emphasize blogging, a kind of public journaling or diary keeping.

The current trend seems to be online networks organized by special interests. Local gossip and clique-formation seem to be giving way to expanding national and international networks organized by everything from musical taste to fashion and avocational reading. Web pages are the ads that bring individuals with similar interests together.

These sites make money by selling banner and text

advertising. They use software to match the advertisements to the interests of the people who are likely to visit particular pages. It's a remarkable system: the young people, mostly teens, who populate these Web sites create the content that attracts visitors whose attention is sold to advertisers.

Check with your school

Suddenly students have an easy, inexpensive way of talking publicly about their schools, teachers, administrators, and classmates. And they can chat in forums that will gain attention, since the major networking Web sites can be searched by names of schools, communities, and teachers.

A growing number of schools have banned students from participating in these sites, because in the worst cases online threats have closed schools, inflamed tensions among groups, and elicited violence between students. But trying to prevent things like online gossip and threats is meaningless without enforcement. Unless schools have volunteers who regularly search the growing number of networking sites for school-related material, such bans are foolish.

It's time for schools and parents to work together on this issue. Honest, open discussion of the pros and cons is critically important, especially for middle school and high school students, who are more likely to reject attempts to limit their freedom of speech.

Check with your child

Many parents have no idea whether their children participate in cyber networks. This new form of Web communication is highly generational—even more than instant messaging.

Parents need to ask as nonthreateningly as possible, "Are you involved in any of the Web sites like Facebook and MySpace?" If the kids who say yes are under 13, they're probably violating requirements set up by the sites, most of which have stopped offering access to younger children because of legitimate complaints about adults preying on innocent children. Of course, some kids lie about their age; in this case, parents can get their kids' postings removed by contacting the site administrator.

Better than any heavy-handed approach is ongoing discussion about the value of participating in online networks. These sites can provide a way for mature young people to express themselves, develop their artistic abilities, practice their writing and reading, and connect with others who have similar interests. But along the way teens need to consider the importance of maintaining their anonymity and avoiding inappropriate communication with friends and strangers. It's not just about safety; it's also about godly communication.

Quentin J. Schultze is a professor of communication arts and sciences at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Construction workers take a break way up in the sky.

Sky Boys: How They Built the Empire State Building by Deborah Hopkinson. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. Schwartz & Wade, 2006. \$16.95. Ages 5–10.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Empire State Building, *Sky Boys* gives readers an insight into the construction of one of the world's most famous buildings through the eyes of a young boy. The boy chronicles the process, beginning with the arrival of the steel, the erection of the columns and the beams, and the work of the riveting gang, finally describing the excitement when the skyscraper is opened to the public.

The end pages containing vintage photographs set the tone for the book, and James Ransome's paintings provide a fine tribute to the construction of this landmark.

No Room for Napoleon written and illustrated by Adria Meserve. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2006. \$16.00. Ages 4–8.

Napoleon, a small

brown dog, sets sail one day and discovers his very own paradise island. Rowing ashore, he is greeted by Crab, Bunny, and Bear, who gladly welcome him to the island and offer to help him build a house. When it is completed, Napoleon's home takes up the entire island, but the process wipes out all the plants and trees. Fed up with Napoleon, the three friends set off to find another island on which to live, but will they return if Napoleon repairs the damage?

The illustrations mirror the changing mood of the narrative. This story depicts the ongoing struggle to help preserve our natural resources.



How Much? Visiting Markets around the World written and illustrated by Ted Lewin. HarperCollins, 2006. \$16.89. Ages 5–10.

Through richly colored and detailed landscapes, Caldecott Honor artist Ted Lewin helps readers experience different marketplaces that sell unique wares, including dipped bananas at a floating market in Bangkok, textiles by the train tracks in Peru, camels outside of Cairo, and antiques at a flea market in New Jersey.



The rich watercolor illustrations and the brief prose descriptions give an impression of the diversity of life around the world while depicting the universal theme of buying and selling.

The Six Fools collected by Zora Neale Hurston and adapted by Joyce Carol Thomas. Illustrated by Ann Tanksley. HarperCollins, 2006. \$16.89. Ages 5–11.

A dashing young man courts a pretty young woman, and they decide to marry. But while celebrating their engagement, the young man concludes that the woman and her parents



are the three biggest fools he's ever laid eyes on. He decides to travel for a year to see if he can find three bigger fools.

