

# Becoming a Writer

**Many parents have trouble encouraging or helping their children to write on any regular sort of basis. Sometimes they try the same sort of meaningless writing assignments that, with the aid of coercion, get kids to write in school. This method doesn't work well at home. (It doesn't work very well at school either, but that's another story...)**

Though most homeschooled kids read up a terrific storm, the majority I know have not had as positive a time with writing. The kids balk at putting pen to paper, the parents try unsuccessfully to "motivate" with cutesy suggestions, then turn to cajoling, then nagging, then it finally all gets dropped. "Maybe he's just not READY to write yet, maybe when he's older..." But when the time does not just come of its own, the parents are left feeling inwardly anxious and guilty, and the kids never get a chance to feel the delight and power of their own writer's voice.

## Writer's Voice

**Yet many homeschooled children do write prolifically. They write articles, family newsletters, letters to friends, family books, notes to parents, and for a host of other purposes. The best teachers in schools and homes set up real communications purposes for children to write within. When children are writing to really communicate to someone, writing is not an exercise detached from the real world, but is instead part of the real world.**

**When children know they are really communicating, listen to the sense of humor and life that their writing sometimes attains. Here are some selections from the *Rainbow News*, a family newsletter edited by nine-year Sunny Schaeffer.**

**In the February 1987 issue, Sunny wrote:**

**Victory! Victory!**

**It was the first time I had ever played "Risk." "Risk is an exciting war game. You win when you've wiped out all the enemy armies, and you become ruler of the world. My 17 year-old brother challenged me to a game. He figured there was no way I could win. He even said he could beat me in 20 turns. (Insult upon insult!) It took 20 turns all right... When the smoke cleared, I was the winner! Mark challenged me to a rematch. It was another 20 turns, and I was still the ruler of the world. Not only was Mark furious, he was**

**totally humiliated. I felt wonderful. I think we should all chip in and buy Reagen and Gorbachev a "Risk" game. They can play at war, and we can get on with our lives!!!!**

**Similarly, in the October 1986 issue, Sunny wrote:**

### **Pumping Oatmeal**

**Well, it's fall, and once again Mark has begun one of his famous "exercise programs." This year Mark set a new record for himself, he pulled a muscle after 4 weeks and has been sitting on the bench ever since. Come on, Mark! When are you going to get off the bench?**

**In the November 1986 issue, Mark replied:**

### **Misinformed**

**To Whom it may concern:**

**To say I was outraged when I read the article "Pumping Oatmeal" is an understatement. I am very surprised that such a reputable newspaper would publish these falsehoods. It is true I started a weight training program. After four weeks I pulled a muscle and was sidelined, but I am now back on schedule. I feel the editor of this paper would fear for her physical safety considering I can lift her in the air with my little finger. I trust your paper will stick to the facts in the future.**

## **Putting out a Newspaper**

**Like, several other homeschooling children, Jesse sometimes puts out his own newspaper.**

The *Picksher Tavern* began last winter. It is my eight year old son Jesse's imaginary newspaper, begun on his own, totally his own idea. It is imaginary, partly because the "news" is largely imagined news, the charge for it sometimes imagined money, but yet the little paper has become quite a reality for all of us.

I don't think any of us remember now just how the idea for the Picksher Tavern evolved. It came on a backdrop of our reading *Johnny Tremain* with its colorful world of Revolutionary War newspapers. Also we'd read a few other articles and books

about the history of newspapers in England and America. And then, as Howard noted, it really wasn't so strange perhaps that Jesse came up with a newspaper idea, as we're so involved as a family in putting out the Western PA Homeschoolers Newsletter. Newsletter talk is always going on around here.

We'd also had a long spell where Jesse had done very little writing, and we were slowly getting back to a rhythm of daily writing. It was almost painfully slow, and Jesse had real trouble finding a writing theme that he could really sink his teeth into, feel involved with, feel his writer's voice. The Picksher Tavern became his vehicle.

Seems to me Jesse began work on his first issue (or "ishoo," as he spelled it) while I was busy with bed-making or laundry sorting. He suddenly popped in on me with the announcement that a newspaper was ready for delivery. He was both editor and newsboy, talking in their proper voices and attitudes. I responded as a proper customer, not as a teacher with red pencil in hand, and looked over the little paper with delight. Jesse had never come up with such an idea before.

