

Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Working Together: Teachers and Parents

Perspectives

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Statement of Purpose

Perspectives in Covenant Education is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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Perspectives in Covenant Education will publish any article written by a teacher, parent, or friend of Protestant Reformed education, provided the article is in harmony with the stated purpose of the magazine. The journal will publish articles whether theoretical or practical. All manuscripts must be signed and all authors are solely responsible for the contents of their articles.

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Much More than Story Time: A Review of *Little White Farm House in Iowa*

Tom Bergman

I take this opportunity to introduce you to a recent book release that may have slipped under the radar. The book is *Little White Farm House in Iowa: A Fictionalized Biography of Katherine Vastenhout*, by Carol Brands. While neither the author nor the book is likely to take the literary world by storm, this little gem deserves the spotlight for a moment.

The book is Katherine Vastenhout's story, written in collaboration with Carol Brands, Katherine's caregiver at Edgebrook Care Center. *Little White Farm House in Iowa* is the first of three books, one for each of Katherine's childhood homes. The story amounts to a collection of childhood memories from 1930 to 1940—as close as possible to the actual events—with narrative added in places. An appendix by Brands specifies which events are accurate as told—a surprisingly long list! I appreciated Brands' very candid manner of sharing what was real and what had to be supplemented.

I genuinely loved reading *Little White Farm House in Iowa*. The stories are very interesting and touching to me personally, to me as a Reformed Christian, to me as a person of Dutch lineage, to me as a parent, to me as a husband, to me as an adult looking back on childhood, to me as a teacher, and to me as someone who enjoys reading about the past.

Little White Farm House in Iowa deserves the spotlight for more than merely striking my fancy. It is a valuable addition to our home and school libraries. It is well written. It is close to home. It is good biography. It is unadulterated Christian literature.

Katherine and Carol combine for good story-telling. Students in our schools can not only enjoy the good stories, but they can also take advice on how to publish a book. I would guess that many of us were very serious about writing

our first book around age six or seven—perhaps we even started. But *Little White Farm House in Iowa* goes a long way toward demonstrating the actual requirements of having a story to tell, writing it down, and getting it published. Let the book itself (the story) and its mere existence (how it came into being) be lessons for our aspiring writers. This book required a tremendous amount of life experience and memories. As Brands herself acknowledges, this 183-page book consumed far more than a couple of story sessions and half of a ream of paper. Writing requires revisions, revisions, and more revisions. Then, too, our students would do well to realize that countless hours and countless pages do not magically make a book, only a manuscript. The journey from manuscript to book takes money and the consent of a publisher. Brands used Trafford Publishing, a company specializing in independent publishing. Visit Trafford’s website for a look at what they can offer.

Little White Farm House in Iowa also hits close to home. It is an excellent choice for us and our young readers because we can relate to the people of the story. Many of us have ancestors who were farmers. Many of us have grown up in Reformed, Christian churches and homes. Many of us consider ourselves Dutch, to some degree or another. And all of us either are or have been children. Childhood can be such a gold mine of fascinating stories. The fact that *Little White Farm House in Iowa* targets us is part of what makes it a great choice for our libraries. You and your young readers will be drawn to it. Brands wrote the book thinking it might be for fourth grade or sixth grade or higher, yet realizing that it would be a book for the whole family to enjoy. I enjoyed it myself, and I would just as readily read it with a second grader.

I am a sucker for good biography. By “good biography” I do not refer to the distilled, basic sketches of a famous person’s most significant actions. By “good biography” I mean a story that includes the life and times of the subject. *Little White Farm House in Iowa* is not merely a rough description of Katherine. It is about Katherine, Katherine’s family, Katherine’s



farmhouse, Katherine's school, Katherine's Iowa, Katherine's 1930s, Katherine's world, and Katherine's God. It makes connections from Katherine to the dust bowl, to Sears Roebuck catalogs, to threshing machines, to whooping cough, to Fords, to plow horses, to the Depression, to kitchen stoves, to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to sewing, plumbing, and weather. *Little White Farm House in Iowa* is about life, real life—and it is highly informative besides.