The story is greatly enhanced by the bright, colorful oil monoprints of characters with exaggerated gestures and expressions that give the story a feel of the South in the 1920s and '30s when Zora Neale Hurston penned the tale. Children will find humor in the foolishness of all the adults in the story.

A World of Prayers selected by Jeremy Brooks. Illustrated by Elena Gomez. Eerdmans, 2006. \$16.00. Ages 4–10.

This collection of 26 prayers from all over the globe is divided into four categories: prayers for the morning, mealtime graces, prayers for nighttime, and blessings. A brief commentary at the beginning of each category reflects on the place of prayer in our lives. Written in simple language, the prayers are recited by children from sev-



eral countries. The dream-like illustrations introduce readers to imagery from various cultures and coordinate well with the prayers.

Although this isn't the most comprehensive anthology of prayers, it's still a valuable collection.



Willy & Max: A Holocaust Story by Amy Littlesugar. Illustrated by William Low. *Philomel*, 2006. \$15.99. Ages 9–12.

Set during World War II in Belgium, this is the touching story of Willy and Max, inseparable young boys who promise to be friends forever. They seem to be exactly alike, but there's one glaring difference: Max is a Jew. When the war gets closer to their city, Max and his father decide to flee before the Nazis can abduct them. They leave a precious painting with Willy and his family, who promise to keep it safe for them. But when the Nazis ransack Willy's home, they steal the painting. Sixty years later a museum curator returns the painting to Willy because of a photo that Max had taped on the back, and with that photo Willy is able to locate and meet

Max's family.

This tale is twofold. It tells not only of a special friendship during tragic times but also of the efforts of museums today to try to return Jewish artworks to their rightful owners.

Nothing to Do by Douglas Wood. Illustrated by Wendy Anderson Halperin. *Dutton*, 2006. \$16.99. Ages 4–8.

Some days are blank, white squares on the calendar with absolutely, positively nothing scheduled to do. Using limited text and exploding illustrations, this book depicts wonderful ways to spend those days—from walking barefoot through the grass to sailing a toy ship on a puddle, from watching the clouds change shape to watching ants carry a huge load, from building a fort to catching fireflies, from climbing a tree to reading a book over and over again, or sometimes just doing nothing. All things electronic are missing from the list—a refreshing exclusion.

Inspired by patterns in nature—explosion, mean-



dering, branching, alternation, spiral, helix, close packing, spherical—Halperin's soft-toned illustrations overflow with details. This book would be a wonderful way to inspire children on those rare occasions when they have nothing to do.



Pablo the Artist written and illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. *Farrar Straus Giroux*, 2005. \$16.00. Ages 4–8.

Pablo fears he is suffering from artist's block just when his art club's big exhibition is scheduled! Seeking inspiration, he sets out to the country to paint a landscape. After painting a tree and munching on lunch, Pablo takes a nap and dreams of various animals visiting his canvas to add different details. Upon waking, Pablo paints the landscape of his dream and in the process creates the star of the show!

Kitamura's bold, cartoon-like characters help to tell this somewhat thin story. However, it may be useful as a discussion starter on how creative people get inspiration and ideas.

Tunjur! Tunjur! Tunjur! A Palestinian Folktale retold by Margaret Read MacDonald. Illustrated by Alik Arzoumanian. *Marshall Cavendish*, 2006. \$16.95. Ages 4–9.

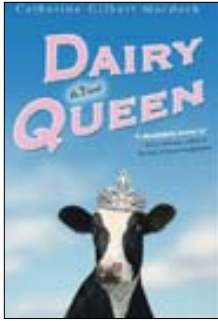
A childless woman prays to Allah for a child "even if it is nothing more than a cooking pot!" Suddenly she's given a little pot with human characteristics. Before long Little Pot becomes restless and wants to explore the outside world. Deviously, Little Pot



manages to roll away with valuable items from each encounter. But after her thefts are discovered, she receives a stinky, just reward that read-aloud crowds will delight in.

The bright, acrylic illustrations are set against backgrounds of decorative Arabic arts, which capture the story fittingly.

Reviewed by Amy DeVries, a media specialist at South Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



Dairy Queen by Catherine Gilbert Murdock. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. \$16.00. Ages 15 and up.

