



Home Education Network

Newsletter

Winter Issue



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HEN NCB 2018 - 2019

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Chairperson's Letter



HEN Contact Officers

HEN was formed 20 years ago to help and support families who were thinking of home educating or were actually already doing it. The HEN NCB (National Coordinating Body) consists of volunteer members who do what they can to help run the organisation. We meet for lengthy meetings four times a year to discuss and plan what needs to be done to help home educating families and to make sure home education is a right that is not endangered. All of our officers give up their time to help others and are unpaid. Over the years, many of our officers have served for as many years as our constitution allows as otherwise the positions would become vacant due to lack of new volunteers. I can't thank these people enough for doing over and above what is required of them so the organisation continues to exist.

We still do our best to help and support families but in recent years, many more families are turning to home education and have many questions about what is involved. This puts extra pressure on our Contact Officers who help the best they can. Our main Contact Officer and Regional Contacts around the country give up hours of their time for free every week to take phone calls and reply to emails and try to help those thinking of home educating. Some of these calls can be very detailed, complicated and lengthy. This is unfortunately unsustainable. We, as volunteers, have only limited time to do these jobs. Some weeks it isn't possible because we are occupied with our everyday lives trying to make sure our children get an education, getting children from A to B, making dinners and generally getting from one end of the day to the other.

Meeting up with other home educating families at the various home ed meet ups around the country is the best way to get support while forming friendships.

We regularly get requests asking for individual assistance with Tusla which we can't help with. We meet Tusla as often as is possible to make sure they understand what home education is. However, we cannot intervene in individual cases with Tusla where a child has been refused registration. It is beyond our remit unfortunately.

Our contact officers will continue to help as much as they can but will refer more complicated situations to a local meet up where the person will get lots of help and support in person by chatting to other home edders.

If anyone would like to become a contact officer to take the pressure off those currently doing the job, please contact me at nweadick@gmail.com.

Natacha Weadick
Chairperson
HEN

Winter Celebrations!



Divine Hot Chocolate

Emily Rainsford-Ryan

Excerpt from www.thenest.ie

Boy, do my boys love hot chocolate... Fresh from a bath, watching a film beside a roaring stove with a cup of hot chocolate is a form of pure bliss for them (throw in some hot fairy cakes from the oven and they think I should be canonized!) So, this recipe is for them!



It is simplicity in itself; and inspired wholly by a gift of same my friend Erin gave us a couple of Christmases ago (but doctored somewhat because I am innately compelled to not leave alone.)



In a large jar, (Erin used a pretty painted kilner jar, but I had none to hand, so used an empty, wide necked jar) I put:

1/4 cocoa

1/4 brown sugar

1/4 grated milk chocolate

Into the last 1/4, I filled the jar with marshmallows.

I scripted a lovely label, tied on with linen string and buttons.

I like to include an “Instructions to Make” bit also:

“Heat milk to near boiling. Pour this over one teaspoon of hot chocolate powder per cup, until three-quarters full. In a sealed container, shake some milk vigorously, and just before serving pour it into the cup of hot chocolate to create a frothy mass, top with some marshmallows and a sprinkle of chocolate powder”

These “Box” ideas are an especially great gift in a family where there are a couple of kiddies, and can be changed to suit your pocket and availability of things.



Diwali – Festival of Lights

Shyami Gomu Sathiaseelan

Diwali or Deepavali is the Indian (Hindu) festival of lights celebrated to signify the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance—or good over evil.

Diwali is generally celebrated in fall and the date varies each year based on the Hindu calendar. Diwali though originated in India, is celebrated in a handful of other countries including Nepal, Singapore, Burma, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, etc.

India is a vast country and Diwali is celebrated differently in different parts of the country. But what is common though is the happiness, the new clothes, food, spending time with family and fireworks (though there is a ban on this for certain hours in a day in many cities because of the pollution levels).



Here's something I like:

Kaju Katli / Cashew barfi

Ingredients

- 1 cup cashew nut
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 5 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon ghee
(clarified butter)



Image via Google

1. Powder the cashew in a dry grinder.
2. Cashew should be powdery and not oily.
3. Heat the sugar and water in a non-stick thick bottomed pan on a low flame.
4. Grease a tray or keep cookie sheets ready.
5. Once the sugar is dissolved add the cashew powder and keep stirring for 7 to 9 minutes till it thickens and the whole mixture kind of comes together.
6. Remove the mixture, add ghee on top and knead it when it is cool enough to handle.
7. Put this mixture on the greased tray and with a cookie sheet on top, roll it to flatten it to a thickness of 3-4 mm.



