

BOOK REVIEW: WILD DAYS: CREATING DISCOVERY JOURNALS

(by Karen Skidmore Rackliffe, 2000; 118pp; ISBN 1-57636-073-3)

This is an easy-to-read, inspiring book which encourages us to put our books and busy-ness aside at regular intervals to take time to drink in the abundant life Christians were promised—and to learn about this wonderful world at the same time!

As a sick child, Karen was given the advice to ‘spend time every day watching the clouds. Watch them move and spin. Look for animals hidden in their curls. Look for castles and dream. Dream. You can find your dreams in the clouds.’

Now, Karen is , ‘a wife, a (home-schooling) mother of seven, a daughter, a church member, a friend, a volunteer, a teacher, a house-keeper...’. She says ‘I am so many things that I begin to lose who I am. Lists suck away at my soul. Yet, the lists become longer. I rush about frantically, like a wild thing, trapped. But the trap is of my own making. I want to be all of those things. I just need a little space to remember why I have chosen them. I need a window and a breath of sea air. I need a door to go out, so I can come back in again’.

This book describes the how and why of keeping what Karen calls ‘Discovery Journals’. ‘Journals are a place to remember thoughts, ideas, images, dreams, events, developments, musings and hopes. Discoveries are flashes of thought that make the world seem somehow brighter, more beautiful, interesting or bizarre. A discovery journal places moments of insight together, page upon page, building connections between seasons and years. It is a record of days, a bringing together of scattered experience into a meaningful whole.’

‘A Discovery Journal can be a wonderful teaching tool for the individual. It is our interpretation of our own experience. By using the skills of writing, drawing, observing, analysing, imagining, graphing, and recording we expand our understanding of the world and ourselves. Likewise, these valuable skills can be taught to our children.’

This offers an opportunity for each member of the family to participate in an activity at their own level—there is no ‘right’ answer, but rather the process of observing, recording and reflecting on how and why each detail fits into the bigger picture (of life). Karen encourages adults to keep their own journals too—after all, example is everything! The lack of drawing skills should NOT be an excuse—how often do we tell our children that ‘practice makes perfect’. Some may prefer to record their impressions in words, even narrated to a parent who transcribes them—it does not need to be a forced exercise—enthusiasm is contagious!

A journal has the advantage of keeping the (many) illustrations children produce in a sequence for them so they can reflect on their improvements as well as remember those special days when the family marvelled at God’s world together.

Karen offers some practical suggestions on equipment, venues, field studies, handicrafts, and embellishing the pages with their own or another’s prose or poetry. This can also be an opportunity to become familiar with scientific nomenclature (names) and label various parts of illustrated fauna or flora. She includes examples from her family’s journals and provides a list of published journals.

I lent this book to a friend of mine who then purchased small watercolour paint sets and appropriate journals for each of her young children. She glowed as she reported their family day out at Christmas, when each child (even the youngest who is less than two) sat absorbed by a cool river and recorded in colour the beauty of the moment—a beautiful family memory recorded in mind and on paper for each one present.