

Winter Homeschooling

by Helen Hegener

The holiday season has always been my very favorite time of the year. I prefer the slower pace of life in winter, with wonderful smells from the kitchen, the sounds of children and dogs playing in the snow. I like the crisp clear days, the beauty of a freshly-fallen snow, the star-bright nights. But mostly I enjoy this time of the year because that's when families gather together in thankfulness and celebration.

In the summertime children always seem so busy and occupied with important doings and their enthusiastic enjoyment of absolutely everything. Take them to the beach and they're off swimming and collecting stuff and meeting new friends and building castles in the sand. Take them on a picnic and they're off as quickly as they can pile out of the car, looking for neat rocks and scary snakes and who-knows-what-else. Oh, they'll show up when the cooler and the picnic basket are unpacked, but then they're gone again, skipping through the creek. Even at home there's so much to do: running and bicycling and playing in the sprinklers and swinging and so much more...

Then in late fall the pace slows, the kids start lingering inside later in the mornings, reading a book or building a model. They'll still race through the day - there's so much to do and like the squirrels they seem to know that winter's coming - but in the evenings, instead of dashing off for a game of hide-and-seek in the evening shadows, they might decide to play a game, or they'll slip a movie into the VCR, or they'll gather ingredients and bake a few cookies.

And then winter! Winter means snuggling up with a good book, having plenty of time to spend on a craft or a hobby, writing letters, trying out a new recipe. Winter is a time for coming close again, a time for families to build those reserves of strength that are needed when life becomes more hectic.

This is the time of year when homeschooling seems like the only reasonable and sensible way to raise children. Instead of walking to school or the bus stop in freezing temperatures, the kids will heatedly argue over the right way to pronounce a six syllable word. Instead of trooping into classrooms with thirty other kids their ages, the older kids will teach the younger kids the fine art of making golden brown pancakes. No bells or buzzers regulate the day, no playground bullies spark fear, no teachers frown at forgotten homework or a temporary lapse of attention.

Homeschooling gives children time to learn what they want to know at their own pace, in their own way. Homeschooling encourages digging deeper, asking more questions, understanding more fully. And homeschooling challenges the status quo, the institution, and the fast lane mode of thinking.

Homeschooling gives a family a different outlook on life, an entirely different set of ground rules. It removes the dependence on institutional expertise, reaffirms the capability of individuals, restores confidence in the ability - and the need - to be responsible for one's own life, and for one's own family. It allows the gentle rhythms of family life to flow uninterrupted, it gives kids and parents time to really get to know each other, to intimately understand how relationships between people work.

In this slowing-down, turning inward, mellowing time of the year, as we cuddle in bed and read an old favorite story for the fiftieth time, as we wrap big and small hands around cups of steaming cocoa, as we sprawl on the floor to help assemble a jigsaw puzzle, let us remember that as homeschooling families, we have much to be thankful for and to celebrate.