Most importantly, Vastenhout and Brands collaborate for a story about a Christian girl and her family and write it in a Christian manner. This is no sappy, quasi-Christian literature; this is the real deal. In the story itself, the father is the head of the home and a spiritual leader who makes sure that his family sees God's hand in all things, whether in prosperity or in adversity. The mother, if she were merely fictional, would make an excellent character for young women to admire. The fact that Katherine's mother is a real person in a real biography makes her even more admirable as a humble-yet-noble, God-fearing woman. Even Brands' presentation of the biographical accounts are polite and wholesome; she's not writing racy material to appeal to the masses and to sell millions of copies. Her presentation is spiritually oriented and spiritually sound; Brands is not trying to pen a hot new story sprinkled with a few shallow Christianisms. On the literary scene, in its genre, *Little White Farm House in Iowa* is the proverbial diamond in the rough.

I found the book at Reformed Book Outlet in Hudsonville, Michigan, available for around \$11 or \$12, if I remember correctly—well-priced and a good value. If you are not in my area, start asking around for the book, look up one of Carol's relatives, ask me for her contact information, or visit www.trafford.com. (I found the Trafford Publishing site much more helpful when I entered the author's name rather than the book title.)

As soon as I get an opportunity, I am going to see that the library at Heritage Christian School, where my children are enrolled, has several copies of this book. Any teachers who use Laura Ingalls Wilder's book in the classroom may find good classroom use for *Little White Farm House in Iowa*, too. Even high school history teachers could add it to a reading list.

Even though my wife and I don't see eye to eye on the worth and merit of books like *Deerslayer* and *Ivanhoe*, we do agree that *Little White Farm House in Iowa* is a worthwhile and wholesome addition to our school libraries and classrooms. It is not a game-changer; it won't transform the way you teach. But, it is an important book that you ought not miss.

Adults Can Help

Erik Lubbers

“How can I help my child perform better in his content area classes at school?”

Is this a question you have been asked as a teacher...or perhaps even a question you have asked yourself as a parent? If so, this teacher has four ideas. Please, take what you find helpful; leave the rest.

First of all, to parents with children not yet in school or in elementary grades, I strongly recommend that you **read to your children**. This nightly reading will not only be enjoyable to you and your children in the moment, but will also prove hugely beneficial later in your children’s school lives. The reading habit will take hold and, long after you stop reading to them (they won’t *need* you to, any longer, you see), their love of reading will prove foundational to academic success. Many classes demand strong reading comprehension; the reading you do with your children will energize this comprehension. Personal experience and anecdotes shared by others (from those who chose to read to their kids as well as from those who did not) have convinced me that reading to our children is one of the best ways to prepare them to do well in school.

Second, as our children get older they encounter electronics (the use of electricity to communicate). A PRTI exercise at a winter meeting several years ago asked our teachers to list things they would recommend to parents, things the teachers thought would help junior high children perform better in school. In that list was “**Limit electronic obsessions.**” Yes, electronic devices¹ can function well as “entertainment,” limiting the demands that children place on us. The cost of this electronic involvement may be high, however, since these devices limit the verbal interactions our children *need* to have with us. The resulting conversational paucity is detrimental to our children. Without talking with us, children

1 I’m thinking about television and radio, of course, but also of computers, phones, and other “smart” devices.

are not able to learn the verbal and reasoning skills they need in order to do well in school. I have observed that children using electronics are often removed from relationships with adults. We have only a brief window in which to talk with them; then we fly apart. Such electronic obsessions also consume after-school study time and can lower creativity. A recent *Newsweek* article states, “Creativity arises from seeing connections others miss, so it makes sense that increasing the activity in white matter by letting the brain rest in default mode supports creativity. So put away the BlackBerry and let your brain idle.”²

Third, we can help our student-children by directing them in their nightly studies. How do we think and talk about these studies? The questions we ask our children concerning their studies often reveal a most unhelpful mindset. Think only of this oldie-but-goodie: “Do you have any homework?” We parents nearly always ask this question rhetorically, hoping for a “yes.” Often, however, the student says “no.” Unless we teach them differently, students may truly believe that studies at home are something a teacher assigns them. This core belief—If the teacher didn’t tell me to study, I have a night off—will lead the student to respond to the parental question with a “no-homework-for-me” answer based on a believable inner conviction.