Life has changed dramatically for 15-year-old D. J. Schwenk since her father injured his hip in a farming accident. Her mother is busy with a full-time job as a teacher/administrator, and her two older brothers are away at college on football scholarships. So D. J. is forced to take care of the family farm.

Summer vacation signals the beginning of the back-breaking work of mowing the hay, baling it, and storing it in the barn, so the football coach at the rival high school sends over his starting quarterback, Brian Nelson, to help out. D. J. knows a lot about football because of her father's and brothers' involvement in the game; she even helped them with their training. D. J. and Brian find common ground and are able to tackle the many difficult jobs around the farm. Then the coach proposes that D. J. consider taking on another job, that of becoming Brian's football trainer for the summer.

This coming-of-age novel is fast paced, humorous, and entertaining. It touches on many interesting conflicts that develop when

characters ignore important issues rather than talk about them. Teens will be captivated by D. J.'s ability to work a farm, her knowledge of football, and her crush on Brian as she discovers her own self-worth.

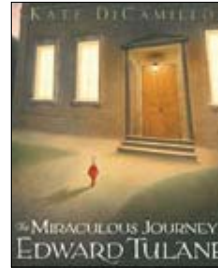
Small Steps by Louis Sachar. Delacorte, 2006. \$16.95. Ages 10 and up.

When 14-year-old Theodore "Armpit" Johnson of Austin, Texas, was released from the Camp Green Lake Juvenile Correctional Facility, he set five goals for himself: "1. Graduate from high school. 2. Get a job. 3. Save his money. 4. Avoid situations that might turn violent. And 5. Lose the name Armpit." So far he's working for a landscape company, depositing his paycheck in a savings account, and taking two classes in summer school. But X-Ray, an acquaintance from Camp Green Lake, contacts him and proposes a money-making opportunity that he guarantees will double Armpit's money in two weeks.

Warning bells should be going off in Armpit's head, but the lure of doubling his money so quickly clouds his judgment. Armpit agrees to go in on the deal,



and soon his life begins to spin out of control. This is a thoroughly entertaining tale about making bad choices in life and then starting over—one small step at a time.

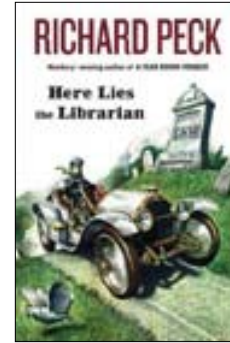


The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo. Candlewick, 2006. \$18.99. Ages 9 and older.

When Abilene Tulane celebrates her seventh birthday, her grandmother gives her a three-foot china rabbit. He's elegantly dressed and has his own working pocket watch. Abilene names him Edward, and she loves and cares for him as though he's real. Unfortunately, Edward is devoid of any compassionate feelings for Abilene or others.

One day Edward accompanies the family on an ocean voyage and is accidentally knocked overboard. So begins an adventure that over the years exposes Edward to many life-changing experiences.

This is a captivating tale about a self-absorbed rabbit who learns to love and to appreciate being loved. Readers cannot help but notice some religious symbolism. The beautiful sepia-toned illustrations effectively portray the story's characters and setting.



Here Lies the Librarian by Richard Peck. Dial, 2006. \$16.99. Ages 8–adult.

The 1914 tornado that twists through rural Indiana permanently changes the lives of 14-year-old Pee-wee McGrath and her older brother, Jake. Their small auto repair business is unscathed, but the cemetery and other parts of the town are hit hard.

Irene Ridpath, who is a library science student at Butler University, and three of her sorority sisters motor out in a Stoddard-Dayton automobile to view the damage, but their car blows a tire right in front of the McGraths' auto garage. A short time later, Irene and her three friends are hired to reopen and run the town's library. Over the summer months the lives of the new librarians, the townspeople, and the McGraths become intertwined in dangerous and exciting ways.

Wonderful characters, laugh-out-loud humor, and descriptive language transport the reader back to the early days of the automobile in this book by master storyteller Richard Peck.

Reviewed by Judy Alphenaar, a teacher at Ada (Michigan) Christian School.

I've often helped my 11-year-old daughter with her homework. But now she resents my help even though her grades are going down. What should I do?

Judy DeJong, principal at Ada (Michigan) Christian School, responds.

A parent who has taken the time to help a child with homework has shown support for the child and respect for schoolwork. That's great! Some children need parental help for organizing, staying focused, reteaching, or drilling concepts. When an older child begins to pull away from parents and wants to complete the homework alone, he or she is communicating that independence is becoming more important than a high grade.