Book Review

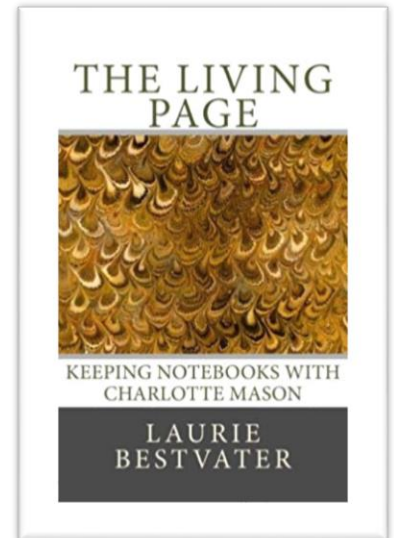


The Living Page: Keeping Notebooks with Charlotte Mason *Laurie Bestvater*

Review by:
Anna Collins

When I say that we use a Classical Charlotte Mason style in our home, people think worksheets and workbooks. Actually, a true Charlotte Mason style involves lots of reading of living books and creating notebooks.

But the first blank page of a blank notebook can sometimes be daunting. Discussions of implementing a Charlotte Mason style talk about many different notebooks - a Book of Centuries (a timeline book), a Nature Journal, a Common Place, a Reading Journal, a Book of Firsts, Word Books and others. Many questions spring to mind: How do I create each? How do they differ? What do they look like for different ages? Might I combine some? How might that look?



I often saw the book 'The Living Page: Keeping Notebooks with Charlotte Mason' by Laurie Bestvater recommended, so when I was battling with trying to understand the Book of Centuries, I finally bought it on a whim earlier this year.

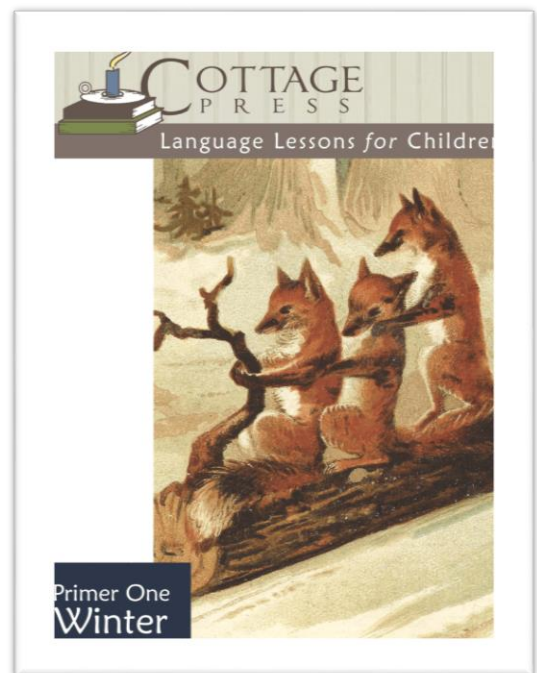
It was so easy to read, so informative and interesting. The author is so inspiring. Her delight and energy bubble over as I read it. It is an easy read. I reread it, skipping the last chapter on my reread. I underlined, turned pages, flicked back and forth, and wished I had bought it earlier! She talks both of notebooks for children and for a mother's own education. I was inspired not only to start the Book of Centuries I had wanted, but also a Common Place and a Reading Journal for myself, as well as to create my own Nature Journal alongside my children, rather than just encouraging them to make theirs. It is helpful for me to have the guidance of this book getting started. We can make these notebooks on our own, each incorporating our own style as we get comfortable, but it's nice to have ideas and thoughts on how to start, and this book was written for this need. There are many blog posts on this topic, but this book is so well written, and illustrated, it made the concepts flow. She talks about both how and why; And being a book, has space to go into both in detail.

Describing the why of a Common Place book: *"A Commonplace book is also an aid to self-education and memory. Keeping one forces you to become an active reader, to read with one eye towards the main points of an argument, the beautiful quote, the insight that gives you pause. You become aware of more than just the words on the page; you become aware of the author's arguments, his writing style, and what **you** think about what the author is saying. It creates a give-and-take between writer and*

reader. Furthermore, the act of writing down quotations and arguments fixes them more firmly in the memory, making it more likely that you'll remember them at appropriate times. Periodically re-reading your Commonplace book will further strengthen your recall even more."

