

Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Burkholder Homeschooling News

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Fiona Updates

Fiona is now walking really well, climbing up into top bunks, and generally getting into everything. She's very attached to her siblings and really misses them if, for some reason, they're not around. During gymnastics class, she insists on standing in front of the window and looking down into the gym to see them at work. She calls "hi guys!" whenever she sees them or wants their attention.

Although her interest in the toilet waxes and wanes, many days she's almost entirely out of diapers, and she is consistently dry through the night.

And cutest of all, she's learned a bobbing Japanese Suzuki "bow", and will applaud appropriately at group class and concerts.

Penpals

Last summer I had a bit of e-mail correspondence with a woman in Holland who was curious about the homeschooling and employment climate in BC, as her family was vaguely considering emigration. Her son expressed an interest in corresponding with Noah. Initially a couple of e-mails went back and forth between the boys, but not much enthusiasm developed.

Then we decided to send off a real postal letter. We enclosed a copy of our Christmas CD and a photo of Noah. Suddenly both boys were really enthusiastic about the correspondence. Letters and trinkets and treats have been traversing the Atlantic. Although it was tempting for me to make more of the educational opportunities than the boys did, I stayed in the background, letting Noah generate and pursue his own lines of inquiry. As a result, the levels of enthusiasm and curiosity remain high.

After the first packet arrived from Holland, Erin and Sophie caught the penpal bug. Erin reconnected with a Scottish pal and I've managed to hook Sophie up with a Japanese-Canadian girl living in Japan.

Oddly enough, while the immediacy of e-mail communication suits the adults in our family very well, the kids prefer the heightened excitement that comes from longer waits while anticipating tangible letters.

Erin's watercolour painting has taken a lovely impressionistic turn lately. Here is a painting entitled "Spring Flowers."



Math

All three kids are rolling along in their math work. Noah switched to Singapore Math just before Christmas. We went back to the start of the 2nd grade program to give him a chance to adjust to the new approach. He's finding it very easy and enjoyable. I discovered a week ago that he was almost finished, and gobbling up a week's worth of lessons at a sitting, and I hadn't ordered the next book. So I rushed off to order it!

Erin has moved into the Grade 6 Singapore books (more like Grade 7 in Canada) and is finding the work easily within her capabilities. I'm a little stymied by what to do with her once she finishes this level, because the Singapore program moves into a fairly intensive four-year high school math program. I really like their approach, but I think she's still too young to enjoy that intensity. For now I think I'll encourage her to take a year or two's break from formal math, maybe just grazing on some interest-led algebra and geometry as the mood strikes her. Then, when she's getting a little closer to adolescence, she might enjoy the program at that point.

Sophie has moved easily ahead in the second Miquon Math book, which is technically "advanced end-of-Grade-1" stuff, but seems to suit her playful approach to math and her excellent self-directed problem-solving skills. She's going great guns for a young kindergartener, despite getting scant active encouragement from her mom!

Art Class

Noah and Erin have been attending a weekly art class for the past six months. The group is led by a local artist / art teacher. The age range is 7-12. Noah is the youngest and the only boy, but doesn't seem to notice this. They started the year working with patterns in nature, through collage, painting, drawing, block-cutting and print-making. Lately they've been working on "seeing", through lots of studies, contour drawings, and the reworking of a particular subject through different media. The teacher seems to provide just the right balance of freedom versus direction, and the kids seem to do little in the way of copying their neighbours. There's lots of individuality coming through.

Lately they've been creating and decorating paper, including doing some marbling on paper, which they really enjoyed. At home we took the marbled papers they'd made and used them to create the covers for some hardcover books, small journals that we've had fun sewing and binding. One went off to Noah's penpal. Two more await their final assembly. I've photographed and scanned some artwork for this edition of the newsletter. Check the front and back pages.

Great Reading

My reading aloud to the children continues to be a really important part of our daily routine. Here are some terrific books we've enjoyed lately:

The Thief Lord and Inkheart by Cornelia Funke. Sophisticated fantasy in a contemporary context. Very well-written and not at all formulaic.

The Bronze Bow by Elizabeth George Speare. Historical fiction from Galilee in the time of Jesus. Really compelling characterization of the protagonist and a very enlightening historical setting.

Why Beethoven Threw the Stew by Stephen Isserlis. Biographical depictions of six great composers, poignant, funny and informative.

The Golden Goblet by Eloise Jarvis McGraw. Historical fiction, this time set in ancient Egypt. A great mystery story, and an interesting depiction of the culture of this time period.

Eragon by Christopher Paolini. This is pure fantasy: a boy discovers he's destined to become a dragon rider. Paolini was a teen homeschooler when he wrote the book. Our self-published first edition is apparently worth \$1000!

Homeschool Study Results

The results of the study of homeschooling we took part in last spring have been released. From the *Globe&Mail*:

"[the researcher] has found that home schoolers are thriving, with the vast majority performing well above the Canadian norm among all grade levels in reading, writing and mathematics. "Education delivered in an institutional setting doesn't tap into all of what it takes to shape a kid," she said. "We give them the gift of time. We give them the gift of space."

