

For the Love of Reading

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my daughter, Melissa, and my mother, Hope Connelly, who both graciously worked on typing the manuscript of this book from my handwritten copy. I know that deciphering my scrawl was not an easy task. Thanks! — V.B. 1994

My children's names and ages at the time of publication (1994) are as follows: Michelle, 14 years old; Melissa, 12 years old; Robert, 10 years old; Raymond, 8 years old; and Mandy, 4 years old.

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Introduction

Reading is an important part of our entire lives. Let it be an enjoyable, integral part right from the start.

There are numerous reading programs available to enable you to teach your children to read. These programs vary in content. Some have: workbooks, games, activities, phonetic readers, spoken audio tapes, sing-a-long audio tapes, and teacher's manuals. There are programs to suit most every type of learner. There are programs to suit most every type of instructor. Many of these programs are geared to teach writing, composition, and spelling, too.

In a society where we are inundated with so many reading programs, why am I writing still another book about reading? My desire is to share my experiences in teaching my children to read. I want to show you how you can personalize your reading program so your children not only learn the mechanics of reading, but they develop a love for reading; a love that will cause them to be life-long readers and, therefore, life-long learners.

First, it is my hope that children learn to be expressive and creative at an early age, or rather I should say, that their creativity and expressiveness that are so ripe at an early age be encouraged to blossom rather than be discouraged by too formal and stilted a program. Reading is an important part of our entire lives. Let it be an enjoyable, integral part right from the start.

Secondly, for those with older children who need to be motivated to read, it is my hope that some of the ideas set forth in this book will provide an avenue by which to nurture the desire to make reading an important part of their lives as well.

Thirdly, it is my hope that the ideas presented in this book will enable you to draw your language arts lessons from the books you share as a family.

2004 note: Since the publication of the first edition of *For the Love of Reading* in 1994, I have written a phonics program entitled *Reading Made Easy: A Guide to Teach Your Child to Read*. Please see pages 333 and 334 for an explanation of this program.

An Idea is Born

Unfortunately, the first child in a family is often taught by the trial and error method. This has been the case with my oldest daughter, Michelle. My husband and I knew we would homeschool our children even before they were born. We did not exactly know how, but we knew in our hearts that it was the best practice for our family. Back in the early days of homeschooling there were few voices offering instruction to parents desiring to homeschool, so we were terribly excited by any materials we could locate on the subject. Through a friend we found out about a Christian correspondence school that would accept homeschooled children. We enrolled Michelle immediately when she reached the acceptable age of four years. I was so excited that she was finally old enough to homeschool. (Years later I realized that I had been successfully homeschooling her before her official enrollment. After the enrollment, our methods began to digress.)

I very promptly induced this independent, creative, intelligent child to sit quietly and complete X number of worksheets, in a given period of time, for five days each week. She rebelled almost instantly. “Mommy this is boring. Mommy I know this stuff already.” But like the thorough mother that I am, I insisted that she complete *every* page. After all, she might miss a concept or a rule that might tarnish her academically for life!

Now during this time period, I was doing my homework, being careful to learn every phonetic rule. I did not concern myself with math too much because it was a favorite subject of mine, and I had already had several years experience in tutoring children in math. Phonics presented somewhat of a problem, not because I was not a good reader, but because I was not familiar with the rules of the game.

After applying myself diligently to the mastery of the rules, I needed a subject on which to try out this newly acquired knowledge. Naturally, Michelle was my target, but the problem was that by the age of four and a half she was burned out on schoolwork. I can not fully describe what happened as Michelle progressed from age four to four and a half, but the following incident may give you some idea.

As I explained earlier, Michelle is a very creative child. She loves to draw and make things out of paper. One day during her fourth year, she was supposed to be completing her worksheets, and I was rather upset with her because she could not read. After all she was four and a half, and according to the teacher’s manual she should have been reading by now! I could see her academic future being washed down the drain. Ready to give up, I left her in the dining room with her pencils, scissors, and paper and decided to read to her little sister, Melissa, who was two and a half years old at the time. Melissa wanted to be read to all of her waking hours, and I decided that this was a comfortable idea since I was pregnant

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with our third child.

