

#20 Notebooking

When I was a newlywed, my husband and I were both students at Brigham Young University. And it was my good fortune to be asked to serve on a committee that organized a special meeting for the women with Freda Joan Lee as our special speaker. Her husband was Harold B. Lee who had passed away a few months earlier. Now, I know not all of you are of my faith—so I'll just explain that Harold B. Lee was the president of our church. He was revered as a prophet just as there were prophets in Old Testament days. To be able to meet his wife was a great honor.

It fell on my husband and I to drive to Salt Lake from Provo and pick her up at her home and drive her down to the event, and then take her back home again. So I got to go into her home and spend the day with this wonderful woman in a very close and private way. She shared so many personal experiences and had such profound words of wisdom. I kept meaning to write them down, but I thought, How could I ever forget these things?

But time passed. And I did forget them. All of them. I remember my husband got to wind President Lee's grandfather clock and I remember Sister Lee fell asleep on my shoulder in the car. I remember how I felt when I was near her and how I felt when I was in her home. But the rest is all gone.

Not writing down the things I learned from her is one of the big regrets of my life. And no matter how hard I try to retrieve them from my memory, I simply can't.

I remember a marketing class where we were taught that research shows it takes, on average, seven times for an ad to sink into a consumer. So repetition in marketing is a key component. You can't show an ad once and expect a consumer to run out and buy your product.

The same principle of repetition applies to learning. Our minds are bombarded with tons of information every single day that has to be sifted according to importance. Much of it goes in the garbage pile or we would be hopelessly overloaded. Notebooking is a way to hold on to that which matters the most to us. Emerson "went out early to hunt a thought as a boy might hunt a butterfly, and successful, pinned the prize in his cabinet by entering it into his 'Thought Book'.

So since it will take 7 times for you to hear me, I will say this several times: That which is not written down is easily forgotten. Through books, your children are going to spend time with some of the greatest, noblest, wisest men and women who have ever walked the earth who are going to teach them priceless lessons about life and living. Notebooking is a way for them capture and remember those lessons and experiences so that they're not forgotten.

Knowledge of whole civilizations has vanished where they left no written records. And much of our learning washes away when we don't take the time to write. Third time: That which is not written down is easily forgotten. In fact, the more we write, the more we learn. Very few of us retain much at all of what we read or study. As I've been going through notes of past podcasts and presentations I've done to put these new training classes together, I am astonished at all I have forgotten that I said! One of my biggest frustrations is when I remember reading a story

or an idea and I can't for the life of me remember where I read it. There are a couple of incidents I read about that have been bugging me for months now because I can not find them anywhere. I can't remember what books I read them in. I've been wanting to find them because I can't remember the details. And I kick myself that I didn't record them somewhere where I can find them again.

That's when I knew I had to develop a different system because as I have read more, it has become harder and harder to go back and find what I am looking for. I have filled dozens of notebooks with quotes and ideas from my reading and it has become unruly. Sometimes moms ask if they can just make one notebook—why do there need to be so many? Well, you can. And if that works for you, go for it. I can tell you Thomas Jefferson kept a Commons Book and as far as I can tell, he wrote as he went along. That worked for me for awhile, but I can no longer keep track of things anymore with that. Abraham Lincoln wrote things down on a piece of board with charcoal from the fire. His system worked because he didn't erase what he wrote down until he retained it in his memory. Some people have developed wonderful memories like that. I haven't.

That's why I have created so many different notebooks for myself. It helps me organize my learning.

I used to do a presentation on notebooking where I suggested these various notebooks that I've been using. The problem was that now set a standard and I had moms who were afraid they weren't doing it 'right' or were frustrated that they couldn't work all the notebooks into their lives.

So I am backing off of that approach and instead want to share principles behind notebooking with a few suggestions and then let you choose what works for you! And that will change over time.

First rule: If you have not yet found something you want to hold on to, then there's not really a need to start a notebook. The same goes for your children. Once you assign notebooking, you've killed the spirit of it. Instead, feed the desire in your children by letting your children see you notebook for yourself. Maybe in the beginning, set aside a Friday afternoon or other time in the week for notebooking. Put the colored pens and papers and stickers and pictures or whatever on the table, put on some music, pull out a plate of cookies or healthy snacks and have a notebooking party to capture the things you want to hold on to from the week. You don't have to do it every single day, unless you want to! In time, that's exactly what will happen. It will just become an enjoyable part of the learning process and will likely happen every single day. Romance their hearts in the beginning.