I thought the last chapter, which was more generally about the Charlotte Mason approach, was waffly and off topic from the title, and there are lots of pages of references that were easily ignored, but the main content was really good. As would be expected from a book written about notebooking, Laurie includes lovely quotes. *"I am not a teacher but an awakener."* - Robert Frost
"To arouse wonder and admiration must be one of the teacher's principal aims." - Essex Cholmondley

Over the summer I bought some nice A4 blank notebooks with thick paper in our local Euro shop for €3 each and in September we got started with our Nature Journals for all of us. I had already started my Book of Centuries for me shortly after purchasing Laurie's book. (We have had a wall timeline for nearly 2 years now which is added to every week.) My daughter's Language Arts (i.e. English) curriculum from Cottage Press is 'Charlotte Mason Inspired' so includes copywork of beautiful poems and passages, narration through illustration of famous tales, drawings with notes for nature study and a choice of pasting in the works for art appreciation. I chose to use a Handwriting Without Tears lined notebook so she has the guides she needs for neat copywork. Pictures are pasted in, so her composition book lends itself to becoming a Common Place notebook for her - in keeping with the concept, if not to the letter, in Leslie's book. This book is one she can enjoy paging back through, becoming a lovely scrapbook of her learning.



I imagine that journalling and notebooking are not specific to any particular style of home education, and the specific notebooks described could be incorporated into or added to other methods.

"One thing at any rate we know with certainty, that no teaching, no information becomes knowledge to any of us until the individual mind has acted upon it, translated it, transformed, absorbed it, self-education is the only possible education" - Charlotte Mason

Essays

Realisations, Reflections & Reviews

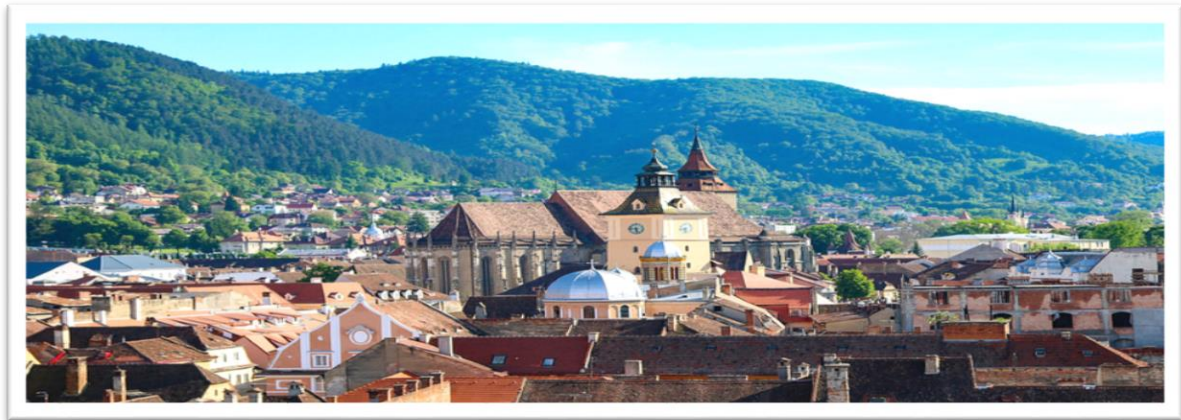


Volunteering in Romania

Lucia Roche

My name is Lucia, and I am 16 years old. There are so many people in this world who are less well off than us that I really wanted to do something useful and good with my summer holidays this year. I researched online and found an organisation that allows young people like me to volunteer abroad in areas which are underprivileged, so I signed up with them to volunteer in Romania for two weeks during July.

I went to a city called Brasov and stayed with a host family for the two weeks of my placement. The lady of the house was very nice, and she made us homemade Romanian dishes every day for our dinner. I tried a traditional dish of deep-fried brains in a restaurant one night when we went out – it was disgusting!!



