

Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Homeschooling Friends

Spring has produced a welcome resurgence in socializing, networking and other forms of mutual support amongst homeschooling families in our area. We've been lucky to have a wonderful family with four kids ages 3-11 move to the New Denver area. Bob (11) and Noah have become fast friends, sharing computer and soccer interests and gentlemanly good spirits. Margaret (9) and Erin hit it off too, first connecting over their mutual Harry Potter interests. And Allie (6) and Sophie seem to be finding their stride as good friends as well. We've been spending a couple of afternoons a week with this family, much to everyone's glee.

With the addition of these four kids to the mix, we have the makings of a local homeschooling group. There are about a dozen kids under 12, and we've been making an effort to get together for activities that are more accessible or more enjoyable in groups. We hope to continue this in the fall.

The larger West Kootenay regional homeschooling network seems to be enjoying a resurgence of vitality. We attended a picnic with 40-50 other homeschooled children and their parents in Nelson, and the regional newsletter seems to be back on track, informing and supporting parents and children, providing a showcase for the kids' creative work, and sharing experiences and inspiration.

Q. How Many Homeschoolers Can You Fit in a Bear Den?

A. Eleven!

Wildlife biologist Erica Mallam recently took a New Denver area group of home-schoolers and their parents on a bear walk near the ghost town of Retallack. We learned lots about bears and their intersection with human populations. The highlight of the morning was the chance to actually clamber inside a recently vacated black bear den beneath the roots of a large cedar tree.



Math

Noah is about three quarters of the way through the Singaporean 2nd grade program he started around Christmas time. Sophie is almost finished her 1st grade program. Erin has finished the Grade 6 Singapore Math books and hence sits at the threshold of Singapore's high school program which we've decided to wait on for a while. (Singapore Math is approximately one grade level more advanced than Canadian math programs.) So she's taking a bit of a break from formal math, though the "learning through life" element of course continues.

Generally we do a bit of math bookwork with a warm mug of almond milk just before we start our bedtime routine. It's a quiet time of day when Fiona is likely to be asleep and the middle kids especially seem to really enjoy this ritual as a way to settle their bodies down for the night.

Independent Reading

Everyone is doing it now, it seems! Sophie and Noah have both become strong readers this year, so the three eldest often share reading material amongst themselves. Favourite lightweight choices are Asterix and Garfield comic books. While Sophie's chapter book choices are usually "easy reader" fare like Arnold Lobel and Mary Pope Osborne, both she and Noah are improving their fluency and ease almost by the day. Erin has been re-reading the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, and Bill Bryson travelogues, among many other things.

Trying School

Concerning school Erin sometimes felt like she was at a party where everyone was talking about the latest hit movie and she hadn't seen it. So when after one particularly grumpy morning, I suggested she try school and see if she thought she'd be happy there, she decided to give it a whirl. Off she went to join the Grade 4 class for two days.

She enjoyed her time there but I think was left feeling like it was a "nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there." The material was easy. She aced quizzes on social studies material she'd never been taught; casual exposure here and there had been enough to allow her to pick up the knowledge. She was unimpressed by the repetitiveness and busywork, and the time limits on creative work were frustrating. Homework felt silly and much of what went on in the classroom was about scorekeeping and measuring the kids' performance.

I suspect (not that she'll admit it!) that Erin has a renewed appreciation for home-based learning... for the independence, flexibility and time to follow her interests it affords her. And school has been demystified, so she now feels she has made an informed educational choice. It was a successful "field trip to school."

Great Books

Here are some more great books we've enjoyed lately:

The Golden Compass and sequels by Philip Pullman. An incredibly intriguing set of alternate worlds, tension between religion and science, children and magical animals... we all really enjoyed these books.

Lord of the Nutcracker Men by Iain Lawrence. This story is set in Kent during WWI. Johnny enacts imaginary battles with the wooden soldiers his toymaker father sends him along with his letters from the trenches at the front. It starts to look like the toy soldiers and the real ones are linked in mysterious ways. The horrors of the war are portrayed honestly but gently.

The Cartoon History of the Universe by Larry Gonick. We have all three volumes published thus far (from the Big Bang to the Renaissance). They're entertaining, funny, accurate and thorough. Possibly the best narrative overview of world history available in any format.

Kite Rider by Geraldine McCaughrean. Historical fiction, set in China under the rule of the Mongols. A young boy learns to ride the winds strapped to a kite as part of a circus, but greed and deceit, both within the family and without, plague him.

Broken Arm

Erin had a spectacular fall from a large tree at the park at the beginning of May and sustained a buckle fracture of her right forearm bones. Her dad was on-call so she got prompt and loving attention in the ER. Luckily Erin is left-handed, so she had an easier time of things than she might have during the four weeks the arm was in a cast. Still, there were a few things she couldn't do...

Violin playing came to a full stop for the month. Gymnastics classes were very much missed. Swimming and bathing were a significant challenge. Rolling out cookie dough and various other gooey and wet things were given a miss. She spent her piano energy working on left hand technique and music theory bookwork.

