

EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

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www.excelsiorclassical.org

“Marcia’s Odyssey” by Marcia Cassady

Not all that long ago, I thought of myself as well-educated. I was an early, compulsive reader, and it carried me through secondary school with minimal effort. I logged a hundred and seventy-two undergraduate hours in the course of exploring college majors. Then, there was law school and seventeen years of continuing legal education. It should have amounted to a good education. But it did not.

My first insight into the limitations of my education came about three years ago as I thumbed through a book

left out on a table at a local bookstore. Its title was *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*. I knew just enough to recognize the sort of great minds it talked of: Plato, Cicero, Milton. The book evoked this image of these men in an ongoing conversation on

universal and ageless topics. I realized that I couldn’t even begin to articulate what the topics might be, much less form a germane question or offer a cogent response.

I didn’t buy the book that day. It was too overwhelming in

“It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.”

~ Epictetus

its scope, too intimidating in its demands. And even for my middle-school-aged children, it was too late. Certainly, it was too late for me. Or so it seemed.

A year later, two of our three children expressed interest in a year of homeschooling. I was already on sabbatical from a career in government affairs consulting, and I wanted to make sure that their basic skills were sound before they entered high school--then I wanted to do some traveling. But all the time I was planning our curriculum, I kept remembering That Book and its tantalizing vision. When I finally bought

Mom’s Night In / Prayer

Monday, January 28th, 7:00 p.m.
at the Moellers’ House

Older Student Library Trip

In order to help high school students with their research papers, we will be organizing a field to trip to the library.

Date and place TBA.

Cross Country Info:

Training for the spring semester will begin the week of January 11. Practices will be Monday – Thursday 2:45-4:00pm at New Albany High School. Heather has asked that students attend practice at least 2 out of the 4 days – preferably Monday and Wednesday. This semester will be geared for the older students (grades 6-12). A few distance runners from New Albany High School will be training with our team during the week.



a copy and read it carefully, I began to see ways we could achieve some of its goals. Maybe we couldn't become fluent translators of Latin and Greek in the time we had, but surely we could beef up history, tackle some classical works in translation, establish a few salient points in the history of Western thought.

In that remarkable year, my sons did manage to begin the study of Latin. As it turned out, Highlands Latin School (www.thelatinchool.org), Cheryl Lowe's cottage school, was a scant fifteen minutes down the road. Both boys made significant progress, even as 7th and 9th grade beginners. At the same time, we immersed ourselves in history at home, lingering on that of the Greeks and Romans. We watched

videotapes from The Teaching Company; we watched historical films and documentaries; we incorporated language arts into our history program. We tackled bits of Gilgamesh and Genesis, *The Iliad*, *Aesop's Fables*, Herodotus' *Histories*, and Thucydides. We read Plato's *Apology* and the *Timaeus*, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, *The Aeneid*, passages from Augustine's *City of God*, *Beowulf*, selected *Canterbury Tales*, and *The Prince*. The gains my children made exceeded all my hopes.

By year's end, even our dinner conversation had begun to reflect an astounding degree of critical thinking on the part of the boys. As for me, I was now able to at least follow that Great Conversation, to formulate a few questions of my own about human existence. But something was still missing.

It was then that Cheryl Lowe invited me to join the faculty of Highlands Latin School and undertake a new Classical Studies course devoted to comprehensive study of *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Accepting her offer meant a commitment to read each of these challenging works at least three times and to author all teaching materials. But more intimidating by far, it meant standing before a room full of other people's children once a week and knowing enough about the material to keep them interested for three hours. Ultimately, I said yes, despite feeling foolish, even irresponsible. It was a risk I felt compelled to take.

I got underway with the first reading of *The Iliad* immediately, and I soon realized why it is more often reserved for collegiate level study. I'm embarrassed to admit how much I had missed in that first reading. Between the second and third reading, I began work on

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Upcoming Events

TeenPact

TeenPact is a Christian government leadership camp for kids 8-19. Students have classes at the state capital and learn about the political process and the workings of state government. They analyze public policy and meet with political leaders. Many Excelsior students have participated in the past few years and have learned a great deal. More information can be found at teenpact.com.