The first issues came out every few days, and had regular "features" -- a farm comic strip (usually about troubles with goat milking and cats and mice), a simple maze, a car and truck race game (similar to one in a math book of his). The paper had no real "articles" at that point, no extended writing. Jesse made himself an "office," wrote a sign saying "Pikshr Tavern" to go above the doorway, and was in business. Jacob, Molly, Howard and I were his best (if only) customers. This was all work that Jesse went to readily and eagerly -- it was, after all, totally his own and was to him a wonderful and elaborate play idea.

After a few weeks though, the idea seemed to reach a natural saturation point, a boredom point when it was becoming repetitive and somewhat pointless. Nothing was moving in the idea, and so Jesse moved on to other writing. He became quite involved with keeping a journal, after we'd seen and read the Jeffrey kids' home-bound books. The newspaper was left and forgotten, stored in a file.

But it was not lost. I'm becoming more and more aware of this special value in our homeschooling -- ideas are never really totally dropped. They may hibernate for a while, even a long while, but they can be readily picked up later. I don't think this sort of spiral movement, circling back to bring something old into a new present, can happen readily in schools. If Jesse had begun the Picksher Tavern in a school (highly unlikely anyhow), then dropped the idea, and picked it up later with another teacher, the new teacher could have no sense of the continuity involved. At home the "teacher" doesn't change, so I could see and appreciate what was happening.

Jesse came back to the Picksher Tavern months later, at the beginning of summer. Perhaps it was important that he'd had another short time of little writing. Perhaps the comfort and ready format of the Picksher Tavern gave him a needed starting place, an easy beginning. He greeted his old issues with a touching fondness, almost with the excitement he feels when one of our long gone wild in the woods cats returns for a few days. He remembered just how he'd had his "office," made a new sign, and delved right in. This time, the large amount of writing he'd done over the spring really showed. He now had bonafide lead articles, with a stronger voice, often imitating newspaper style:

U.S. officials say America is making too much stuff and is wasting too much and it should not keep garbage rates down. For example [spelled "for idzmpl" Spain or even better France makes much less than us. Their garbage cans are 1 foot when U.S. has 3 feet.

There were also now lots of ads for "gerog sales and okshins," a part of newspapers he gathered seemed to be important to me perhaps! He readily compared his new issues with his old, and was proud of his clearly evident growth -- "In my first issues there was really hardly any writing, now there's a LOT... My mazes in the first issues were so simple, now I'm making much more complicated ones."

He also evolved a whole imagined scenario to explain why the paper had not been published for a good while:

Talk from Picksher Tavern. We have been having trouble since the press broke shortly after Christmas and we had a strike also. Most of the workers got new jobs and we had to train new workers.

A competitor newspaper came on the scene, the Depot News, which tried to steal business from the Picksher Tavern, and there was some rather cut-throat journalism going on between the two rivals. Again, Jesse would set to this work with no prompting, often writing up a page or more before breakfast.

We set off on a family trip at the end of June, and the Picksher Tavern and Depot News came too. Jesse brought his markers, clipboards and lots of paper, and literally spent hours during our long car rides busily writing and drawing for his papers. He developed a delightful type of person drawing, patterned with intricate symmetrical designs, and he added one of these to the back page of each issue. (Incidentally, the timing of this renewed interest was good for ME, as one stop on our trip was the Mid-Atlantic Homeschooling Conference organized by Manfred Smith, where I was to co-lead a discussion on encouraging children's writing.)

Back from our three week trip, the Picksher Tavern got another boost. We'd bought 2 gelatin hectograph print sets from our local office supply store, on sale for a dollar each, and Jesse was eager to try actually making printed copies of his paper. This real publishing effort gave Jesse the motivation to polish up his pieces a bit -- he now wrote first drafts, asked for and accepted a bit of spelling help, tried hard to write neatly (always a struggle for him -- he has typical "boys" handwriting). He wrangled with the sometimes cantankerous technology of the simple presses, and asked lots of questions about other types of printing methods. He'd had a chance to try out a Ben Franklin press at the Capitol Children's Museum in Washington, D.C., and we often visit local print shops for a quick look at the astonishing clanking machines and to pick up any extra scrap paper the shops don't want. We also read a short biography of Guttenburg in here somewhere.