This response is a positive part of your daughter's growth into adolescence, so use it to teach her new skills. It's also a time to redefine your role in homework. Here are some steps for doing this.

1. Compliment your daughter for her independence. Tell her that you'll do what you can to allow her to do her best work on her own.

2. Talk about what she needs to be successful, such as papers, a place to work, and good lighting. Allow her to choose a system that will help her break her work into manageable parts, and discuss what will be easier for her to do on her own and what she might need help with. Be willing to allow another person to help her if she tells you that she doesn't want you to help.

3. Agree on checkpoints—when someone will review with her the completed work, look at her grades, and discuss whether changes need to be made. Four weeks might be a good time frame for this.

4. Celebrate each success. Give specific, positive, and constructive feedback.

The good news is that this redefinition of responsibilities is a positive step for your daughter. She's learning how to organize her work, take responsibility for it, listen to feedback,

and dare to ask for help when needed. She'll learn through this process—and appreciate her parents as well!

My 8-year-old daughter says that she wants to spend the night with her friend, but when we arrange this, she usually ends up phoning us to pick her up. What should I do?

Mark Christians, assistant professor of psychology at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, responds.

Bedtime routines and rituals are important to children at this age. They find comfort in hearing familiar voices, singing a favorite bedtime song, having a night-light on, keeping the bedroom door open a certain distance, or saying prayers together. Staying overnight at a friend's house produces a new environment with unfamiliar routines. However, sleepovers should be and can be fun for everyone.

Here are a few ideas to help you and your daughter successfully navigate the sleepover. First, remain calm, and try not to telegraph your feelings. Your daughter will notice if you are nervous about her staying at someone else's house. Next, arrange some trial sleepovers at a familiar place like a relative's

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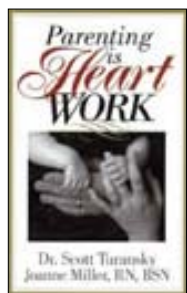
home. This will allow her to experience the joy of staying overnight without the pressure of doing it at a friend's home. Then, have your daughter invite a friend to stay overnight at your house; this may reduce her anxiety about staying away from home in the future. And finally, talk through the subject with your daughter. You may discover that she isn't anxious about sleeping in a strange place, but she is concerned about finding the bathroom at night. Packing a small flashlight in her overnight bag would be an easy solution.

It's important for your daughter to feel safe and to always have the option of calling home. I don't recommend the strategy of forcing her to stay. Separation anxiety is normal at her age, and her need to go home should be seen as a positive emotional bond with her parents.



"That's his class summer vacation essay."

Parenting Is Heart Work by Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller. Life Journey, 2006. 246 pp. \$12.99. Reviewed by G. Mark Sumpter.



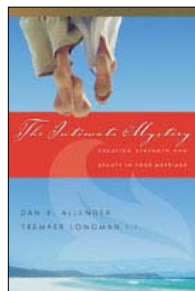
The 1995 bestseller on parenting, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, paved the way for heart-themed resources on child nurture and training. *Parenting Is Heart Work* reminded me of *Shepherding* but without the depth of biblical analysis.

This book makes clear that the parenting challenge “is to help children change on a deeper level,” and it takes a look at two important questions. First, Why should a parent engage the heart of a child? The answer is that emotions, commitments, influences, and ambitions converge in the heart, and therefore, the “more you focus on your child’s heart and consider a heart-based approach to child-training, the more ideas and solutions you’ll discover.”

Second, What’s the best strategy? The parent-child connection requires healthy doses of self-examination. Are you teachable? Do you appropriately share with your child what you’re thinking when you face hardship? Have you considered Scripture memory—getting more of God’s promises and commands into your own heart? And prayer promotes growth in doing God’s will. Parenting is heart work for us, first, and then for our kids.

The book bases heart work on the gospel of grace, the gift of God’s work in the heart for salvation. But it quickly adds that parenting must concentrate on teaching children how to respond to God’s work of grace in them.

The Intimate Mystery: Creating Strength and Beauty in Your Marriage by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III. InterVarsity, 2005. 106 pp. \$15.00. Reviewed by Cynthia Washington.



Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III suggest that one of the purposes of marriage is to find God and to help our spouse do the same. How? By surrendering oneself to the other and by giving more—far more—than we sometimes receive. We honor our marriage by leaving parents and any emotional and egotistical baggage behind and forming a union that repels the invaders of the past, present, and future.