Music Updates

Things are just ticking along in the music department. Sophie has made big improvements in her posture and bow direction on the violin. She is currently polishing up *Perpetual Motion* in Book 1. She's still enthusiastically participating in group class, playing solos and joining in on group performances. She's decided she's ready to enroll in a summer institute, which will be her first experience with lessons outside the family. She's also recently doing a little pre-piano-lesson work out of some beginner books and seems to have a real knack for note-reading, so much so that after a little bit of an introduction from me, she's been able to work ahead in the book quite independently and teach herself new things.

Noah is comfortably working in Royal Conservatory Piano Grade 1. His amazing ability to hear patterns and learn kinesthetic skills more than compensate for his reluctance in the sight-reading department. On violin he is polishing up *Gavotte* from 'Mignon', working on note-reading, early shifting and getting ready for some vibrato work. He will be enrolling at our local music summer school on piano and at a Suzuki Institute in Washington State on violin, where he'll get his first real orchestral experience.

Erin is gradually taking more responsibility for her violin and piano work. She's moved into Book 7 and the Bach a minor Concerto on violin, and is finding her new Grade 6 Royal Conservatory repertoire on piano quite easy to master. She'll be performing the three movements of the Haydn Concertino in C for piano and orchestra with the community orchestra next month. She'll be doing the same summer roster as Noah, and has chosen to add a chamber music option on violin to both her summer program weeks.

Grazing on Learning

Although there are interests that the kids lock onto for months or years on end, there are also lots of interests wax and wane in this family. It's often hard to predict which sparks will become flames. Recently Erin has been interested in Latin, and has been reading *Minimus*, an introductory Latin book for kids. Noah is very much into Greek mythology and is enjoying the fact that he can now read reference books on the subject. *Carcassone*, a medieval tiled map strategy game, has enjoyed some popularity. Cross-country skiing received considerable enthusiasm from time to time in the winter. Prehistoric beasts, world geography, statistics, the human body, medieval chivalry, the Great Depression, French, and countless other areas have been encountered, questioned, read about or otherwise explored.

Carschooling

While we do our best to stay focused around home and local activities, the reality is that our weeks include at least one round-trip to Nelson, and often two, and there are occasional longer forays elsewhere too. We spend a lot of time in our minivan. It's nice when we can manage to make the travel time not completely wasted.

The Suzuki recordings are sometimes on. We often eat lunch in the van so that what would otherwise be lunch time in Nelson can be spent on more productive activities. Sometimes the kids read or draw, but that's not always terribly enjoyable on our winding, mountainous roads.

Although with the kids and their carseats scattered out over the two rows of rear seats, casual conversation can be a challenge, we often play games with words and numbers. Riddles and other guessing games are always fun. A recent fun invention has been a game of "Roots" where someone chooses a Greek or Latin root and we all try to think of words that are derived from that root.

Our new van stereo plays both regular CD's and the MP3 variety. So we listen to music, or to the radio occasionally, and our Boomerang Audiomagazine CD's are popular and educational entertainment. But now we can download audiobooks, burn them onto CD's in the highly compressed MP3 format, and listen to up to 10 hours of reading aloud from a single CD. We've got a subscription at an internet service called Audible.com which allows us 2 book downloads a month. We're currently enjoying Phillip Pullman's "His Dark Materials" trilogy (32 hours of full-cast dramatic reading). Audible® carries a huge selection of books for both children and adults, enough to keep us going for a long time.



Noah painted this Still Life using acrylics at art class. It's a large painting, about 14"x20" and he put plenty of thought and preparation into it.



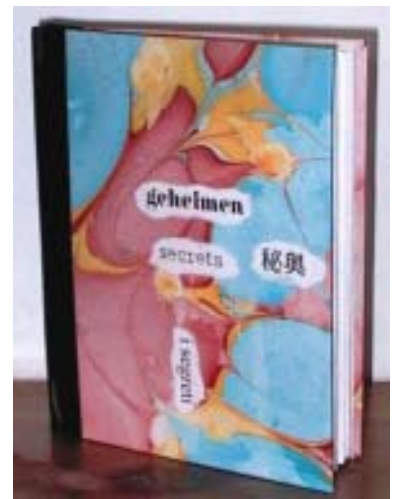
Sophie's watercolour paintings have become representational lately. This is a beach scene, with different shades of blue for water and sky.

Musette Moose

When I last wrote, our stuffed moose had visited homeschooling Suzuki families in Canada, the US and Central America and had just arrived back in Ottawa. Since then she has hopped across the pond and spent time with a Suzuki family in Manchester, England, and then headed up to Edinburgh Scotland. Her next stop will be Iceland, the land of fire and ice, in April, and then she'll be heading to Italy and on to Australia and New Zealand before returning home to New Denver, likely by fall. The map below shows her travel route.



A photo of a journal made using Noah's marbled paper.



Spring?

There's still plenty of snow on the ground here, but we're thinking of spring. We've got big gardening plans, have little pots of peppers germinating on windowsills, seed orders in the mail, and Sophie and I have begun a gardening journal. I hope to get a gardening club for children started in our area in the next year or so. In the meantime we'll concentrate our efforts on the home front.