Melissa and I sat in the rocking chair reading in the living room, while Michelle busied herself in the adjacent dining room. Michelle had given up the phonics workbooks in favor of creating dollhouse furnishings from paper. Let me further describe what she was doing. Michelle would draw a figure on her paper, cut it out, fold it, tape the ends, and produce a china hutch, television, chairs, washer and dryer, and so forth.

Meanwhile, Melissa and I were reading. By this time Melissa had learned the alphabet, and now she was working on learning the sounds those letters generally make when used at the beginning of a word (initial consonant sounds). She then progressed to detecting the letter sounds at the end of a word (final consonant sounds). As I read to Melissa, I casually pointed out the letters in some of the words and emphasized their sounds. Next, we worked on short vowel sounds in words like *cat*, *dog*, *cup*, *pig*, and *bed*. Melissa loved this attention and progressed rapidly. (After all, this was really just a game to her.) Michelle was taking all this in from the other room, more extensively than I realized.

I began pointing out more difficult phonetic combinations to Melissa like *bl*, *cl*, *fr*, *tr*, and other blends. Later she was ready for the more complex phonetic sounds like *oo*, *ow*, *au*, and *or* that appear in the middle of words. I would say to Melissa, for example, “See this word *f-o-o-d*, well, *oo* says *oo* in this word. The word is *food*.” Then I would point out other *oo* words, still rather casually, as we read along. Days, and probably weeks, passed and each day I would sit and read with Melissa, and Michelle would draw or create something out of paper.

It was not long before Michelle was interrupting as I read with Melissa in the next room; she was shouting out the sounds for the letter combinations that we were reviewing. Melissa was learning to read in a pleasurable relaxed way on Mother’s lap, and Michelle was learning to read by eavesdropping! (I am convinced that if your child is having difficulty with a concept, go in the next room, whisper the information, and he will get it!)

This teaching strategy benefited Melissa, Michelle, and me. Melissa wanted to be coddled and read to, Michelle wanted to be free to work with her hands, and I needed to be able to share this new phonetic knowledge that I had acquired with someone!

Things have not changed much through the years in our household. While I am reading aloud to my children, Melissa still wants to look over my shoulder and read along, and Michelle listens better if her hands are busy either drawing or sewing, and I still have a need to share new thoughts and ideas with them. I learned an important lesson 10 years ago from our first schooling experiences; I learned that children are individuals. They have varying needs, desires, strengths, and weaknesses. I

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learned to be flexible while still remaining goal oriented. My goals have not varied too much over the years; however, my teaching strategies have varied to fit the needs of my children and our family's situation.

I learned that I could not recreate school in the home effectively and more importantly that I should not! If anything, the schools should be trying to emulate the atmosphere prevalent in the home. I used to look back on the early years of homeschooling and feel a sense of failure. But I have come to look on those years as a growing period — a period of growth and learning for me, my husband, and my children. What is important is that we grow as a family and learn from our experiences.

I would like to relate another situation that occurred while teaching my son Robert to read. When Robert was five years old, I began teaching him to combine letter sounds to form short words like *cat*, *dog*, *bit*, *rug*, and *bell*. After he had fairly mastered some simple words like these, I handed him a small, very easy, phonetically controlled reader. One of the pages in the book read something like, "Hop Fred, hop, hop, hop." He dutifully proceeded to read the book when suddenly he looked at me quite frustrated and said, "Mom, don't you know that people don't really talk like that!"

I was astounded at this five-year-old's perceptiveness, and I decided that I would not offend his intelligence by having him plod through such monotonous books any longer. I said, "Robert, would you like to write your own readers?" He quickly agreed to this, and I immediately asked him to dictate a story to me. Still not sure what was to be the outcome of this, but delighted that he was not going to have to read anymore little readers, Robert began enthusiastically telling me a story.