A more helpful view of homework (by the student, parent and teacher) is that of nightly work marked by regularity and recurrence. If we are able to frame a student’s work away from school as such we will help him. He will, for example, learn to view tests not as something crammed for the night before, but as assessments of his cumulative work ethic. We will teach him to plan for these assessments; to prepare for them through slow and steady work *each* night and *every* night over a two-week period. Treated as such, “night before” tears, blame, drama, and the oft-played game of emotional hot-potato will be dramatically reduced. Let’s do ourselves and our students a favor and ***stop asking the question, “Do you have any homework?”***

Instead, for better results, we might ask, “What is your plan to review for the upcoming tests in math, history, science, and English?” or even, “Your mother and I want a better return on our investment in your education than we have been receiving. God has put us in charge of teaching you to cultivate the talents He has given you. You and I need to develop and implement a study plan by which you will raise your performance in school.” By asking these kinds of open-

2 Sharon Begley, “Buff Your Brain” *Newsweek*. January 9, 2012.

ended questions and beginning these types of conversations we create a situation where our students must think about (and can begin to share with us) what *they* need to do. This strategy reduces the opportunity for one-word answers which result in an end to the conversation or the start of an argument. I have had conferences with parents of children (performing far below both their own abilities and their parents' desires) who have told me with shrugged shoulders and a what-can-I-do helplessness that, "I ask my child if he has any homework but he says that he doesn't." Of course our children say "I don't" and "no"; these answers have been time-proven to end painful questions and parental pushes for personal growth! Let's end our complicity in the child's denial and work from a solid benchmark—the grades our children's report cards reveal. These six-week trends are a much better assessment of our student's work ethic than any words.

If your child can, at this point, take ownership for his studies, he will let you know that, whether an adult daily reminds him or not; ***it is the job of the student to actively study and read in his content area classes each night.*** If he can't own his responsibility, he will most likely initiate some form of denial. He could, for example, *blame* the teacher, *excuse* himself, try to *dodge* the subject (by crying or bringing up a red herring), *minimize* the seriousness of his school performance, or even *attack*. He may try almost *anything* to take the focus off himself! Do these examples sound familiar?

As for the student's job of nightly studies, please note the adverb "actively" modifying "study" above. As a teacher, it is a frustrating experience to be told by parents that their child is "studying hard" but is not getting the results (usually on a test or report card) desired. "Studying hard" is a vacuous term. For some it may mean that they or their child worked to prepare for one test one night—the night before. For others it might mean that the child went to his room alone and was "out of the parents' hair" for a time. "Studying hard" could also be a child with the book open and his mind a million miles away, even while you are in the same room with him.

You could try this, instead: Have the child clearly define his plan for active study (ask him to write it out) and have him track (perhaps on a chart posted on the fridge) how much time and with what techniques he studies each evening. I recommend ***10–20 minutes of active study every night in each subject for junior high students.***³ Most junior high teachers teach their students a myriad of

3 By high school they should be up to 45–60 minutes per subject; by college, two hours

studying techniques that would help them.⁴ However, if the child does not follow these directions, or if the child studies sporadically, he will not achieve consistent results. This may mean that he will achieve lower grades than he and his parents might want. Will he accept responsibility...or blame someone else? (Quite often, “blame someone else” wins out.) This list of what the child has been doing—when communicated in a calm manner to a teacher—will allow informed assessment. Then everyone can discuss what to try as an alternative. Without such a list, typically, enabling and blaming dominate the discussion. Then, all who are involved become emotionally reactive, confusing the boundaries of adults and children, students and teachers.

Finally, we come to the darkest part of studies at home—emotions. We humans are not naturally good at thinking, so studying (a pursuit that involves thinking) is a painful process. Of course, we want to escape this pain. The danger here is that we equate the pain our students experience as they study (and studying hurts!) with harm.⁵ As parents, we want to stop the pain the child is experiencing. We believe this is what “good parents” do. The emotionally distressed child knows this. He is frustrated. That child attempts to hand off his frustration and we parents pick up his emotions. The child’s feelings, however, are not ours. When we take them, we have confused our boundaries with his boundaries. They

for each one hour in class.