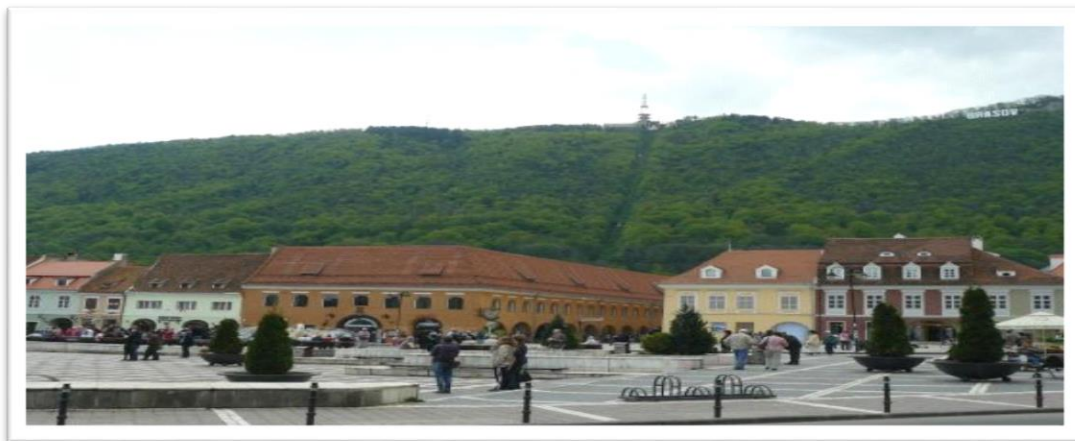
Brasov, Romania.

Every morning we spent our time teaching English to the kids in a summer school, between the ages of 4 and 15 – we had to plan the activities and record their progress. They really appreciated us being

there in the classroom with them and we had great fun doing the activities.

In the afternoons we would go across town to a construction site where there was a building being constructed for adults with Autism, we would put on our hard hats and do whatever work was necessary for that day. It was difficult in the heat of the afternoon, especially as we had to wear protective gear and sturdy shoes for safety reasons, however, the thought of being able to help such a needy section of society kept us going every day.

We did have some recreation time at the weekend – we went to see Dracula’s castle outside Brasov, and climbed the mountain to see the big Hollywood style BRASOV on the side of it – we came down in a cable car, which was really cool.



Cable car and Brasov sign, Romania.

The things I found most difficult about the placement was sharing a room with 4 other girls who were all in the same boat as me – sometimes we were homesick, tired and in need of some peace and quiet, but we became good friends and had a great time together. I learned a lot from my volunteering this summer and can see already how it has helped me to grow and learn about the wider world. I especially enjoyed the feeling that I made a positive impact on other people’s lives.

I think that helping others is a good reason for working, and I hope to volunteer again someday.

A Home Education Journey

with Marta Dorigo Salamon



Our journey into becoming home educators started early. When we moved to Italy, we started looking almost straight away for the right kindergarten for us. We thought what we wanted was basic: small groups, a kind and empathic teacher, an outside garden or playground - we were hoping also for flexible hours, but we knew that, in Italy, that means pushing it a little bit. We started looking early, the little one was not yet 2 - yet we discovered that we were aiming for the sky.

Public kindergartens were (are) overcrowded, which often meant (means) overstressed teachers; outside areas very thin on the ground - green areas even thinner; flexible hours simple utopian. We looked into private ones - most of our local friends did that as well; we were not impressed, however. Aside from the high cost, the ones that we liked best meant a long ride there and back. Getting up early, rush out of the house, into the car, to the kindergarten, then rush again in the evening, too tired to actually spend some time together... that simply was not the kind of life we were thinking of. There were also considerations linked to the kind of educational approach we were aiming for. All this led us to reconsider what we wanted as a family. In retrospect that was a pivotal moment, but at the time we simply went along with what felt right and decided to sort our lives to keep R. at home. And that was all it took for us to fell in love with home education.

Kindergarten in Italy is not mandatory, so we didn't have to fill in any form, didn't even have to tell anybody about our decision. Once a child turns 6, you have to notify the local school in writing that you have decided to homeschool; the school then acknowledges it. There are Headmasters that require a meeting, where the families have to explain what they are doing, the pedagogical approach and so on. On a national level, the picture is varied, there are schools that have excellent relationship with the homeschooling local families, others have proven to be misinformed and very confrontational - even trying to force families to enroll children. Since 2017 there is the novelty of a mandatory yearly exam - to be held in June/July. The idea is to check that the child is "on target" - which basically means homeschoolers have to follow the Italian,

national curriculum. At the end of the second year of primary school, normally the child is expected to be able to read and write in Italian and do basic maths up to 20. Things can become more complicated later on though. The mandatory exam hasn't gone down very well with the home educators' community; so far some families have refused to take it and some have gone to Montessori schools in order to at least personalise the programme as far as possible. Also, it is pretty unclear what happens when a child is judged "not on target".