After a bit the Picksher Tavern was laid aside again, becoming once more a bit stale. Jesse turned, refreshed, to other writing -- longer 200 word pieces telling about his new goldfish, our monarch butterfly hatchings, his new stone buildings dotting the woods and yards. We began a helpful way of rewriting and editing, an idea I got from Madalene Murphy in her work with her son Christian. I'd take Jesse's first draft, type it out on our computer/printer exactly as he'd written it, same invented spellings, lack of capitalization, lack of punctuation. I'd print out a copy with big print, and quadruple spacing -- plenty of room for Jesse to make corrections and changes. It seemed much easier for him to make changes on these print-outs, as there was not the aesthetic trauma of marking up and possibly ripping his own paper. He'd sometimes go through and change all the small *i*'s to capital *I*'s, or go through and add in punctuation marks, or find all the words that rhymed with "all" that he'd spelled "ol." I might ask him to try to find, say, ten words that he thought might be misspelled, and see if he could figure out closer spellings. He often could. If he knew a word was not quite right, but didn't know what to do with it, I'd underline the letters he'd gotten RIGHT, saying maybe, "Hmm, 4 out of 6 letters are correct, one needs to be deleted, and one exchanged for another." Figuring out correct spellings became a sort of game, a type of code cracking. Almost fun.

Jesse has now used some of these computer printed out stories as lead articles for the Picksher Tavern. He's even talking about using a simple block-printing method to add on his masthead at the top. Using the computer has not turned Jesse away from handwriting though -- he last week put out another hectographed copy, and even then copied out his lead article once again by hand, as he wasn't quite satisfied with the clarity of the printing. His head is full of ideas to extend the paper, and I'm sure it will keep popping up from time to time over the next couple of years. The Picksher Tavern has become a sort of measuring stick to see how his writing is growing and changing,

as well as an old and welcome friend. It will be almost sad if he ever starts spelling it "PICTURE Tavern!"

## Family Books

**Some families put together little books with contributions from each member of the family. As Susan writes...**

I'm thinking of encouraging homeschooled kids to send out published and bound copies of books they've written to other homeschoolers, a sort of lending library of their own writing in the same way that so many families now share and swap books they've purchased and loved.

We've already begun this a little bit out here, with a book Jesse, Jacob and I put together about the monarch butterflies we raised this summer.

We also have launched on a wonderful and productive writing project that grew out of a visit to another homeschooling family. The boy, Brian, showed me a journal he had just begun two days before telling about the animals he owns at his small farm. He was a child who previously had NO interest in writing, who thought he didn't need to write because he could already form his letters, and he DID write his MATH problems out anyway.

His mother in despair called a friend for advice. That mother had the wonderful good sense to put her own 8 year old on the phone to tell Brian about HIS chicken journal he'd just started, detailing the goings on of his very loved chickens. Brian was hooked, ended the phone conversation giving his friend a suggestion on what he might add next about the chickens, and said he thought he'd better go to begin his own story of his goat!

I'd read Brian's two entries aloud to Jesse and Jacob and they enjoyed them, and we talked about the idea of an animal journal on the car ride home. I then thought of the delightful book, *Our Animal Friends at Maple Hill Farm* by Alice and Martin Provenson, which the boys both love, and wondered aloud if maybe we could write a similar book about the animals of RICHMAN FARM. We were ALL hooked, and have been writing up a storm of stories for the past several weeks. Jacob is dictating and Jesse is of course writing his own. I'm writing mostly about the animals that died when the boys were very young, the ones they've heard stories about but can't really remember themselves.

It's been a delightful experience. We've even been working up illustrations, using several printing techniques, and plan on having it ready for Christmas gift giving for

everyone in the family. Very exciting for all of us to be involved in this project jointly.

#### EDITING A ROUGH DRAFT

Susan typed the rough draft just as Jesse had written it with paper and pencil. Then Jesse edited the typed copy. The final copy, which went into The Animals of Richman Farm appears at the bottom.

Orange Juice is good yoomerd and lite orange, He. is  
a prity good mouse kachn. But he is quite scard of  
his twin brother Timitheey. Orange Juice is a  
wanderer he gos to the ~~neibors~~<sup>neighbors</sup> and raids the ~~garbiga~~<sup>garbage</sup>  
cans. <sup>So does</sup> his father mer. He is very kind to the kittens hoo he is the  
~~father and the~~ brother to.

#### ORANGE JUICE

by Jesse Richman

Orange Juice is good humored and light orange. He is a pretty good mouse catcher, but he is quite scared of his twin brother, Timothy. Orange Juice is a wanderer. He goes to the neighbors and raids the garbage cans. So does his father Mer. He is very kind to the kittens, who he is the brother to.

