

Renewal

by Maxine McLellan

In late August 2001, I purchased an old, ugly, seven drawer desk for \$12.50 with the idea of painting it for by September. Little did I know the lessons in flexibility I would learn that could be applied to my educating tasks.

Preparation Plans: My family didn't like the cream coloured paint I had on hand (Plan A), so, Plan B was expose the wood grain. Not wanting to spend any money on this project, I tried to strip the layers of brown paint with old paint stripper. After many hours of almost gagging, using stripper that didn't work like the can said it should, I still had half way to go and no more stripper. Plan C: my friend Ben Brown lent me his old power sander. It worked great until it broke! Plan D: hand sanding. About now I was exhausted and ready to put ANY paint over that thing. This was confirmed when I accidentally ran a piece of wood 3/16" X 1/2" long under the entire length of my thumb nail. (It took a full months for my injured thumb nail to get back to normal.) Finally, the bare wood was exposed. I knew it be worth it all, even though "nay sayers" and pain tried to discourage me!

Refinishing Plan A: still in the spirit of not wanting to spend any money, I used a year- old can of urethane in the garage. It went on fine, but it wouldn't dry. Two days later Ben told me I had to scrape the gummy all off! Back to preparations Plan E - scraping. After a couple of days of hard scraping I could see I had weeks to go. Plan F: With Ben's now repaired sander, I made some headway until the sander sent up smoke of great distress which seemed to mimic my internal stress! On to Plan G: Ben suggested a certain brand of stripper to try and WOW! it worked! The final sanding with NEW sandpaper worked with no splinters. On to Refinishing Plan B which worked wonderfully! Ben insisted that I use NEW urethane and warned NOT to apply it to the desk in full sunshine as I had originally done! A little knowledge education goes a long way to saving time, I found. Our new/old pine desk is now a pretty, natural honey colour, is functional, and the drawers all work (the interior of the drawers is another story for another day!). All this is to say that when educating children at home, we can get worn out, run into bad days or months, lose sight of our goals and our joy, and be ready to junk the whole idea of educating at home! We may need to take several steps to ensure our final success and to gain a renewed enthusiasm for the task God has given us.

1. **Assess your family goals and keep them in focus.** Are they realistic? My first goal had been to paint, but as I got into the project I could envision a beautiful desk, even though my family was when they looked at what I had dragged home. My new goal was to bring out the original beauty had been covered by layers of paint. Labouring intensively, I sanded out deep pencil markings and filled major gouges with wood filler I made creatively from glue and sawdust. My desk is now uniquely beautiful, complete with its little imperfections that add to its and charm. It takes a long time to shape your children and bring out their true beauty with their unique characteristics. Fine craftsmanship takes time, so take it!
2. **Assess your tools and equipment.** Don't try to get by on used or free curriculum materials. That used desk was a terrific find but I needed new, good quality sandpaper, urethane and stripper, not the supplies which caused much pain and suffering! Perhaps it is time to take a new approach or to learn how effectively use the terrific tools you already have.
3. **Evaluate** the amount of parent preparation and teaching time required for a particular program resource. Can you really handle it? Do you just need to allow more time? My desk took much more time than expected to refinish. I failed to use the time management rule: estimated time to complete times a factor of 3 or more equals real time for completion! My panic to get done on time caused me to make errors in judgement, and to end up with a plank in my thumb, an aching back, and a short temper. Are you frustrated because your child did not finish their grade work on time? Don't lose your joy and just let the children finish in their own timing.
4. **Be flexible.** It took me many different plans or approaches to prepare the desk and to finalise it. This also has been my experience in over seventeen years of educating children at home.

5. **Be humble.** Ask others for ideas, advice, or help, if necessary. What has been working for friends? What do your children think should be changed or improved upon?
6. **Step back and view your progress.** Look at where you started and where you are now. Even a bit of progress is cause for encouragement and rejoicing.
7. **Take pride** in your high calling as a craftsman who is shaping and finishing God's children entrusted to you. Remember also that as the craftsman shapes and finishes a project, so are they themselves and they are finished into the gem God wants them to be, if they are open and willing. I like to think of the rewards of Phil. 4:13-14 in "forgetting those things that are behind", (the frustration and pain of teaching children and ourselves at home), and "reaching forth unto those things which before", (Godly children and parents prepared to be ambassadors for the King of Kings), as I "press the mark for the prize." The prize is to hear the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant", and to hear scores of children around the Throne, each rising up to call their mother and father blessed. It will be worth it all!

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