

LITTLE BIG DREAMERS

Nurturing our kids in their God-given talents

BY SHELIA ERWIN

ONE MORNING IN 2014, my husband, Hank, and I were standing together and looking out our hotel window at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre. It was one of the big "worth it" moments for us as parents. That night we would walk the red carpet for the world premiere of our two sons' newest movie.

I'm often asked how I responded when Andy and Jon said they believed God wanted them to make movies. Well, I believed my boys, and I believed in them. I also believed that God wanted me to be part of that process.

As parents, we can easily become stressed and discouraged as we juggle the many tasks of raising kids, especially highly creative children. Yet I believe that God equips those He has called. When we help cultivate our children's God-given gifts, He in turn equips them for the work He has in mind.

Parent the children God gives you

Early on, I saw some issues in my sons' temperaments that, if left unbridled, could someday rise up to destroy them. They could show such ferocity at times, and in such different ways. I had believed that it was my job as a parent to tame these wild stallions.

But I began to recognize that these traits were part of my sons' unique personalities, and if they could be brought under the control of God's wisdom and direction, they would be the making of creative, passionate thoroughbreds. That doesn't mean Hank and I avoided teaching discipline and responsibility, or helping our boys recognize sin and try to steer clear of it. But it did require a worldview adjustment, an understanding that some of our boys' qualities didn't need to be diminished but given direction. >>>

We asked God for wisdom, trusting Him that it would be given (James 1:5). And God showed up, helping us direct our boys' inner fire, guiding our parenting decisions to nurture curiosity, creativity and compassion without extinguishing their passion.

I was recently talking with Jon, now a parent himself. I mentioned that the character traits that I had to discipline him and his brother for—the ones that drove me crazy!—are the very traits that God is using in their lives in accomplishing His will. The Creator of all things can take our weaknesses and turn them into strengths.

Instead of asking why God made a child the way He did, ask Him, "What guidance and direction do You have for this child?" Be thankful for how He has made your children, always seeking wisdom in how you can best equip them.

Grace through mistakes

I was a creative child myself, which generally drove my mother up the wall. When I was about 12 years old, I spent many hours painting a portrait of my mom while she was in the hospital. When she arrived home, I met her at the door with my gift, but she could only see the oil paint all over her kitchen table. As a mom, I can understand her response. How often do we look past those surges of childhood creativity and see only the mess, the broken camera, the tools left out in the rain? In those moments with my sons, I remembered the pain I felt over my mother's lack of acknowledging my creative efforts. And I wanted to be better with my boys.

Yet I also recognized that my mom taught me how to live a more disciplined, responsible life, to not let my creativity control and

consume me. And so there is a balance here, between nurturing a child's creative spirit and helping him or her understand that we must still operate within certain practicalities and responsibilities.

As I encountered the mess and complications of raising two creative boys, I stuck to a principle of first seeing things through my sons' eyes, not just my grown-up eyes. I wanted my boys to know that I treasured their unique, fiery spirits and creativity. One of the most important things we all need to see is that we are unique creations of God who have been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

Let your children know that God has a special plan for that uniqueness. Ask God to give them a clear understanding of the work He designed them to accomplish.



Teach what you know; trust God for the rest

Hank encouraged the boys to dream big, often teaching them a key principle that would make the difference in everything they tried to do. He called it “The Wow Factor.” If someone sees your work and says, “That’s nice,” you’re not done. Go back and work some more until they say, “Wow!”

Our sons’ journey into filmmaking began with Hank’s love for radio and television. Hank worked at a Dallas TV station to help pay for seminary. After a year, the news director asked him to join their news team. Our sons grew up thinking all fathers were on TV, and in their teen years, they were allowed to work on their dad’s set. They caught the same bug their father had, working as cameramen for high school football games, editing video clips and learning to operate the machines in the

production booth. They branched out into making short films for Word of Life summer camps, using their maturing storytelling skills to integrate the Gospel message into every video that the campers took home. As these projects and others began to accumulate, they learned that God could take limited resources and do mighty work.

Step by step, God began to teach the boys how to make a movie. He did this by opening doors for projects that were just a little bit out of their existing skill set. As they were willing to learn new skills, other assignments would come. Just as God was faithful to enable our sons to do what He had called them to do, He will do the same for your children, even if it doesn’t look anything like what you’ve expected or imagined as parents.

At some point, the active role of

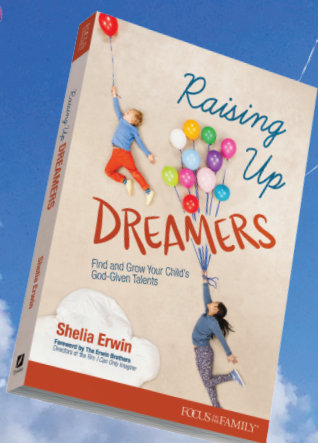
parents starts to fade from this picture. But as God equips children to grow their skills, parents have a chance for a new role: to come alongside them and be their fans. We always waited to be asked into our sons’ world of filmmaking, and when they outgrew our ability to help, we stepped aside. Now we stand on the sidelines and cheer them on.

Prepare them for disappointment

Following God’s plan doesn’t mean we get to pursue our dreams without failure and disappointment. When our boys were young, we taught them that God has His plan, and even if it is different from our plan, we will submit to it. Yes, there might be pain and disappointment and long periods of waiting, but we can thank Him for His wisdom and presence in the midst of the journey. >>>



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**Your child is an amazing mix of
hopes and ambitions,
creativity and courage.**

In *Raising Up Dreamers*, Shelia Erwin, mom of two award-winning Christian filmmakers, shows you how to nurture your kids' talents and gifts from a position of trust and rest in God. Help your little dream-chasers grow up looking to glorify the Lord and not be gripped by the world.

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He directs and instructs us by both giving and withholding.

My sons encountered a major obstacle and disappointment with their first big film. Everything was going great. The movie was finished. Then came the low point. They were told that because of the subject matter, no one wanted to distribute the movie in theaters. Even though promises had been made, they were told to just put it out on DVD and try to make their money back.

With this heartbreaking news, Andy and Jon sought God's direction in prayer. They decided that the Lord really did want this movie to be seen by a broader audience than a DVD format could offer. While Andy was editing the movie, Jon set out to raise the \$2 million needed to market and distribute the film.

So we all prayed. Eventually, the money began to arrive. But God first had to take them to the end of their human resources before He began to provide. And in October of 2012, *October Baby* opened nationwide, breaking into the top 10 movies that first weekend, though it was only on a limited number of screens.

Parents, we need to start early in teaching our kids how to face disappointments, because they are bound

to encounter obstacles on the way to their dreams. There will be times of heartache, times when they don't get in the band or their artwork isn't selected for an exhibition. Show them how to keep trying, to keep improving, to continue turning to God and trusting His guidance. So often God uses failure, and none of us ever know what He is planning.

Only part of the masterpiece

"Instead of being soloists, can we become a symphony?" Those were the words of my son Jon as he and his brother announced the co-founding of their new movie studio, Kingdom Story Company. It was a reminder that I am only part of this masterpiece. Over the years, as I did what I could to contribute to my sons' journey, I had only been one brush in the hand of a powerful God. I certainly hadn't been the only brush. He had used many brushes.

God had given my sons His creative ambition. He had prepared them for His dream for such a day as this, and that kingdom story has only just begun. ●

Shelia Erwin is the author of *Raising Up Dreamers: Find and grow your child's God-given talents*, from which this article has been adapted.



LISTEN NOW!

Follow Shelia Erwin's story of raising two dreamers who became film producers.

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