4 Day Class (ages 13-19) -

February 18 - 21 \$169

1 Day Class (ages 8-12) -

February 22 \$34 1st child / \$29 2nd

Public Speaking (ages 13-19) -

February 22 \$35

National Latin Exam

This year the exam will be March 14 at 8:00 a.m. The cost of the exam is \$6.00 per student.

Nashville Field Trip

If anyone would like to go to Nashville and visit the Parthenon, Children's Museum, Art Museum, etc sometime this spring, please see or e-mail Janna Crowe ASAP.

teaching materials. I read books and essays on every facet of ancient history that could shed light on this ancient text, becoming immersed in Homer's world. And I have it on good authority that I became an insufferable bore in the process. I couldn't seem to comment on anything without some Homeric parallel that needed a lengthy explanation.

Then, in the waning weeks of summer, I read *The Iliad* for the third time. This time, my eyes burned as Andromache pleaded with Hektor. I laughed out loud at Hera's name-calling in the Theomachy, the Battle of the Gods. I winced at the image of Priam kissing the hands that had killed his sons.

In taking stock of all that I had learned, I realized that my anxiety about teaching Homer had shifted in its focus. I was no longer concerned that I would run out of things to discuss halfway through a three-hour class. Now, I wondered how I could possibly fit it all in.

This week, my class of seventeen students, grades 7 through 12, will take the leviathan exam that completes our twelve weeks of work with *The Iliad*. I still don't have definitive answers to the questions that so worried me as I began, but the classroom experiences and the work my students have done have given me great confidence about how much has been achieved.

Two weeks ago, we paused to reflect on the image of Achilles, capped with divine flame, screaming in the ditch from which he watched the battle for the remains of Patroklos, his cry joined by that of Athene. There, we paused to read a short, untitled poem by a young classical scholar turned soldier on a brief leave from the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign of World War I. On the island of Imbros, in the shadow of Troy, the soldier faced his own death with reflections that ended with these lines:

*Was it so hard, Achilles, So very hard to die?
Thou knowest, and I know not; So much the happier
am I.*

*I will go back this morning From Imbros o'er the
sea. Stand in the trench, Achilles, Flame-capped, and
shout for me.*

In the seconds after those lines were read aloud, a motionless silence gripped my classroom full of students, as all of us experienced the power of this ancient image speaking across three millennia to a soldier on a modern field of battle.

That same stillness held when we envisioned Priam at the knees of Achilles, pleading for the slain and abused corpse of his son Hektor, on whom a grief-maddened Achilles had taken vengeance for the killing of his closest friend, Patroklos. Each of them saw mirrored in the other the struggle to accept the unbearable, forging a bond that transcended their hatreds--a bond that restored humanity in the acceptance of its darkest realities. It was an insight into the serenity that attends the acceptance of that which cannot be changed, serenity that Homer captured in the image of an old man and a young man despoiled by grief and bound together in a moment of unspeakable empathy.

In these moments, I have become conscious of the profound difference the immersion in one author and one book can make in a person's depth of knowledge. I have also come to fully understand the ability of great literature to shape our experience of life.

To see greatness and nobility in the work of a Homer is to be better able to see it in our own lives today. In every movie I see and every book I read, the echoes of three millennia resound. My first forty-four years have been spent as one who sits before a symphony orchestra with only the ability to hear a single violin. But our Creator surely equipped us for so much more, for the vast score of our humanity is not written for solo violin. It is a work of awesome complexity, made comprehensible by recurring themes and motifs, driven onward by the rhythm of cycles and seasons, and orchestrated for the voices of every age in recorded history. It is music I have finally begun to hear.

Marcia Cassidy is the classical studies instructor at Highlands Latin School. Nearly all of her students scored above 90 on her 20-page final over The Iliad.

Preparing for January...

January Headmasters

January 11th - Fradenburg

January 18th - Green

January 25th - Crowe

January Clean-Up

January 11th - Snyder family

January 18th - Crampton family

January 25th - Hill family

January 11th - Wendy's

January 18th - Pizza Dr.

January 25th - Danver's

Please leave your completed order form and money in the box labeled "LUNCH" in the foyer of Bldg A a week before the lunch you're ordering.

Lunch

