

the FirstYear™



Secret Power

by Michelle Miller

Just forty-eight hours earlier, my father had died. Now came The Dreaded Time—the private, family viewing with intense, painful emotions.

But I discovered a surprising joy. Through bleary eyes, I looked down the row of us in the tiny room and saw my now-adult sons. They had, at great cost, dropped everything and traveled cross-country to be here.

The abstract concept of *family* instantly became real, warm, and solid. It transcended us as individuals. It was surviving the loss of one member.

In a flood, I could feel the history of our family and, especially, of these two sons. You see, our family has long homeschooled, so we have had many vivid seasons together.

I recall entering the homeschooling universe (the boys were then eleven and seven) with the belief that if we did the earnest work of homeschooling, it would *guarantee* a perfect Christian family. Yes, deep down, I unwittingly, but smugly, assumed we would get through parenting unscathed with homeschooling “fire insurance.”

That is not quite how it played out. The journey was not a warp-speed trajectory into hyper-spirituality, as I had wished. My children are not sporting phosphorescent halos. (Neither am I, but I never expected that.) Nevertheless, with years under my belt, I now look back and see that something glorious *was* building, not at hyper-speed but slowly, quietly, and imperceptibly. The same beautiful growth is happening at your house too.

Big Plans, Big Pressures

We began in the Late-Homeschooling-Dark-Ages Era when my then-little boys were mostly bundles of sparkling spunk and innocence. It was easy to imagine that our Christian parenting and homeschooling would insure us drift-free children. I forgot to factor in a couple of dynamics, however.

First, hubby and I—*dub!*—were not perfect. Naturally, I knew that, yet somehow I still thought parenting and teaching rested on my shoulders as God’s fearful mandate to moms and dads. It was a crushing pressure, which my children also felt keenly. Years later, God would gradually show me that His grace would help me fulfill my quite limited parenting role; He had always planned to do the rest. But that is another story.

The second cloud on my sunny dream? Our children, and their little sin natures, would continue to grow up and out of our house. Their powerful, God-given wills (alas) were susceptible to worldly lures.

But in the beginning when I was in my first year, I had big dreams, so we mechanically and impersonally attacked the schoolbooks. Over time, God loosened the educational tourniquet; life flowed into our homeschool. We walked, talked, read, wrote, worked, learned, probed,



**Next Issue:
Breathless!**

researched, explored, stretched, grew, played, and conversed *together*. Day and night, we were family.

We sought God's truth on every subject. I thank God for the opportunity to lay that crucial foundation in their lives. But, I had assumed our teaching was the fire insurance. What I didn't realize is that truth—while still God-powerful—easily can be rejected for a time.

After my sons graduated, we did not see the super-hyper-ultra-mega-über-spirituality that had fueled my parenting and homeschool dreams. Turns out, my boys were human! While possessing many great qualities, they made mistakes and sometimes tasted of the world. I did not handle that as the normal, adult growth process, for I had placed upon my sons unrealistic and crushing expectations "because they were homeschooled."

The Cloud Lifts

But there is good news! Our now-adult sons were living their own lives far away, yet the phone

The goal of our FirstYear column is to provide encouragement, practical tips and ideas, and home-friendly methods for teaching your child at home—especially during the daunting first years.

We also send out an encouraging FirstYear message through email every week. Homeschooling Today's weekly eNewsletter, *FirstYear*. You probably know families who are in the early years of homeschooling or maybe they're new to homeschooling. Now is the perfect time to sign them up to receive weekly practical advice to help them stay on track and enjoy teaching their children. Sign up today: www.homeschooltoday.com/newsletters



kept ringing with their latest questions about life, God, money, politics, and relationships. Yes, our twenty-somethings still wanted our input on the things that matter most. The days of spiritual inflow were not over. Something was still connected, something they could not ignore as easily as our teachings.

The guys *wanted* to spend some summer weekends and holidays with us, bringing their wives/children/girlfriends and college homework. They were warm, affectionate, and interested. As they talked, I could hear truth flowing out of them.

One day, both sons called Hubby; they wanted to go into business with him! They chose to move back (but in their own homes, naturally) and build a company together, a united threesome. Their trust and respect for Dad were very strong, they said, and there simply wasn't anyone else they'd rather work with than each other!

I now realize that while our teaching was very important, it was doing life together completely that has made lifelong truth-talk and friendship possible for us. The bonds of family preserved and nurtured those of theology and philosophy. How brilliant is God to sew parents and children together this way across lifetimes!

An old friend and I once explored this topic. She said that although she had never quite been able to put it into words, this is exactly what she counts as the best part of the whole homeschooling experience for her and her graduated children.

While you may be just beginning to homeschool, remember that curriculum is *not* the main ingredient, nor is the schedule or activities. None of those will be fire insurance. What is priceless is that you are invisibly, atom by atom and throughout every hour of every day, building a family-friendship entity with God and His truth at the core that will survive life's traumas. Homeschooling can be a special means for tying your family together with cords of superseding love. This *familyness* will outlast hurts, failures, and trials.

It will sustain you—even at your father's funeral—when your strapping, grown sons choose *earnestly* to stand there with you.

Michelle Miller likes homeschooling, which is convenient, since she began in 1992 and won't finish until 2019! Her first two sons are now successful adults; a daughter-in-law and four grandsons are proof! Her youngest son, daughter, and hubby (thankfully!) are still at home in northern Michigan. She has authored a spiritually focused, in-depth, literature-based history curriculum: *TruthQuest History*, one of Cathy Duffy's "Top 100 Picks." You can learn about her unique vision of history, and her relational way of exploring it, at www.TruthQuestHistory.com. Michelle also operates a homeschool library, where she's learned much about the best children's literature.