4 Techniques such as the following: working on each subject for 10–20 minutes per night, studying with a positive attitude, making notes while reading, rewriting teacher notes (everything written on the board or spoken during class), drawing tables and other graphic organizers to help see relationships, making note cards and reviewing them in order to memorize key terms (while adding new information as studies progress), reviewing the worksheets completed in class at least three times (many students merely store them and forget them), researching unknown terms, looking up unknown words in the dictionary, reading and re-reading the text, stating the Chapter Title and the Major section titles (usually four per chapter) from memory, regularly over-viewing the whole chapter, learning all the boldfaced terms and concepts, and changing section headings into questions in order to answer them (all the while making sure electronic devices in the environment are turned off.)

5 Here’s an analogy to show the difference between hurt and harm. When you eat candy it does not hurt you; it tastes sweet and pleasant. However, this can harm your teeth and lead to tooth decay. Then, you may have to go to the dentist. This visit may hurt you; since the process of filling a cavity is painful. However, this does not harm you; because it repairs the damage caused by eating sweets.

are the child's emotions; he needs to experience them.

As we parents pick up our child's anxiety, anger, or other strong emotions, we cease to think clearly. Aggravating newly-acquired emotions like anxiety, confusion, or frustration is the fact that we parents were not in class. We didn't have opportunity to receive the teaching, overview, practice, class work, and suggestions given by the teacher. Of course, our children are quite good at handing off their emotions; they know to whom (and at just what time) to give them. The inappropriately transferred emotions are now a problem which can build to a critical mass; from the child...to us...and perhaps the entire family. At this point an explosion may be imminent. It doesn't have to be this way.

Although we should not pick up our child's feelings, we do need to help our children learn to deal with them. We can do this by **containing our child's emotions**.⁶ Containing is better for our child than either picking up his emotions or blaming others for them. Containing is a technique which helps our children understand and process what they are feeling. Three major parts of the containing process are soothing, affirming (or validating), and structuring. Although some parents are able to contain, many of us cannot consciously and regularly do this. Unaware of what is going on, we blindly pick up the child's emotions. We do not need to. Our children will benefit from our practice of containing them as they experience their emotions. (We will, too.) What follows is an example of the technique:

“Yes, Tom, I'm listening to you [soothing].” “That math problem sure looks hard: I can see why that is frustrating [affirming].” [You listen to Tom some more.] “It had to be hard when you saw that the teacher couldn't take extra time with you today [more affirming].” [After you listen to the child pour out his heart some more], “Would you like me to try to help you?” “No?” “OK, maybe we can take a break from math for a few minutes and...[structuring].”

The difficulty of containing our children's painful emotions can be exacerbated when we parents have other things (finances, relationships, jobs...life?) to deal with. However, we will find containing to be a better method for dealing with student-stress than picking up the child's emotion and trying to feel for him. So

⁶ For any parents who would like to know more about the technique of containing their children's emotions, please contact me (eriklubbers@comcast.net) and I'll give you information that will explain it in more detail.

often, when we do this we get mad and act out. We also deprive our children of an opportunity to grow up. Emotions are God-given tools which are difficult (but not impossible) to understand and use. We need to continue to talk about them with our children. We need to let them experience their feelings as we teach them how to handle them.

When we fail to contain our children's emotions we place ourselves in a precarious situation. Often, after we have picked up their emotions, we feel frustrated. This frustration causes us to inappropriately "explode" on a spouse, the child, or the teacher. Then, we are unable to "be angry [or express other strong emotions] and sin not." Such inappropriate reactions reveal more about us than they benefit our child. And often, when we as parents allow ourselves to become emotionally triggered we do things for which we later must apologize and make amends. Appropriate parental *containing* along with regular nightly study by the student can help keep everyone's emotions at a more reasonable level.