As a teacher in schools I probably would have always shied away from "taking part" so intimately, fearing I'd be leaving my stamp on it all too much, but at home this just feels very RIGHT -- the feeling of being true colleagues with the kids, the same feeling I'm getting more and more now with music when Jesse and I play recorder duets together...

**When our *Animals of Richman Farm* book was finished, and the first steps toward a sequel were being taken, there came a time when Jesse was refusing to get started with writing some of his pieces for the sequel. As Susan wrote when Jesse was eight...**

Jesse's written messages ALWAYS get a proper response that mere speech might not! Here's a sample from one, written after he'd burst into tears when I was getting too pushy about giving him advice about, of all things, his WRITING:

Mommy, your advis on riting is not a good one its a taribll one i no wat you menen BUT!! the riting iv bin dooing is not that sort. So you wunt me to chang my riting toppics I wont!!!! if you stert to rite for the cumming book of the animls of Richman farm I will to But sins you arnt I woent ether. GOT IT!!

We had been at a sort of writing lull after our major "publication" of our first ANIMALS book, and it was indeed true that I had not worked on any pieces for the talked about follow-up book, but felt it was my right (!?! ) to nag HIM to get on with it. After receiving Jesse's letter I got busy and finished several stories -- and so did Jesse.

## **Rough Drafts**

**Writing does not begin in final form. When Jesse was eight, Susan wrote about the process of working through rough drafts in her own writing and with Jesse in his writing...**

I've been noticing a lot lately how many simple errors I make in my rough draft writing, and it's helping me to be more tolerant of my 8 year old son Jesse's rough drafts. I'm learning to give him the same time and consideration I give myself with my writing. I don't expect my writing to be ready for publishing on the first go round, and I no longer expect his to look that way either.

I recently looked over some of my hastily penciled out paragraphs and found these "errors" -- I'd written *my* for *me*, *ant* for *was*, *of* for *from*, *their* for *they're*, *like* instead of *lick*, and *what* for *who*. I've left out connecting words, and gone back over to rather



messily insert them. I've scratched out lots of words and squeezed in substitutes above them that most people probably can't decipher. I've scribbled out whole sentences, XXXX'd out whole paragraphs, put arrows winging across a page to show a possible rearrangement. I've written too small. I've written sideways up a margin. I've written long words with a mere jiggle or scrawl for the last 7 letters. (After all, I know what it means, so what does it matter -- at another stage I can type it all out, letter by letter.)

The "chef d'oeuvre" of my recently noticed rough draft mistakes was a real surprise. I was typing out a copy of a short piece I'd written for a book the kids and I recently put together called *The Animals of Richman Farm*. My story was about the ladybug hibernation spot we'd discovered in a pasture. I had to look twice -- no, surely it couldn't be -- had I really written not once but TWO TIMES -- *labybug*, substituting a *b* for a *d*??!? I couldn't believe it. Now, I have no "directional difficulties," no "dyslexia," no "perceptual problems," and I've known my right from my left since I was five. What my error meant was just that this paper WAS a rough draft, and my thoughts had been racing fast (with maybe a tumbling baby on my lap to boot...). That's all. I didn't need to do workbook exercises or drills to correct my "disability" in recognizing or forming a *b* or *d*. I just needed to do a second draft of my piece.

Now, Jesse LOVED hearing about my *labybug* incident, as he has been known to spell his brother's name as *Jacod* more than once or twice. I try now to let Jesse see my rough drafts, and see what adult writers go through in the writing process. It's really helped him view HIS writing as a series of drafts, and not just as a one shot deal that must be perfect the first time or else. He has plenty of time to reread his pieces for clarity, for spelling, for cohesion. For some kids, writing must be some magic procedure -- POOF! and ideas spring forth onto the page fully proper and correct and ready for an audience. There's no hint of the scratch outs, the corrections, the redrafts, the scissors-and-tape, and most importantly the continual rethinking that goes into most writing.

## **Editing on the Computer**

**When I was an undergraduate student at Carnegie-Mellon University, I used to wonder about the students who spent day and night at the computer center. My friends and I used to call them the computer "nerds" because they had no interest in anything but computers. I got a small glimpse, myself, of the attraction of computers when I took a single course in the FORTRAN computer language, enough to see that it could be fun to play with a computer. In those days all contact with computers was through cards punched on a card-punching machine and the computer's reply spewed out on a rapid-fire printer. The cards would be fed into the computer and thirty minutes later the printer would spew**

forth explaining why it would not accept your cards. This process would continue from about 10 PM until about 4 AM at which point your exhaustion would disappear in the ensuing feeling of triumph.