This isn’t a book for people who want to settle for simply getting along well with their mate; this is for couples who want to raise the bar. Chapters on sexuality are forthright and even breathtaking. While most books on marriage discuss communication and sex, this book exposes their deeper intentions. Foremost, the authors promise that despite

our human failures, there’s always another day to improve and offer ourselves in the sacrificial path to God that is marriage.

Surprise Child: Finding Hope in Unexpected Pregnancy by Leslie Leyland Fields. WaterBrook, 2006. 162 pp. \$11.99. Reviewed by Beverly Dillard.



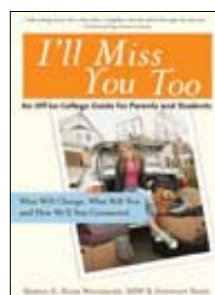
For most women, pregnancy is a time of joy. For them, there are shelves of cheery books. But what about women who feel financially or emotionally inadequate to nurture a new baby—those who are unmarried, were raped, or consider themselves too old, too young, or simply too busy to meet the demands of a new child?

Leslie Leyland Fields was one of those women. Recounting the discovery of her fifth and sixth pregnancies, Fields recalls feelings of anger, denial, and grief. She searched for other women in her situation and offers comfort, advice, and assurances to despondent moms-to-be.

Honest and authentic, Fields’ book exposes the bad, the ugly, and ultimately the good awaiting women who find themselves in an unwelcome pregnancy. Personal stories weave throughout, giving the reader reassurance as each featured woman learns to embrace the new life she harbors as a gift from a wise and loving God.

Written in a stage-by-stage format and with discussion questions, *Surprise Child* fills a void in the baby book world, providing support and hope to women who might otherwise feel ashamed and alone.

I’ll Miss You Too: What Will Change, What Will Not, and How We’ll Stay Connected by Margo E. Bane Woodacre and Steffany Bane. Sourcebooks, 2006. 208 pp. \$12.95. Reviewed by Diane Miller.



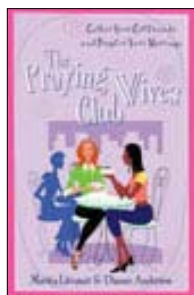
I’ll Miss You Too is a candid mother-and-daughter journey through the challenges of the off-to-college experience. Written in a neighborly and upbeat manner, the book uses anecdotes to illuminate alternative viewpoints, drawing from personal thoughts, e-mails, and journals. Each chapter describes a different door as a student moves from high school into the college years, from the revolving door of the high school senior year to the screen door of a student’s first college months to the golden door of college graduation.

In addition to the book’s investigation of the joy and confusion that college brings, it presents practical tips at the

end of each chapter. The most beneficial advice is also the common thread throughout the book: face a changing parent-student relationship with mutual respect and openness. Nevertheless, families with more serious relationship struggles might find this family's relative ease of communication cloying.

The book is reassuring and upbeat, but it slights more serious issues, such as transferring to another college and financial aid.

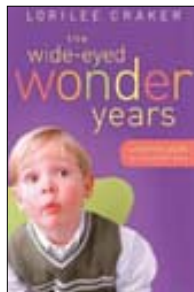
***The Praying Wives Club: Gather Your Girlfriends and Pray for Your Marriage* by Marita Littauer and Dianne Anderson. Kregel, 2006. 157 pages. \$11.99. Reviewed by Chila Woychik.**



Gather your girlfriends and pray for your marriage!" Marita Littauer and Dianne Anderson show us how they've done just that—the who, what, when, where, and why of getting together with concerned friends and seeking God's face on behalf of their marriages.

This delightful and inspiring book addresses everything you need to know about beginning a Praying Wives Club. The book includes everything from a contract of accountability and confidentiality to personal illustrations and sample prayers with both common and dramatic answers to those prayers. The personality overview and dozens of topical prayers are integral to understanding how to pray for marriage relationships. Full of enjoyable anecdotes, this is one of the best books that I've read.