We can help our children perform better in school by reading to our younger children and by encouraging their reading; by limiting the time we allow them to spend on electronic devices; by changing the question, "Do you have homework?" to more open-ended questions, helping our students to actively study and read each night, and implementing study techniques and tracking if necessary; and by identifying their emotional difficulties, resisting the urge to feel for them, and heading off their attempts at blame and denial through the technique of containing.

Parental Grievances

Jay Kalsbeek

In all my years as a Protestant Reformed school teacher I have occasionally been disappointed in one area of my teaching experience. That is the area of parental grievances. I have seen firsthand the abuse or ignorance regarding this issue. That is why most Protestant Reformed schools have policies guiding and directing this important avenue of communication among parents, teachers, administrator, and the school board. The proper steps to follow are outlined and mandated as the proper way to handle concerns, difficulties, and problems that will and do arise even in a Christian school. Yet, I have seen these policies ignored or bypassed.

The policies follow one basic pattern and that is to take the concern, difficulty, or problem to the teacher, *preferably in person*, to resolve the issue. If this does not resolve the issue then the next step is to inform the teacher of the intent to go to the administrator. The matter is then brought to the attention of the administrator, *preferably in person*, again for the purpose of resolving the issue. If this step does not resolve the issue, the administrator is informed by the concerned parent that he will be taking up the matter with the school board.

So why are we given the policy of “teacher first”? Why not go directly to the school board and get the matter resolved? After all, the school board is the final authority.

Three things come to mind when looking at this process of teacher first. The first thing is the principle *in loco parentis*. A teacher stands in the place of the parent. This idea is expounded in many books by many authors.

When a parent sends a child to the school, that parent is asking the teacher to stand in his place, to act *in loco parentis*.¹

It is an integral part of the covenantal conception of school to view the

1 Norman DeJong, *Education in the Truth*, 2003. P&R Publishing Co., 137.

teacher as standing in the place of the parent...this defines the authority of the teacher with regard to the students: it is nothing less than the authority of the parent...²

This is a daunting thing for a teacher. The values and morals of the teacher inevitably are on display. The teacher's love for and discipline of the students are the same as the parents. Any concerns of a parent should go directly to the one who stands in their place. And teachers need to be open and receptive to parents who come to them with concerns.

A second thing that comes to mind is the issue of how we deal with the brother. This process is outlined in Matthew 18:15, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." This is the example given by Christ of how to deal in love with one another, and therefore dealing in love for the resolution of conflict between teacher and parent starts with communication at that level. Conflict resolution is not done in the way of bypassing the teacher.

The guideline for parental grievances is based upon the love we have for each other in Christ and the love for the covenant children placed in our care. And isn't our first priority the resolution of that concern or difficulty? An administrator should never have to deal with a parental grievance. Teachers and parents, as members of the same body of Christ, need to direct all efforts at sorting out their differences in humility. Unfortunately, we all have the old man of sin within us and we maintain our foolish pride.

The third thing is that we must always act in decency and good order. I Corinthians 14:40 says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." This means going to our teachers first because that is orderly. They are first in front of our children and have such a great impact in their young lives. It is also decent that teachers hear the complaint first as they are presumably the cause of that complaint. The way to find a solution is to go to them, not complain about them to someone else.

What kind of order is there when a parent brings a grievance to the administrator or the school board? Where is the decency toward the brother when a complaint against a teacher is made public to the school board? Is this walking in love one with another?

2 David J. Engelsma. *Reformed Education*, 2000. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 62.

I am not only an administrator; I am also a teacher. I try to make sure that the line of communication between myself and the parents is always open. But I know I am a sinner, in need of the Savior, and I also know the barriers that sin can create. No one likes to have his weaknesses pointed out or his mistakes magnified. Do I like having real or imagined concerns about myself brought to my attention? Of course not! Therein is my sinful pride. Do I respond appropriately when I am brought before my problems? Ruefully and with shamed face I must confess “sometimes no.” Is that an excuse not to come to me with parental concerns? Absolutely not. Matthew 18:15b says, “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained a brother.”