I think one of the biggest roadblocks to notebooking I've seen is that moms are unsure what should go into the notebook. Notebooking is a big thing in the homeschooling community, but almost all that I have seen is about notebooking facts and information. While there is nothing wrong with that, it seems there is a better use of the time and energy when you are educating the heart. I can access any fact or information instantly on my phone when the need arises. What's

the capital of West Virginia? What year was Abraham Lincoln born? Where did Charles Dickens live? What books did he write? I don't want to fill my notebooks with facts and information, except as they pertain to something I really care about. So here's what I think is going on—most of the recent books are filled with facts and information. There is little to grab the heart. So when I say only write down the ideas that grab the heart, that's a foreign concept if you haven't spent much time in the older books when they wrote for the heart. I can tell you, once you get into the older books, there will be so many thoughts and gems of wisdom that will make you put the book down just to think about it for a minute. Those are the ones you want to capture in your notebooks.

Sterling Sill filled over 25 notebooks, including over 7500 pages of ennobling thoughts and ideas. He said, "When in my reading I come to some little nugget of an idea that sends a chill up and down my backbone—I take that out and put it in my idea bank." Some of those words he memorizes and thus they become part of him.

So let me throw out a few ideas of what a notebook could look like.

A preschooler could start a notebook of favorite things. Let your child cut pictures of favorite things out of magazines and glue them on pages. Barebooks can be used for a number of projects like this. They are inexpensive, have hard covers and have a more permanent feel to them. You can do the same thing with fine art. Let them pick their favorites and print out whatever size you want. You can make them full size and put them in sheet protectors in a notebook, or make them small and pick up a little dollar photo album at Walmart and slip the pictures in the sleeves.

You can begin to make their collections of favorite poetry. Maybe use a bare books to create Mother Goose rhymes for toddlers. Let them pick one, you write it down while they watch, and then let them color pictures on it to illustrate it. You can do that with poetry for your older children. They may create several collections of poetry over the years. There's not a right or wrong way. Some may like to copy a poem on a full sheet of paper, illustrate it or not, and put it in a 3 ring notebook. Or pick up a pretty blank journal at the store and let them start copying their favorite poetry in it.

I like to have a literature gems notebook. Again, begin any way you want. Let children illustrate something from a fairy tale you've just told them. You lead the way. Keep them in some kind of a book. They love to share what they have created and this gives a fun way to go back through their books and let them narrate and recall the stories or their favorite part of the stories. This encourages an oral interchange—remember the importance of the voice?

Drawing will help them develop the fine motor skills they'll need to write letters. And drawing is usually a lot more enjoyable to a child! In a biography of Beatrix Potter, it said that 'writing came easily, for Beatrix could copy shapes of letters as quickly as she copied leaves and flowers.'

As they get older and are writing, let them copy down favorite parts of books they are reading. Let that be their copy work. The act of copying words and sentences is teaching them language

arts and is providing an enjoyable and meaningful way to practice their handwriting skills. Some of our greatest writers learned to write by copying down the writings of other great writers. Again, it can be on individual pages of any size or in barebooks.

I like to create literature pages by printing out illustrations from the books if possible. The pictures help me instantly recall stories I may have forgotten. While I read, if something strikes me, I put a little post it tab on it. When I go back, I look at what I marked and decide if it's worth remembering enough that I want to copy it. In that way, I hold on to the gems—that which means most to me. I don't have to copy down the entire passage—just enough to trigger a memory and then I put a page number by it so I can find it again. Notebooking in this way helps me read for meaning. I'm always on a treasure hunt for something worthwhile to hold on to. If the books I am reading consistently aren't yielding anything worthy of holding on to, I tell myself I better look for some more worthwhile reading! There's nothing wrong with a little cotton candy, but it will make you sick if that's all you eat.

Simply reading through this literature gems notebook keeps re-feeding my heart from what I read. If I didn't take the time to do it, so much of what I read will be gone.