***The Wide-Eyed Wonder Years: A Mommy Guide to Preschool Daze* by Lorilee Craker. Revell, 2006. 202 pp. \$12.99. Reviewed by Ruth O'Neil.**



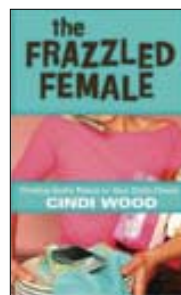
The *Wide-Eyed Wonder Years* tells moms of preschoolers what to expect and how to handle the challenges that they undoubtedly will face. Its humor and short sections make it a quick read for moms who have only a few spare moments here and there.

This book suggests how to handle clinging children, overbearing in-laws, picky eaters, monsters in the closet, sibling rivalry, gift giving, and parties. The suggestions for teaching children a wide variety of concepts will help preschoolers develop life-shaping patterns of thought.

You'll laugh when you read what fiascos and embarrassing moments other mothers have gone through with their

preschoolers, and that may make yours seem not as bad as you've been tempted to think.

***The Frazzled Female: Finding God's Peace in Your Daily Chaos* by Cindi Wood. Broadman & Holman, 2006. 122 pp. \$12.99. Reviewed by Michele Howe.**



How does God relate to the Christian woman's stress-ridden life? Cindi Wood begins *The Frazzled Female* by urging women to develop a vital relationship with Christ before trying to cope with society's expectations. Wood then explains the power of thinking biblically throughout the day and learning to live in God's time frame rather than in society's unrealistic and

frequently counterproductive one. Two chapters deal with recognizing and embracing a servant's heart by exhibiting love to all and coming clean on personal sin issues. The author concludes by delving into depression, hopelessness, and physical problems such as sleeplessness and loss of appetite.

Busy women will appreciate this quick read on subjects near to a woman's heart and soul and the author's suggestions on how to chart a new, stress-reduced course.

***Making the Blue Plate Special: The Joy of Family Legacies* by Florence Littauer, Marita Littauer, and Lauren Littauer Briggs. Life Journey, 2006. 320 pp. \$19.99. Reviewed by Lettie Kirkpatrick Burress.**



Making the *Blue Plate Special* reminds readers of the great value in passing along family legacies. Florence Littauer and her daughters have compiled many stories that include holiday traditions, keepsakes, memorable meals, and family vacations. Sprinkled throughout are tips to assist readers in creating meaningful moments.

I appreciate Marita Littauer's foundational comments relating to the importance of legacy. She focuses on God's biblical plan for passing on truth through tradition, stories, and even genealogies. Her premise is that we should be intentional about creating legacies because doing so gives us a sense of history and purpose.

Although this book is readable enough, the authors cover almost too many topics, so there isn't the flow and cohesiveness that one might expect. Also, the significant emphasis on collectibles gives me pause. I wonder if it's possible to spend so much time and effort preserving our past that we clutter our present.



DISNEY/PIXAR

Doc Hudson (left) and Lightning McQueen rev their engines in *Cars*.

The Medium Is the Message

BARNYARD

Paramount; written and directed by Steve Oedekerk; MPAA rating PG for some mild peril and rude humor.

THE ANT BULLY

Warner Bros.; directed by John A. Davis; screenplay by John A. Davis. MPAA rating PG for some mild rude humor and action.

MONSTER HOUSE

Sony Pictures; directed by Gil Kenan; screenplay by Dan Harmon, Rob Schrab, and Pamela Pettler. MPAA rating PG for scary images and sequences, thematic elements, some crude humor, and brief language.

CARS

Walt Disney Pictures; directed by John Lasseter and Joe Ranft; screenplay by Dan Fogelman, John Lasseter, Joe Ranft, Kiel Murray, Phil Lorin, and Jorgen Klubien. MPAA rating G.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST

Walt Disney Pictures; directed by Gore Verbinski; screenplay by Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio. MPAA rating PG-13 for intense sequences of adventure violence, including frightening images.

SUPERMAN RETURNS

Warner Bros.; directed by Bryan Singer; screenplay by Michael Dougherty and Dan Harris. MPAA rating PG-13 for some intense action violence.

Legendary film producer Samuel Goldwyn is supposed to have said, "Pictures are for entertainment; messages should be delivered by Western Union." That sentiment certainly holds true for this past summer's crop of movies aimed at family audiences. There isn't a message in a multiplex full of them, although in one there are some unintended lessons that most parents wouldn't want their children to learn. Major studios are becoming more conservative in the worst possible way: trying to repeat successes of the past rather than finding new ways to appeal to potential audiences. Although none of the films breaks new ground, a few of them do manage to deliver large doses of pure entertainment.