I carefully wrote each word, inserting proper capitalization and punctuation as I went along, meticulously forming each letter. I had large kindergarten-lined paper on hand, so this is what I used to transcribe his story. After he dictated about 6 or 8 pages to me, I read his story to him, and he drew a picture to accompany his story. Then I handed the papers to him and said, "Now, here is your reader. Read it to me."

Robert exclaimed, "Why, I can't read that! It's too hard!" I reminded him that he wrote the story, so how could it be too hard for him to read? (Presented in that manner, it did sound logical to him.) He skeptically took the pages from me and slowly began to read the words. Suddenly, the story began to flow more naturally, and a bright smile came over his face. When he reached a difficult word, he managed to decipher it. After all, it was *his* story, so he was familiar with the storyline and the vocabulary. Occasionally, I would help him with a word or two. Robert and I were both so excited that we could hardly contain ourselves. He had progressed in one sitting from reading sentences like, "Hop Fred, hop, hop, hop," to reading sentences like, "The knight lived in the dazzling

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castle on the hill.”

Our excitement was contagious, and Raymond, who was only three years old at the time, was anxious to “tell Mommy a story, too.” I carefully wrote out Raymond’s story, and then I read it to him. Afterward, he illustrated his story. I began to see how successful this teaching method could be. In only six months, Robert progressed from reading on a Kindergarten level to reading on a third-grade level. (I confess, I succumbed to temptation and pulled out a third-grade reader which Robert read flawlessly. He also noted that these stories were much more interesting than those in the beginning readers.)

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Not only did this simple method of reading instruction produce a terrific reader, it produced two terrific storytellers. Yes, every time Robert dictated a story, little Raymond had to dictate a *longer* story. And out of this love for storytelling arose a desire to make books, real books.

I want to explain that I did continue giving Robert phonics instruction using a manual that supplied me with appropriate exercises. We would spend a short time each week mastering the rules, and the remainder of the time Robert would spend dictating stories and reading them to me.

We also played games to help with difficult sounds. Most of these were card games that I made up, but more recently I have found a book called ***Games for Reading***, by Peggy Kaye. This book includes over 75 easy-to-make games that are not only fun to play, but that are beneficial for building the child’s vocabulary, for helping him to hear letter sounds more accurately, and for training his eye to see patterns of letters. I find that I am more consistent in using games that I make rather than using purchased games, because I already have time invested in the game. My children seem to appreciate that I have taken the time to make something for them, and many times they are also able to help make the games, which makes them even more valuable!

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Combine your favorite reading program with ***Games for Reading***, have your child write (dictate) his own readers, and you will have a winning phonics program — a program that encourages creativity and a love for reading!

Robert and Raymond's ability to create stories did not just happen in a day or two. For a number of years my husband, my two older daughters, and I had been reading to them daily. They also listened to stories on audio cassette tapes. Story time was part of our daily routine (and it continues to be). This story time included selections from picture books, novels, biographies, poetry books, Bible stories, the Bible, and numerous other kinds of books. They had assimilated many stories, and when asked to compose stories of their own, they had little trouble. Occasionally, they would be stumped when they could not evoke the right name for a character or place. However, after a little contemplation, they would devise a satisfactory title.

Recently my son Robert, who is now ten years old, was dictating a poem to me for inclusion in one of his most recent books entitled *Fine Art Pictures and Poems*. First, I allowed him to brainstorm, thinking of many words that related to his poem's topic. After compiling a list which he dictated to me, I encouraged him to think of words that rhyme with the words in his list, and I wrote these down also. It was then time for him to compose the poem. We sat for what seemed a very long time with no utterance from Robert. I guess I displayed a sense of annoyance as I told him I would be back after I did some laundry. When I came back, he dictated a simple but excellent poem to accompany his re-creation of Monet's painting entitled, *Houses of Parliament*. Robert's poem reads as follows:

The River Thames

*On the quiet River Thames,
The House of Parliament sits,
The fog and bog surrounding it,
Enclosed in gloom and mist.*

I was obviously impressed with his poem, and Robert smiled and said, "Now Mom, some things are worth waiting for!" So now when I try to hurry my children or press them too hard, I remember, "There are some things that are worth waiting for!"