That was 1971. I didn't have any more contact with computers until 1983. I wasn't yet a computer "nerd," but I was partly hooked. In 1983 the school I worked for got its first micro-computer. As soon as it arrived, I got a workbook for the BASIC computer language and a manual for the computer's word processing program, and I was soon staying late after school designing educational computer programs to use with my students and typing term papers. I can now proudly claim to be a self-made "nerd."

Some people have mis-supposed that since I am so interested in computers, maybe my children are doing wonderful things on our computers at home. Maybe they are getting prepared for twenty-first century careers as computer whizzes. Actually, my children have really not shown much interest in programming. Sure, they hear my agony as my microcomputer tells me that there is an error in my current program, and sure they hear my exuberation when I get my program to work, but they are not naturally "nerds" and don't seem to show any inclination to be.

Susan is very practical in her use of the computer. With great reluctance she began to do her typing on the computer and soon found it to be a great tool. As she points out, her ten typos per line no longer show up in her final copy. Although she showed no initial enthusiasm as I computerized our newsletter's directory and mailing labels, she did come to appreciate the time-saving result.

Jesse has generally taken on Susan's attitude. I have had more hope for Jacob and Molly. Jacob likes to draw pictures and play games on the computer. Molly mostly uses our electric typewriter which she calls her computer. (Now that we do our typing on the computer, the electric typewriter doesn't get much other use.)

About a year ago, Susan began using the computer to get Jesse to edit his own writing. She would type Jesse's rough drafts onto the computer just as he had written them out with paper and pencil. Then she would print out the drafts and Jesse would mark his changes on the print-out. She would then type Jesse's corrections and print out a revised draft. Still, Jesse wasn't actually doing any of the computer work himself.

For the last couple of days though, Jesse has begun to make changes in his own rough drafts on the computer. A few mornings ago, I showed him a command in

**WordStar, our word-processing program, that would allow him to correct a particular misspelling everywhere that it occurred in his essay. Incidentally, a "word processing program" is something you buy that makes it easy for you to type whatever you want on your computer. It allows you to type, change, and otherwise manipulate the words in your document. Jesse was writing a story about one of our mother cats named "Moppit." He had frequently misspelled "mopet" and with this command he was able to correct them all at once. He was surprised to find that Susan didn't know that particular WordStar command. I explained that Susan had never worked her way through the WordStar manual and that there were a lot of WordStar commands that she didn't know.**

**That evening I asked Jesse if he wanted to work his way through the manual and he said he did, so I helped him get set up with the manual in a cookbook holder next to the computer. Then I sat in a nearby chair so that I was available to answer any questions that he asked, and to be an audience if he wanted to show off something that he had just learned. Several times he called me over to show me WordStar commands that he had just learned about. Some of them were new to me. Jesse worked through several pages in the manual, and experimented with several different commands, learning through trial and error.**

**I don't think Jesse is about to become a computer "nerd," but I do think that computers will be a tool that he is able to use. For a couple of years now, Susan and I have been doing our writing in front of a computer video screen, and now Jesse is joining us in that adult world.**

## **Write From The Start**

**I began this chapter by noting that the artificial-assignment writing model that is common in the schools often does not work at home. It usually does not work well in the schools either. The best writing teachers have argued for years that these sort of assignments do not develop a love for writing in the student. Recently, Susan wrote about *Write From the Start* by Donald Graves and Virginia Stuart which advocates a different approach to writing in the schools and at home...**

Kids can write, right from the start, at whatever point they are at. We don't have to wait until they are perfect spellers, understand all punctuation and capitalization rules, know about paragraphing format, or know nouns from verbs. They don't even need to know all of the alphabet letters, or both upper and lower case. Kids can begin writing NOW -- but they can't begin writing RIGHT right from the start. Too many children, teachers, and probably parents, feel kids can't write because their writing is incorrectly

spelled, is too slow, too wrong in every way. They are criticized immediately to a jolting silent halt.