There is an online community (<https://www.edupar.org/>), with plenty of information that can be pretty helpful and supportive in difficult cases. In October 2017 a national association popped up as well (LAIF L'Associazione Istruzione Familiare <https://www.laifitalia.it/>). At the beginning, however, we were only a few families, scattered around Italy; our numbers have increased, especially during the last two years.

There is a need for a community. Internet and socials are great and very useful, but some of us have started to feel the need to meet up in person, to let our children play/study/enjoy lives together and to allow us to support each other in our unique journeys. Un/homeschooling after all is not only a way for our children to learn, it is a way to live and it is only natural that we are seeking to have near us people that share similar values and similar paths.

Since we are moving to Galway before the end of the year, I can assure we will look for other home educators near us straight away.

Looking forward to meeting you all!



Image via Google

Q&A

Profiles in Courageous Home Ed



Each issue, we will be showing the beautiful and diverse ways in which we home educate across Ireland by featuring a Courageous Home Ed family.

This winter:

Orla Kirwin



What's your name?

Orla Kirwan

How many and what ages are your children?

Five children aged 4,6,8,9 & 10.

How long have you been home educating?

Three years.

Can you describe your family's home ed approach?

Originally structured, we had a time for school books, math, English etc... but the kids evolved (and dragging me along with them). Now I would say we are open schooling. I'm open to whatever works! We have put the school books away, they found them repetitive and restrictive. They play a lot, we have a Lego room, they delve into what interests them, they have online curriculums for math, English, science, history etc., they talk to each other, they ask endless questions, I ask Google.

How did you come across home ed as a way of life?

Mainstream school was suffocating us all, and in a random conversation someone said sure why don't you homeschool? I honestly had no idea

that home education was a possibility or even a reality in Ireland. I researched it and went to the Abbeylax meet up...I was blown away. Decision made. Our lives became our own again.

What part of Ireland do you live in?

Laois

Do you find it to be an easy or a difficult place to be home educating?

I find it very easy to home ed here. The HE community is welcoming and inclusive, there is something HE on almost every week. Our Wizard of Oz, Annette, has organised a forest school which we love. We also have the Big Blue Barn meet up in Carlow, the Athy meet up, Kildare is also on our doorstep. The forests in Laois are a great asset, libraries, fabulous playgrounds, Slieve Blooms.

What inspires you through the difficult times?

Seeing the relationships my kids now have with each other. Meeting adult children who were HE and are flourishing. Seeing my friends have the same struggles with mainstream school.

What is the best part of what you do?

Knowing my children, being an integral part of their childhood.

What is the most challenging?

To let them be... not to control their journey.

What do your children think of their home ed lives?

Fun.

Thanks, Orla! Best of luck going forward!



Notices



A Note from The Newsletter Officer

Thank you all for your wonderful feedback on our last newsletter. It has been a big learning curve and a real pleasure to experience!

Times have certainly changed in the last few years with social media tools replacing a lot of the “slower” ways of communicating. This has had a make-or-break effect on so many aspects of publishing, but as we home educators know how to do better than anyone: it’s time to adapt.

Aside from an experimental four-month stint, my family and I have been home educating from the word go—our eldest being fifteen years old. We’ve lived in Galway, Dublin, Canada and now Kildare. We have, as have so many of you have, spoken to dozens of families from all over the world about their experiences in home education.

And they are varied! The reasons people home educate and the ways in which they do so is as diverse as the places we hail from. But within that lovely jumble, there are absolutely things we all need; things that we all have in common. That is what I am trying to suss out and reflect in this newsletter.

Things like: “Am I alone in this?”, “Where is everyone?”, “How do other people do it?” and the one that keeps us all up at night, “Will they be okay?” (a.k.a. “Did I make the right choice?”)

Hopefully the stories, photos, experiences and reflections we put forward in these coming newsletters of ours can help to reassure us. My aim is to help curate a newsletter that we can use to inform, guide and connect to one another in a slow and beautiful way that social media cannot. We can use the newsletter to go back to, and read over, double check, and show our friends and family when *they* need reassurance.

Thank you all so much again for your feedback, and I look forward to hearing from you! (Wink, wink, nudge, nudge... get writing!)

Have a wonderfully rich and cosy holiday, everyone.

Kelly Lane

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