A mother who attended one of my seminars related an interesting story to me. She said her family was studying the fruits of the Spirit and her little daughter said, "Mommy, I can tell you all the fruits of the Spirit." She began, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, hope, gentleness, self-control, and *hurrying*." Her mother was rather astounded and said, "Hurrying?" Her daughter explained, "Oh, yes, I figure that's the most important one because you're always telling us to hurry, hurry!" That mother said that now when she catches herself hurrying her children, she stops and remembers her time with them is really very short, and she must take the time to enjoy them.

To Invent Stories, You Need to Listen to Stories

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It is important for us to consider these thoughts when teaching our children, whether it is teaching them how to read or how to tie their shoes. We should not be speeding our children on to adulthood, but rather nurturing, loving, and simply enjoying them.

“Children are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward.”

Providing an Atmosphere for Learning

Naturally, very young children seldom have the necessary attention span to sit through an entire book. Even a simple board book may be overwhelming for an adventuresome youngster. Some (like my daughter Melissa) will show an interest in books at an early age, but many are too busy with important matters like building block towers, or more often, un-building (otherwise known as knocking down) block towers built by someone else.

I learned through the years of homeschooling my children how stimulating it is for young children to be present when their older siblings are having their lessons. Often the very young are busy at play while I am reading aloud to the older children. It is amazing to me how much they absorb while I am reading, even though they are not planted next to me on the sofa. We often think that the children must be sitting close by with eyes fastened to us or the book. (Remember the incident I related earlier about Michelle learning to read by overhearing?)

Last spring I was preparing for a workshop detailing a sign language unit study we had done the year before. My daughter, Mandy, who was three and a half years old at the time, accompanied me to the library to select books to use during my presentation. As I pulled a copy of *The Story of My Life*, by Helen Keller, from the shelf, Mandy looked at the photograph on the cover and exclaimed, "That's Helen Keller. You read that book to us." I was astonished at this remark, for Mandy was only two and a half years old when I read the book to my children!

Mandy has absorbed much information by being in the room during schooling hours. Her experiences are not confined to traditional preschool lessons, but to real literature, history, science, math, and so on. Preschool subjects are taught naturally through daily life experiences. Mandy did not complete a series of worksheets on squares to learn about squares. Squares and other preschool topics were a part of her real world.

People sometimes ask, "What type of kindergarten program do you have planned for Mandy?" Well, she already enjoys sign language, spouting off definitions for Greek and Latin roots, learning about electricity and magnetism, dictating and illustrating stories (her art work is somewhat non-descript as she spent too much time studying Picasso), "typing" on the computer, learning about Ancient Egypt, and more. I guess she will keep on learning right along with the rest of the family!

Mandy did not have much of an interest in the alphabet in printed form before age four, but she was very intrigued by the manual sign alphabet. Now as I sign the alphabet, she can say the names for each letter that I sign, regardless of the order in which I sign them. I initially taught her the ABC song, signing each letter as I sang the names for the letters. Recently she has begun making the signs for the letters with her own chubby hands. It may seem unusual, but she has learned the manual sign

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alphabet before learning the printed form. The printed form will be mastered later. Incidentally, I am using her knowledge of the manual sign alphabet to teach her the printed letters and their sounds. (I do not recommend this procedure for all children, but I mention it to emphasize that it is beneficial to use a child's interests to teach him basic skills.)

All my children have learned their alphabet with help from *Dr. Seuss's ABC* book. (We are presently on our second copy.) Now as I read this book with Mandy, I make the letter sign with my right hand and point with my left hand to the corresponding letter on the page. Then Mandy proudly tells me the letter's name printed on the page. One evening I told Mandy that we need to read *Dr. Seuss's ABC* book everyday and practice her letters and that soon she will be able to read. She said, "You mean I will be able to read all by myself?" I told her that she would if we really worked at it. Well, early the next morning while I was still asleep, Mandy brought me her *ABC* book and wanted to read it! This was a good sign that Mandy was ready to begin some simple phonics instruction in a fun, non-stressful manner. (I've found many of the suggestions in *Games for Reading*, by Peggy Kaye, are appropriate for Mandy at this stage.)