One film—*Barnyard*—is at the bottom of the pile. The basic plot device, already overworked in earlier films, is that when the farmer goes to sleep, the animals come out to play. If the idea of male and female cows with udders that look like the business ends of toilet plungers was supposed

to be a wild and wacky joke, it falls completely flat.

Ben the cow (voiced by Sam Elliott) tries to guard the farm from marauding coyotes that are far too evil and threatening for very young children. When Ben dies, his son Otis (Kevin James) is unprepared to take his father's place, in a pale imitation of *The Lion King*. Animals rock out at cleverly animated concerts in the barn, drink enormous quantities of "milk and honey," and generally behave like frat boys at a kegger, but there isn't a moment of genuine humor in the entire film. The only "fun" occurs when complete chaos reigns, as when the cows steal a neighbor's car, lead the police on a wild chase, and then return the battered car to the unsuspecting neighbor's driveway. *Barnyard* manages the neat trick of encouraging drunken behavior without actually showing any alcohol; it's like *Animal House* with real animals. Keep the kids away from this one.

A far better film is *The Ant Bully*. The plot may be derivative, combining elements of several other movies about bugs with an idea from *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*, but the end result has a charm of its own. The title character is not an ant but a young boy named Lucas, who the ants have named The Destroyer. New in town, Lucas is bullied and takes out his frustrations on the anthill with a water gun. An ant wizard named Zoc (voiced by Nicholas Cage) develops a potion that shrinks Lucas down to ant size. Zoc's girlfriend, Hova (Julia Roberts), befriends Lucas and begins to teach him the ways of the colony, particularly the virtues of cooperation.

Eventually Lucas must join the ants in defending the yard against the bug exterminator (Paul Giamatti) before Zoc finally agrees to restore him to human size. Along the way there are some delightful moments created by animators who have a lot of fun playing around with the difference in physical perspective between the human and the ant worlds. Fans of Alfred Hitchcock films will especially

enjoy the very funny way in which the filmmakers play with his trademark eye-of-God shot. This really is a film for kids, but there's plenty to make it much more than a babysitting experience for parents.

Be prepared, however, for brief mention of a kind of ant religion centering on the Great Queen of All Ants. When talking about this with children, don't forget that in an ant colony, as in a beehive, all of life revolves around the queen.

Quite a different story is told in *Monster House*, the most visually exciting animated film of the summer. The plot plays on a common childhood fear: that the darkly shuttered house holds something dark and sinister. For DJ, Chowder, and Jenny—three preteens on an otherwise ordinary street—the problem at first seems to be a frighteningly cranky neighbor, Mr. Nebbercracker, who screams at the kids to stay off his lawn and sometimes physically threatens them. But when old Nebbercracker collapses one day and is taken away in an ambulance, the house begins to devour everything that touches the lawn—a tricycle, a basketball, and finally two police officers.

Steve Buscemi gives just the right maniacal edge to the voice of the angry Nebbercracker, Maggie Gyllenhaal chews the scenery as the kind of babysitter about whom parents have nightmares, and Kathleen Turner is the voice of the demented house. They and all the other actors go at their parts with gusto.

This is a plot that could have come from the mind of Stephen King. But the animation style creates just enough distance that we never forget that this is a cartoon. The story develops as a good suspense story should, beginning slowly and gradually building the tension. It's a wild ride, perhaps more fun for the adults than for the kids.

The kids that I watched these films with liked *The Ant Bully* better; I voted for *Monster*



PETER MOUNTAIN/Disney

House. But we agreed on one thing: we all liked *Cars* better than any of the others. A cocky, young racecar named Lightning McQueen (voiced by Owen Wilson) runs off the road on his way to a big race and ends up in the town of Radiator Springs, a community bypassed when the freeway was built. His arrogant ways get him into trouble with the law, a former racer named Doc Hudson (Paul Newman). McQueen learns something about the meaning of friendship, thanks to a lady car named Sally Carrera (Bonnie Hunt); Doc Hudson regains some of his former dignity; and along the way the movie makes a point about what it used to be like to travel the highways of America.

The brilliant idea that makes this story work is the creation of a world inhabited entirely by cars. When a race is held, the camera shows us a grandstand filled with—cars! Once again, Pixar runs away with the grand prize with this delightful, humorous, creative, and warm-hearted story.