The alignment of the bones looked good and the cast came off two weeks ago. She's back to doing everything she was before, including climbing trees!

Vacation Learning

We had an extra few days for sight-seeing on the way to and from the Suzuki Institute (see page 4). On the way down we took the big ferry across Kootenay Lake and had a chance to watch the artisans at work in Gray Creek. They were a big hit as always: a blacksmith, weaver, broom-maker and glassblower. In Creston we spent a morning at the wetlands wildlife preserve. From there we went on to Cranbrook where we toured the railway museum, experience first-hand the opulence of rail travel in the early 20th century, complete with stained glass, mahogany inlay work and silver tea services.

The next day we went to Fort Steele, a restored/re-created 1898 town. We also took a quick ride on a steam train. After that we headed across the border where some interesting cultural observations were made. At our first stop (to pick up a tourist map) we saw a man casually strolling across a parking lot with a rifle. We noticed that in the US where deer occasionally meander onto highways the warning signs read "Game Crossing" rather than the Canadian "Wildlife Crossing". And of course the kids enjoyed getting to know US currency and making sense of signs in miles.

On the way home we visited an open-air market where one of Erin's violin instructors was playing jazz violin, and later spent a morning at a park in Spokane where the kids rode a restored 1909 carousel.

Musette Moose

Our poseable mascot continues her journey around the world with great success. She's visited Edinburgh, Scotland, Hveregardi, Iceland and Rome, Italy since our last newsletter was published and is now on her way to Australia's outback. To her tiny Polarfleece Canadian vest she's added hand-made mocassins, a stars & stripes sweater, a Scottish kilt and a custom-made Icelandic sweater. We can't wait to receive her back home and see all the other mementos she's accumulated. I've transferred her web journal to my new website, so you can now find details, and plenty of photos, here:

<http://www.nurturedbylove.ca>

Fiona Updates

Fiona has been out of diapers and almost totally reliable with her toileting since March. We're all very impressed. Her babbling has become constant and insistent and interspersed with an increasingly decipherable collection of words. She can ask for things quite capably and is the family's self-appointed summoner-of-all at supper time. She loves the sandbox and animals of all sorts (which are all referred to as cats, even those of the small two-legged feathered variety).

She's going through a phase where she's a bit of a handful in stores and restaurants, but the payoff for her increased adventurousness is that she is more comfortable apart from her mom and actually frequently gravitates by choice to her other family members, including her Grandma Hughes.

Suzuki Institute in Pullman

In early July we attended a Suzuki Summer Institute in Pullman, WA, about 5 hours south. It was an excellent experience for all of us.

Erin had 6-7 hours a day of instruction. She was the youngest in most of her classes by at least 2-3 years, so she didn't really have any social peers, but she had plenty of musical peers, which was really what she needed since she doesn't get that at home. The Advanced Orchestra was excellent, very challenging and filled with capable players, and she ended up in a master class with two teens who clearly play with lots of passion and commitment. The 13-to-17-year-olds she was with in orchestras and groups were a really nice bunch too and they made her feel part of the social banter even though she was so tiny and somewhat shy. She made some really big strides participating in discussions both during classes and afterwards.

Noah had 4 hours of classes a day and was well-placed for confidence-building. He was among the most secure and most advanced students in his orchestra and master class, which was great, because he likes to be comfortably in his comfort zone when in public. He made many friends and proved to be a bit of a social magnet for kids his age and a bit younger. Every time I'd enter the music building with one of the girls, kids would come up to me and ask "where's Noah?" He started Suzuki Book 3 during the institute, which gave him a boost. He made a very good friend, another 7yo homeschooled boy, and really enjoyed his company in classes and elsewhere.

Sophie had 3 hours of classes a day. She too was well-placed for confidence-building. She was doing the Junior Institute for "first-time enrollees under 7 and in the first half of Book 1." While she had moved into the 2nd half of Book 1 since registering, and was therefore the most advanced kid in two of her classes, it was the right place for her since she'd never had a lesson or group class with anyone other than her mom or grandma. She loved her group class which was taught by an amazing teacher who was worked the kids very hard and made some big progress in her playing.

The social activities were low-key and enjoyable. The institute was friendly and warm. We really really enjoyed it. Chuck spent lots of time being the "Suzuki parent in loco" for Noah and also sometimes for Sophie, and really liked being able to be involved. Fiona survived just fine, napping on my shoulder, making countless recreational trips to the washrooms and drinking fountains, watching, singing, smiling. Miranda sucked up lots of teaching inspiration and had a great time re-connecting with Suzuki friends.



Sophie (in speckled dress) and Noah (middle, white shirt and dark shorts) confidently performing in the final concert at the Pullman institute.



Erin (left) performs Telemann with her trio at the chamber music concert. Between them the three girls had a whole violin: two 1/4-sized instruments and a 1/2-size!