

Conquering "The Fearsome Monster"

-by Maxine McLellan of JOY Center of Learning

There is no getting around it -- February has impacted many of us. Perhaps you are feeling it too! Around our home FEBRUARY used to be the month when Mom (that is me) went berserk and my very sanity was questioned! For our first five FEBRUARYS in home schooling I questioned my sanity, my ability to educate even a dog - let alone my children, and my wisdom. Be it understood that I reconfirmed my complete and total failure as a mother! If remember correctly, my usual tirade went something like: "Let's put them back in school, any school will do as ANYBODY can do a better job than me - I am a failure as a mother, wife, homemaker, housekeeper ..." Something HAD TO CHANGE!

In some years "February" started the last week of January and ended sometime in March! I realized at last that I was focussing on the negatives and could not see ANY positives during those dreary winter weeks. Preparations to avoid the inevitable collision with "The Month" (or was that "The FEARSOME Monster?") had to be planned well in advance and carefully executed. God gave me a plan. It is quite simple really and has worked beautifully for us during many "FEARSOME Monster months!"

The plan in a word: REFOCUS. The plan in its parts: Regroup, Recuperate, Reorganise, Re-Assess, Re-energise. This plan is a family affair at each step from the youngest to the oldest. Refocusing requires taking the focus off the negative and onto the positive in definite, calculated steps beginning with regrouping.

First, cancel all academic studies for the children for the entire month of February (longer if necessary). That is right, put the books away. The exception to this rule is for children with learning disabilities or those who tend to forget easily. These children need about 15 minutes per day to drill on basic math concepts and perhaps 15 on organised grammar/reading. Having been in the forest so long we cannot see the trees, it is important to get into a clearing to regroup as a family (much like having a prearranged meeting place away from your burning home should fire strike!). In the "clearing" rest, sleep, read God's Word, relax, play, and recuperate from long months of intensive study. Recuperating takes a week or more and then it's on to the reorganising step of the plan.

February can be renewal month, instead of "let's get Mom to an asylum month." After a time of recuperating you are ready to begin renewing and reorganising your home with spring cleaning. That is right, Spring cleaning in the dead of winter! Physical work is the best cure for most cases of temporary insanity, and all boredom. We personally clean, wax, polish, sort, file, organise family pictures, bring out artificial spring flower arrangements, clean the basement, and prepare for a big yard sale in May or June. While working we sing and have lots of fun. Get everyone involved, including toddlers and dad. Use this time to teach valuable life skills. Getting the cobwebs out of the corners of the house and the clutter out of the closets has a way of clearing the cobwebs, clutter and insanity from the mind!

Towards the end of your reorganising activities, turn to refocusing as you reassess your home education. This involves reconfirming and recommitting to your God-given call to home educate your children. Look at what has worked, what needs changing, and make new plans and possibly new schedules. After reassessment, you are ready to face the rest of the school year re-energised. In our family we begin our academic pursuits by refreshing our communication skills. This is done through letters sent to family and friends, thanking them for all they have done for us and mean to us. In encouraging others, we ourselves are encouraged. During the final days of our refocusing we also spend time doing something exciting and totally different from our regular day-to-day studies.

In the years we have followed this plan we have never failed to meet our academic goals because with renewed energy we surged ahead after our refocusing efforts. Perhaps your family should rename your "February" from "The FEARSOME Monster" to "Renewal Month." We are certainly glad we did!

For more information on home education and home schooling contact Maxine at 519-925-9721 or mail@joycenter.on.ca

This article originally appeared in the OCHEC Winter 2001 newsletter.

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