There is not an exception to Matthew 18. Matthew 18 does not add that if someone is difficult to approach then by all means go to someone else about him. There is not a phrase that states, “Go, but only if he is willing to repent.” I like to apply this to the brotherly love we show each other in our communication of parent and teacher. It is not just a matter of going to the teacher first—but only if you feel comfortable with that teacher. Maybe you feel more comfortable with your administrator and very uncomfortable with the teacher. That is no excuse.

Or, maybe you feel that the teacher does not listen anyway and will only scoff at or ignore your concerns. This then is an issue of trust. Perhaps there is a lack of trust which certainly makes it easier to bypass the teacher altogether. But don't. Your lack of trust should not lead to your lack of decency and good order. A lack of trust is not a stipulation in Matthew 18 so that we may detour around the brother. All this does is to foster bad feelings and a further closing down of communication.

As a teacher I try very hard to make myself available and approachable. I cannot speak for every teacher but I would generalize and say this is true with most teachers whether at the grade school or high school level. We all realize the human tendency to make mistakes and that we are accountable for our mistakes. Yet that old man of sin is never far away. We need to pray and need parents to pray for us as well. Don't bypass us teachers because we are inherently sinful.

I am not only a teacher; I am a parent. I have had the opportunity to speak with teachers about concerns I have had. “Yes,” you say, “but you are also a colleague and an administrator. As such you are on better terms and/or even in a position of authority.” True, but I speak of the context outside of this when I was neither teacher nor administrator. It is, indeed, very difficult to take a real concern to a teacher. And, if I might add, it is just as difficult as a colleague and

administrator.

I have come to the conclusion that even as the teacher must be humble and must put away pride so must I, as a parent, come in the spirit of love. It must be my desire to work out a solution to the conflict and not to focus upon the teacher and his shortcomings. Philippians 2:3 states, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

I know that it happens that parents go above the teacher to solve some grievance. This goes against every fiber of my being. Rodney King said after his beating by Los Angeles policemen, "Why can't we all just get along." Succinct to say the least, but it does not even begin to cover the life of Christ we have as fellow believers. For us it is more than just "getting along." We must bear one another's burdens and "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).

When parents go beyond the teacher they are neglecting the one they place in their own position. They do not follow the Christian teaching of love as outlined in Matthew 18. They do not follow school policy and act in decency and good order. And how does that show respect for the authority of the teacher, authority that is conferred by the parent, employed by the school board, and bestowed by God?

I have seen in other Protestant Reformed school policies and as stated in LPRCS's rules and regulations to contact the teacher "preferably in person." Go to the brother and speak with him face to face. If the concern is real then an e-mail or phone call is not enough. Now some may argue the phrase "preferably in person" to mean "if I prefer to meet in person," standing, once again, on foolish pride. I see "preferably in person" to mean "it is better to meet in person." In order to bring a concern I would call or e-mail to set up a time to meet face to face. This mode of communication gives the teacher an opportunity to self-evaluate and to prepare to talk openly with a parent about a parent's concern. If the teacher is not prepared he ends up becoming defensive and short. It is far better to meet face to face where civility and manners can be controlled and accusations and anger be tempered with politeness and respect.

Sometimes proper procedure is not followed. Sometimes the teacher is not given the benefit of speaking with parents about their concern. Maybe the teacher has a gruff and taciturn type of personality. Maybe he is unapproachable. Maybe he is emotional and never wrong. There may be a thousand reasons for not going

directly to the teacher. So we bypass him and go directly to the administrator or the school board.

Sometimes this way is easier for the administrator or school board to handle. I know that sometimes it is done out of a desire to help the teacher. The possibilities are myriad. The administrator can stand as a buffer between disgruntled parents and irritable teacher. The scope or magnitude of the concern might appear significant enough to go directly to the school board, or the parent might be a school board member. There may be very real, very legitimate reasons for going beyond the teacher first but if there is a policy in place, it is set as the standard, the canon, the rule, and it should always be followed.

When parents come to me about a teacher (or teachers about a parent), I ask them if they have contacted the teacher (or parent). This is not a cop-out, a shirking of my duty. This is not a method of avoiding difficult situations. This is required of me by the standard, the canon, the rule, the written policy that is put in place governing parental grievances. Go, in love, to the brother and communicate. Let your light shine even if your brother hides his light under a bushel. “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not: charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:4–7).