Two live-action films round out the summer's offerings, one based on a Disney theme ride and the other on a comic strip. What they both prove is that sequels don't have to be dull and derivative.

Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest works because it follows the two cardinal rules for good sequels. Rule One: Don't change anything. Rule Two: Don't repeat anything. The movie is too long, but Johnny Depp finds enough new craziness in the character of Jack Sparrow to give the flagging scenes the movie equivalent of a defibrillator shock. The bottom

line is that if you liked the first *Pirates*, you'll like this one. If you didn't, you won't. As in the first film, some images are too grotesque for people with tender tummies.

Superman Returns works because director Bryan Singer ignored the failures of three previous sequels and returned to the legend, which he respects, and because newcomer Brandon Routh is almost eerily right in a role that we thought belonged forever to Christopher Reeve.

Superman returns to Earth after an absence that's never fully explained to find that much has changed. Lois Lane has tried to forget him and is now the mother of a young son. But much remains the same: Lex Luthor still embodies evil and still seeks to dominate the world.

This is a fairly straightforward story of good versus evil, with Kevin Spacey as a pitch-perfect Lex Luthor, who is all the more convincing because he seems so ordinary. But be aware of two things. First, the parallels between Superman and Jesus were already built into the story in the comic books of the 1930s, but they make for bad theology. Jesus is all-human and all-divine, not a hybrid; his divinity doesn't modify his humanity, so the Superman analogy simply doesn't work. Second, in this movie Lois Lane is in a long-term relationship but isn't married, and the man she lives with may not be the father of her son. Apart from those flaws, the film effectively reinvigorates the Superman franchise.

Reviewed by Lowell A. Hagan, a freelance writer in Bellevue, Washington.

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Mottoes, T-shirts, and Tattoos

by Daniel R. Vander Ark

Jim's voice vibrated with passion at a school board meeting last spring. He said, "Last night I read in the newspaper the saying of the Class of 2006 at an area public high school; it was 'From this point on, clothing is optional.' But last night when my son graduated from our Christian high school, the class motto was 'To God be the glory.' That's the fruit of Christian education."

Every country has a motto; states, provinces, and colleges do, too. Canada's motto is "From sea to sea"; in the U.S., it's "In God We Trust." A Christ-centered focus is seen in the motto of McMaster University, "In Christ all things hold together," and in that of Covenant College, "In all things Christ preeminent." Some mottoes imply action, such as "We are ready" (Simon Fraser University) and "Forward" (Churchill College at Cambridge). At the high school level the themes sometimes mention service: "Not for ourselves, but others." More often they brashly celebrate self: "The future is not in the hands of Fate but in ours."

Many of us have formed instant opinions about someone based on the images or words emblazoned on his or her T-shirt or inked in a tattoo. Athletes and fans wear T-shirts with their team's nickname and mascot to show their support for the team and their solidarity with the athletes. Some T-shirts are walking billboards of anger, humor, or vulgarity, but others crow about the individual's accomplishments: "I have more MySpace friends than you" or "Nobody knows the trouble I've been."

Think about mottoes at the beginning of this school year. First, on a continuum from "Clothing is optional" to "To God be the glory," where is your school's identity? If your school had an official T-shirt, what would it say? How does

the community identify your school? What's the students' theme song—"Living for Jesus" or "It's My Life"?

At the first assembly of each school year I used to hold up our school uniform with the word *Christian* prominently displayed and say, "All of you, just by being students at this school, wear 'Christian' on your back. In every act, people who know that you go to this school will be drawn closer to Jesus or driven further away."

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). You can help your children dare to be Daniels or Deborahs by pointing out the importance of boldly identifying themselves as followers of Jesus.

Of course, there's more to being a disciple than wearing a shirt or reciting a slogan. The same students who picked "To God be the glory" as a motto can stumble badly—fooling with sex, dropping a nasty putdown on a friend, or cheating to get the good grade. But no one would deny that persistently learning

who we really are in Christ—adopted sons and daughters of the living God—and hearing and seeing it over and over is more likely to mean that we follow him than if we find our identity some other place.

Jim ought to be filled with gratitude that God gave him the grace of forgiveness, the commitment to educate his son to follow the Truth, and the courage to say it out loud to his fellow school board members. And to us. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Daniel R. Vander Ark is a former executive director of Christian Schools International.

Self-reliance or dependence on God—what mottoes are our kids adopting as their own?



CREATIS