When I read biographies, it's like inviting great souls to dine with me. I listen to their stories and I want to hold on to the parts that really inspire me or stories they tell that I love. So I have a great souls notebook. Mine is a 3 ring binder that I add individual pages to. I like that best because I arrange them in chronological order and it helps me begin to sort out who was living at what time in history. It becomes a story of the world, as well. I insert a few world events pages to provide context of what's happening when these people live. I even create pages for my ancestors. I use lots of pictures, especially fine art. I just do a google search and find the images that are going to best help me remember this person. A picture is worth 750,000 words, remember? I want to know what this person looks like. And then this is where I copy those gems from my reading or at least enough, with a reference to where I can find it again. This notebook along with my literature gems are my greatest treasures. I love looking through these notebooks and remembering all that I have learned. It can also facilitate conversation as you sit down and look through your child's notebook with him or her and allow them to talk about it.

A younger child's notebook of great souls may only have pictures and names. Maybe they can draw the pictures themselves. That works, too.

One mother shared that her dyslexic daughter really struggled with writing until she started hearing and reading fascinating stories of real people who inspired her heart. She created a book because she wanted to remember their stories and their words and even though it was extremely difficult and challenging for her to write, she pushed through because it was something she wanted for herself and her written language improved in every way.

A notebook can be a simple book of happy moments. Every night before you go to bed, take time to write down one happy thing that happened that day. It fosters an attitude of gratitude. You can help a child do that—in the beginning, you do the writing until the child can write himself. You can grab a little calendar notebook at the store that has a few lines for each day and

that, too, is a notebooking activity for the heart.

Louisa May Alcott said she was encouraged by her parents to keep a diary in which she wrote down her thoughts and feelings and fancies. “Even at an early age Louisa’s journal was a record of deep feelings and of a child’s sacred emotions.”

So a personal journal is a form of notebooking. Again, many great writers learned to write by keeping personal journals.

Pestalozzi used notebooking in his schools. “They would draw pictures of things, make collections of leaves and flowers, and keep a record of their observations and discoveries. Through keeping these records they learned to read and write.”

Nature journaling, such as John Muir Laws teaches, is another form of notebooking. I was talking with a mother who said that her daughter did no formal science classes throughout high school, but she was a big nature journaler. When she decided she wanted to be a nurse, and realized she would have to take science level college courses, she panicked. But the first semester she called home and said she was at the top of the class. Because she had been trained to see the details, she knew exactly what the professor was trying to teach and she caught on very quickly.

You may also want to start a cultural notebook, as a family or as individuals. As you learn about different countries, you may want a place for the children to copy favorite recipes from that country or to write about their cultural celebrations. Let them take pictures of themselves and their crafts or their family cultural night dinners and glue them in a book. What a source of happy memories! You can either create separate bare books for each country or put dividers in a notebook. Whatever works for you. You may even create a notebook of places in the world you want to visit one day. Google a picture, glue it on the page, and let your children write what happened there and what they would want to look for if they ever got to visit one day. Let them copy a few words from the language on a page or helpful phrases: How are you? What is your name? Where is the train station?. This can be a place where you can keep maps of the different countries and whenever you read a story that mentions a place, let them put a dot on their map so they can see where it’s taking place. This is geography taught in a natural way. Or at least, always go to the world globe or map and let them see where it is you are talking about.

A lot of these activities are the precursors to research skills. These kind of notebooks will be something they will want to keep, rather than the thousands of worksheets that go in the garbage. I’ve only suggested a few ideas. Try out different ways and see what works for you. There is no right or wrong way to do it. The key points to remember are to not force it—make it an enjoyable activity and let it connect to something your child cares about. The best way to teach notebooking is to do it yourself and let them see you doing it.

A friend of mine said her 15 year old son was hugging his notebook one day. He said, “Mom, if anyone knew what was inside this notebook, they would know it’s a treasure of great worth.” That’s when you know you have achieved notebooking success.

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happy moments
journals–louisa may alcott
great souls
culture
nature–journaling

How we learn to write. In the whole apple of learning.

Ok. Final test. You complete the sentence: That which is not written down is.....