Even though it sometimes happens that concerns or grievances are brought that inappropriately bypass the correct route, it is more often done correctly. These are the times I never hear about and shouldn't. These are the instances that shows the wisdom of Christ when he says, “Go to the brother in love.” This is proper. I struggle to maintain this approach as parent, teacher, and administrator. So should we all.

Garage Floor Drains

Jim Regnerus

My summer painting days were always fertile ground for meeting interesting people. I remember the rural Rock Valley lady who had a hangup over floor drains in the garage.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. — were native to Iowa. Deciding to build a new home upon their arrival exposed them to working with Sioux County contractors. Sometimes the cultures clashed.

One day as I painted, Mrs. — was lecturing to me about the plumber. “Every day,” she bemoaned, “he asked us whether we wanted a drain in the garage floor. We couldn’t figure out for the life of us why anyone would need a drain in the garage floor. We had never heard of that before where we come from. So finally one day we asked him why anyone would need a drain in the garage floor. And do know what he said?” And by this point she had one hand on her hip and the other hand was wildly gesticulating around. Little specks of froth were starting to form around the edge of her mouth. She took a deep breath as she tried to steady herself for the punch line. “He said..., he said,” she quivered, “he said so you can wash the car on Sunday!”

Void of professional conduct, I nearly fell off my ladder with laughter. Please understand that I try to have great regard for the Sabbath, but the plumber’s obvious tongue-in-cheek poke at our own propensity to being a tad hypocritical cracked me up.

The plumber’s sense of humor was lost on Mrs. — that day. Nevertheless, I have often reflected back on his subtle and accurate surmising of how we sometimes live our lives as Christians.

We try to emphasize Christian living to the students. As a teacher, I often reflect on how the garage floor drain is a bit like teachers and students wrestling with doing schoolwork on Sundays. We could easily get away with it in the privacy of our home—at least from a human point of view. Yet, it’s hard to maintain

a clear conscience with the Lord when our day-to-day work steals time from the day of rest. We must guard that school work yield to God's command that the Sabbath be kept.

Let's work to guard the Sabbath. Teachers must be conscientious to assign reasonable homework loads for the weekend. Students must be stewardly with their time management so that the work isn't put off until Sunday night. School and home—working together for the great cause of honoring the Sabbath.

God's name will be glorified.

Contribution

Listening and Hearing Hoof Beats

Skip Hunter

Editor's note: This thoughtful piece appeared in our Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School newsletter a few years ago. It refers to a school shooting in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania on October 2, 2006. The reminder is always timely and the perspective is very appropriate.

At this time of the year, Christians are encouraged to consider the four horses of Revelation 6. We do this at the end of an old year and the beginning of a new so that we are conscious that we are one year closer to the return of Christ. As a school society, school board, teachers, and students, we also must be listening. In the past few months I think we have heard a few hoof beats.

Earlier this fall I was brought up short at the news of the shooting in a small non-public school in a rural community of Pennsylvania. I could not shake the

feelings of disbelief and concern from within me. Later as I talked to others I was told that they shared those feelings with me. Law enforcement within Lyon County (in northwest Iowa) also became concerned. Our school board became concerned as well. We begin to search for answers to the question what must we do to assure the safety of our covenant children in our school. Both groups quickly came to the conclusion that if it is God's will that it is to happen it will. But we also realized that we have the calling to be vigilant.

In the board notes found elsewhere in this issue of the *News and Views*, you will find mention of a school safety committee, some preliminary recommendations they brought to the board, and the board's approval of those recommendations. We clearly have a concern for our children. These recommendations will cause some inconvenience for the teachers, the students, the parents, and others associated with our school. It is the opinion of not only Lyon County law enforcement but also the safety committee and the board that one of the steps we must take is to make our school secure so that an intruder cannot enter when students are in the classrooms. The combined Lyon-Sioux Special Response Team came to our school and gave us their recommendations to carry out this step. So the board is working at making it easy for teachers to lock their classroom doors when necessary, communicate with each other during the day wherever they may be, and to try to be assured that no intruders can enter. To do this we will need to replace our east door. Now this was something that the board looked into last year. Because of the bathroom project this was put on hold. Now we are looking at it again and including with the process a device or devices to keep those out who should not enter and allow those in who have a right to be there. More details will be forthcoming as the board puts together a proposal for the society.