In *Write From the Start*, Donald Graves and Virginia Stuart start kids writing, at whatever level the kids are at. They urge us to trust kids to be able to come up with ideas for writing THEMSELVES. Our role is *not* to rack our brains thinking up clever and cute story-starters and motivations and "tricks" but rather to be colleagues for our children, respect their efforts, help them talk about the writing process, and show them what the usually hidden writing process can be like. In John Holt's phrase, give kids access to the world of writing.

In a chapter called "Wrong from the Start," the book has a great expose of writing as it is usually taught in schools. It argues that kids spend all their time in most schools PREPARING to write -- doing fill-in-the-blank exercises about vocabulary, circling the correct multiple choice answer about punctuation, or merely copying a sentence or two from the blackboard or workbook. If the students do actually write something, it is immediately judged, marked up with red pencil, graded -- then tossed out. The child is not given the time and support to work through several drafts himself, to find his real writers' voice, to find what it is he really wants to say. He is not given a real audience for his work, a real purpose. Just assignments, just bits and pieces. Just "getting ready."

In contrast, Graves and Stuart offer concrete vignettes of many children of all ages, at home and at school, who are feeling like writers and who are writing a lot, almost every day. These parts of the book are great to read aloud. They helped our kids see how other kids' writing can change and grow over time. Perhaps kids who balk at writing, who writhe and squirm away from it, who seem to insist on being perfectionists (therefore they can't and won't try), may just have no sense of the process ALL writers go through. They don't yet write themselves, and they see only the finished, magically perfect, printed-up versions of other people's writing.

Reading *Write From the Start* really made a lot of difference in our writing at home. It helped me see better the ways in which I could support Jesse and Jacob and Molly as beginning writers:

- How to listen better to their ideas of how their writing is progressing.
- How to be a better sounding board as Jesse tosses around possible ideas for stories.
- How to not over-react to details (spelling, punctuation, neatness, etc.) when he's only on the first draft. Often now I ask Jesse to read aloud to me from his drafts, while I sit across the room, so that I can respond first to the sense and meaning of his piece -- I can't react with a critical eye to spelling errors that I

can't see. Jesse often picks up small errors himself when he reads aloud to me -- sees where he's left out a word, or written the wrong word by mistake.

- I also discuss my own writing with the kids more, often writing at the same time with them, sometimes on a joint project. In our *Animals of Richman Farm* we all wrote sections, all of us contributing our own voices and memories to make a larger whole, better than anything we could have done separately.

Another emphasis in the book at first eluded me, as far as translating the idea into homeschooling terms. Graves and Stuart put a lot of emphasis on sharing writing with others, telling of lively classrooms where children can borrow hardbound copies of books written by classmates. Then it hit -- why not share more writing among homeschooled children? The BACKPACK (the children's writing section of *Pennsylvania Homeschoolers*) certainly does this, but even more we are now trying to send more writing through the mail to specific friends. After all, as Jesse said today, that's what the mail is for -- sharing writing. And whenever we visit a family these days, seems a child is always bringing me some writing to look over, and it's always a delight, and something I always call my kids over to see. Brian Coughenour showed me his new animal journal, John Stephen Fredland showed us the very long sports adventure book he's been working on for several months, and the Kissell girls showed us their hand-bound journals. We're beginning to get writing in the mail too -- a wonderful book by Willy Moffat about a lonely fir tree wishing he were a Christmas tree, and a whole series of memories of his summer trips by Luke Wilson. Takes a bit of time of course, a bit of effort to xerox our kids' writing, or write out extra copies, or bind a small book, but the rewards are coming in and making it all worthwhile. I also think it can help kids (and parents!) to physically see another kids' rough drafts -- to see that others may not print neatly either, or spell expertly, or whatever, but what good stories they may have to tell!

Another thing that Graves and Stuart point to again and again is that teachers and parents who want their kids to write need to write themselves; they need to go through the process, often time-consuming and difficult, of trying to get their own thoughts on paper. There's lots here to encourage adults who have felt for years that writing is not for them, that they just can't do it. The teachers in Graves' study often began finding their writer's voice when they began keeping journals and personal written observations about individual children who were in their classes. Likewise, I think many of us parents are finding our true writer's voice when we begin writing about our own children. I always think that when we write about our children it's like a special gift for them -- we're letting them know that they are important enough for us to take the time to keep our memories about them in writing. And our newsletter gives us all a place to share with others.

I could go on and on about *Write From the Start* and the good ideas in it. I think it should be on every homeschooler's shelf, and hope it inspires you as it has us.

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