Mandy has recently reached the point where she loves to sit while I read to her. She does not have to busy herself "undoing" what someone else has just finished "doing." She also enjoys "reading" to me. She will take a favorite book that is partially or completely memorized and "read" it to me. It is special when Mandy invents her own story to accompany the illustrations in a book. On a recent visit to the library, we saw three little girls about Mandy's age sitting at a small table. Mandy pulled up a chair and began "reading" them a story from a book she had not seen before. The little girls sat mesmerized as she wove her tale. Mandy had a captive audience and she loved it. When the children's father asked if he could read them a book, they all responded with, "No, no! We want Mandy to read us another story!"

All of the processes I have mentioned are paving the way for Mandy to learn to really read. Let us review these pre-reading processes. First when she was very young, Mandy played nearby while I read to the other children. Then as her attention span increased, she sat, looked, and listened (and commented) while I read to her. (Even when Mandy was an infant we read baby board books.) Then Mandy "read" to me and created her own stories. We have always made books available for her to freely look through, and we have also always insisted that she have a respect for books and not destroy them. Now she is learning the names for the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they generally make.

Earlier this year, Mandy dictated and illustrated her first book entitled *Brown Bear Gets Lost*. My four older children also made books during the same time period. Mandy was thrilled that she was actually mak-

ing a real book, too. She had often looked at the books her siblings had previously made. (For information on *Creating Books with Children* see page 331.)

Mandy dictated her story to me over the course of three days. Initially I wrote the story in longhand and then my daughter, Melissa, typed it into the computer. Each day Mandy made an illustration to be included in her book. I taught her to draw a bear by making a series of circles with her pencil. Then she colored her pictures. Once the illustrations were complete and the text was printed on the pages, Mandy helped me glue the pages and sew the book binding.

Afterward we made a book jacket which Mandy illustrated. This book jacket contains a front flap with information about the book and a back flap with information about the author/illustrator. My boys dictated the information for their book jacket flaps to me as I sat at the computer, and Mandy “typed” on another computer, listening to every word they uttered. (She was probably “typing” what they were saying.)

Then it was Mandy’s turn to dictate her passages to be used for her book jacket flaps. She was excited to tell about herself as her brothers had done. She even understood, without my explanation, that the back jacket flap was to read as if someone other than the author had written it. She was copying or mimicking what she had heard her brothers say, and she was applying it to herself. (Children often do this while engaged in a pretend conversation on the telephone.) This is the passage she dictated to me concerning herself, the author/illustrator.

Mandy is three years old, and she likes to ride her bike, read books, and “type” on the computer. She loves hamsters and birds. Mandy likes bears and dolls too. This is Mandy’s first book and she wants to write some more books soon.

I then added:

Mandy is the youngest of five children.

Well, I had typed what Mandy dictated, printed it, pasted it on the back inside flap of her book jacket, and she was *still* telling me all about herself! She then asked, “Mommy, did you get all that?” I explained that she would have to write an autobiography next!

Raymond, who turned eight years old this summer, made great progress in his reading abilities as we were making books. The children spent a week getting their basic stories written or dictated. As Raymond dictated his story for his book, I typed it into the computer. Then each day we began with Raymond reading aloud the portion of his story that he had dictated to me the day before. The benefits of this were twofold as it served as a review of what Raymond had previously dictated, which en-

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abled him to logically begin the next episode of his story, and it served as an enticing reader which kept his interest, challenged him sufficiently, but did not overwhelm him. Once again, as I mentioned earlier when relaying a similar experience with my oldest son Robert, the student was not overburdened with deciphering and following a storyline. Decoding was less difficult due to familiarity with the vocabulary, the child's own spoken vocabulary, and the storyline was naturally interpreted as it was created by the child.