The board does not take these steps lightly. But they are of a mind that they must do something to ensure as much as is possible the safety of the covenant seed with whom they are entrusted. They are hearing the hoof beats of the red horse. Are the rest of us listening?

Children and Youth Literature

Brenda Dykstra

Caldecott Medal winner (1946)

Once a Mouse...: A Fable Cut in Wood, by Marcia Brown. Recommended ages: 2–10+ years.

A hermit once sat thinking about the concept of big and little. Upon feeling compassion on a little mouse, about to be eaten up by a hungry cat, he uses his magic powers to transform that mouse to a stout cat. His powers continue to transform that little mouse. He starts as a cat, then dog, and even a proud errant tiger to defeat his enemies. But will he be thankful to his magic hermit maker who helped that mouse from “little to big?” What happens when pride enters and “once a mouse” forgets he used to be so very tiny?

Response: The photos of woodcuts demonstrate unique style in this tale. Brown’s other children’s books exhibit excellent artistry as well. Reviewing art, however, is difficult; its true value and varying mediums require interpretation. To me, the red, green, black-and-white pictures succeed in telling a powerful fable of ancient India and make the story meaning clear.

Younger children will appreciate the clear, well-written plot line, especially in its simplicity. And the story really has deeper meaning because, without the hermit creator, the mouse was nothing. Supposedly this tale was a start of a collection as a “mirror for princes” in India to instruct errant sons. How much more aren’t we as God’s dear children, simply specks of dust wallowing in our sins, in need of our heavenly Father? And how much more is the creature meaningless without a large, powerful Lord? This shorter, simpler text could easily explore these thoughts for older readers.

This would be a book worth shelving in the school library and worth exploration by teachers, especially with its artistic wood carvings.

Magic Tree House series, by Mary Pope Osborne; illustrated by Sal Murdocca. Random House, NY; approx. 75 pages ea. Recommended ages: 6–9 years/early chapter readers.

Adventures await for two fun children, the brother-sister duo Jack and Annie. But what makes their adventures so exciting is the magic of a tree house where they meet a special white-haired lady named Morgan who begins the magic. The two children spin around and around and are taken to fun, exciting worlds. They battle dinosaurs, meet ghost queens, tackle pirates, explore rainforests with crocodiles and piranhas, and much more. Other, later novels include magic of Merlin, wizardry, traveling through history, and more. Each novel covers one adventure. Will they return to their normal world or be swept away?

Response: Mixed responses abound from varying angles on these very popular, fun children’s books. As a child reader, the imagination will undoubtedly go on some very enjoyable, exciting rides, while learning about many not-so-well-known topics. Jack and Annie are fun characters to which a child can very well relate. Imaginary journeys for children do encompass and enhance mind development.

From an educator’s standpoint, the stories are fairly well-written. Several silly expletives could be deleted, but the plot line, setting, and development indicate good writing, though not excellent in my judgment.

But I’d encourage parental guidance. Parents must choose if these are appropriate reading for their kids because questionable issues arise. Such issues include wizardry, evolutionism, magic, witches and fairy castles, “prehistoric” eras, and more. New age ideals are present in many as well as good seems to be present in everything and all ideals at times are acceptable.

Little minds soak up the reading and take it for gospel truth on every level. For us, it has opened up doors of opportunity to lead to better knowledge of Christ and a real-world understanding of these specific issues. Our daughter has read over half of them. Her reading level has increased just by exploring these adventures. But on the other hand, if an immature reader can’t grasp that these things aren’t real, or if a parent chooses to neglect that responsibility or doesn’t have time to discuss, foregoing these novels is a better option. A further note: The later novels include far more wizardry, magic spells, and goblins, prehistoric times, and evolutionism than the earlier ones.

The question of appropriate glory to the Savior through any text continues for the astute, Christ-centered parent. May He receive praise in our meek, humble efforts.

Perspectives in Covenant Education

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