

Parents as Inspirers

By Karen Andreola

Ask anyone in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, about the annual end-of-summer agricultural fairs and you will be told that they are serious business. They're fun, too. Our town's fair begins with a parade. The streets are lined with enthusiastic faces. Three days of exhibits on the fairgrounds follow. Ferris wheels and all other rides are barred from the fair, and so are prize stalls. Therefore no ticket stubs litter the ground.

The fair is free. Many volunteer to run it. Many more enter. When we had recently moved to our town, the first time we visited the fair and stepped into an exhibit hall, I was astounded. I wasn't expecting to see so many entries, so carefully crafted by both children and adults (displayed safely under plastic). Within moments a tear filled my eye. I couldn't help it. But I wiped it away instantly, not wishing to appear emotional in public. I was impressed. The most wonderful thing is that I felt inspired.

I examined the knitting, sewn garments, quilts, and embroidery and knew from experience the unmarked hours that had gone into each entry. I marveled at what was home grown. Flowers more beautiful than in a florist shop. Whole rows of fruits, vegetables, herbs, baked goods, and preserves glowed more appealingly fresh and delicious than what can be bought at the grocery store. Indeed things are still made in the USA—as long as there are pumpkins . . .

Never had I seen such fastidiously groomed and healthy dairy cows and other farm animals. I couldn't help notice their owners, the young people, who handled their animals with pride and confidence.

The aisles of amateur photographs, the tables of crafts, and a wall of paintings spoke to me that people have found things to like about their world—enough to capture it in art. The dreary, murmuring attitude of “why bother” was put to shame.

The key word here is *inspiration*. Those who put the work and *care* into making an entry in the agricultural fair had to have been inspired by someone. From whence do you derive your inspiration?

Our Educational Responsibilities

To educate is to inspire. It is to sustain the inner life of a child with ideas. Ideas come by inspiration. We find them in books and experiences. As home teachers we are tempted (when exhausted) to tackle our educational responsibilities with the burdensome view of getting through a stack of educational materials: so much needs to be covered before the week is out, before the semester is out, before the year is out.

A Yoke That Is Easy

I once mentioned in *A Charlotte Mason Companion*: It isn't how much a child covers that matters most but how much he **cares**. When we understand that education is much, much more than the three *R*'s or more than covering *all* the material, we are refitted with a yoke that is easy. We are more willingly harnessed to the task and work faithfully, carefully, and lovingly. Why does the yoke seem easier?

We recognize the importance of our call and have taken on a special role. Parents are to be inspirers.

A Child's First Copybook

By the very lives we live, we are sowing seeds of ideas in our children. A sobering old proverb states: "Parents are a child's first copybook." Because we love our children, we seek God to help us demonstrate understanding, kindness, patience, cheerfulness, hard work, and reverence in our homes. How else can children learn how to show these to others? Through books, written by people inspired by ideas, we give children what is pure, lovely, noble, and just to think about. Books alive with ideas do the teaching.

"Right thought flows upon the stimulus of an idea, and ideas are stored . . . in books and pictures and the lives of men and nations; these instruct the conscience and stimulate the will."¹

Passing on the Torch

A good schoolbook shows us what virtue looks like. Textbooks do the job of offering us facts, but seldom do they go into the interesting detail of discovery, invention, or spiritual awakening. So we rely on other sorts of books to inspire us. This fallen world is not all sweetness. Therefore we reach for books that accompany life's hard truths with **hope**.

In literature, we meet sorrow, but we ought also to meet large-hearted characters that comfort. In history and biography we meet those who destroy, so we look for those brave souls who build, defend, or minister the gospel. Science rises to meet the challenge of hardship and sickness, and so we read about the inventors and the healers. Inspiration comes by way of those who uncover truth and pass on the flaming torch of ideas (especially needed in dark places). Some day our children may be one of the torchbearers.

Charlotte Mason borrows language from Ecclesiastics when she tells us: "The duty of parents is to sustain a child's inner life with ideas as they sustain his body with food. The child is an eclectic; he may choose this or that; therefore, in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not which shall prosper . . ."²

Endnotes:

1. Charlotte Mason, *Philosophy of Education*, Charlotte Mason Research & Supply, page 130.
2. *Ibid.*, page 39.

*Home educators know Karen Andreola by her groundbreaking book **A Charlotte Mason Companion**. Karen taught her three children through high school--studying with them all the many wonderful things her own education was missing. The entire Andreola family writes product reviews for [Rainbow Resource Center](#). Knitting mittens and sweaters and cross-stitching historic samplers are activities enjoyed in Karen's leisure. For encouraging ideas, visit her blog: www.momentswithmotherculture.blogspot.com.*

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