

Table of Contents

Foreword by Robin Sampson	9
Ch. 1 Introduction: Why Did I Write This Book?	15
Section I: Finding a Safe Place to Write	19
Ch. 2 No Safe Place to Write	23
Ch. 3 A Safe Place to Write: Introduction to the Writing Group	31
Section II: Writing Education Principles	39
Ch. 4 Learning from Great Writing Teachers: Research as Our Foundation	43
Ch. 5 How Writers Write: Creating the Writer’s Environment	61
Ch. 6 The Parent’s Role as Writing Mentor	71
Ch. 7 Parent to Parent: Three Major Myths About the Writing Life	87
Section III: Publishing Process for the Writing Group	93
Ch. 8 Beginning the Publishing Process	95
Ch. 9 Rejection Day	103
Ch. 10 Completing the Publishing Process	109
Ch. 11 More Ideas to Encourage Writing	115

Section IV: Writing Through Life	123
Ch. 12 Writing as a Life Tool	125
Ch. 13 Writing Through Grief and Loss	141
Section V: The Importance of the Family Writing Lifestyle.....	149
Ch. 14 Nurturing the Family Writing Lifestyle and Rituals: Why Bother?.....	153
Ch. 15 What Does God Say? A Biblical View of Writing and Family Traditions.....	163
Ch. 16 A Wake-up Call for Parents About Literacy	175
Section VI: Celebrating With Writing	185
Ch. 17 Weaving Writing and Arts Traditions into Daily Life	189
Ch. 18 Weaving Literacy into Annual Celebrations	215
Ch. 19 In Closing: The Figurative Hope Chest.....	227
Twelve Principles for Nurturing the Family Writing Lifestyle.	229
Section VII: Resources and Bibliography	231
Bibliography	233
Recommended Books and Magazines About Writing	239
Publishers of Young People	241
A Month of Quotes.....	242
About the Author	246

Dedicated to

Suzanne,

Janelle, Natalie,

and Maria,

for making the writing process magical.

Magical writing is contagious.

Lucy Calkins

Foreword

by Robin Sampson

As an author, publisher, homeschool mother, and educator, I am thrilled to see the completion of this book. I was excited as soon as I saw the words “A Family Writing Lifestyle.” Mary Ann shares valuable insights not only about writing itself, but about passing on the gift of written expression as a family tradition. What a gift to pass on to your children—the ability to capture insights, record memories, and relate perceptions and feelings.

We have eleven children ages 5 to 34. I have always encouraged my children to write. Almost twenty years ago, when we began our homeschool journey teaching my children to write well was one of my main goals. The years of writing encouragement have paid off. All my grown children write regularly. Even my very busy 32-year old daughter (a mother of five) finds time to relate touching thoughts and memories through her family scrapbook journaling. Now I take pleasure in priceless annotated scrapbook pages of my grandchildren. I continue to encourage my youngest children to write daily. My five-year old loves to dictate his fascinating stories as I record them. My seven-year old son enjoys copywork and writing and illustrating letters to servicemen. He has written or dictated stories about horses, baseball, and knights (the same type of writing his 28-year old brother wrote when he was seven).

The importance of teaching your children to write cannot be overstated. Skillful writers influence society. Christian writers have the privilege of encouraging, teaching, and strengthening others to have a closer relationship with God. The late Dr. Paul Bubna, former President of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, wrote, “It may be true that a picture is worth a thousand words, but we must not miss the fact that writing words has a unique power all its own. Something powerful happens to the person who writes the words. It is one thing to think the thought, it is quite another to put it into words and see it on paper, or even a computer screen. That process opens a door of intimacy with one’s self that may be unmatched

any other way.” Our spiritual lives, our success in the work world, and our social networks all require the skill of writing. Writing skills are vital in today’s changing culture. Written communication declined during the age of the telephone but with the development of the computer people are writing again in the form of emails and blogging (on line journaling).

In my book, *A Heart of Wisdom Teaching Approach*, I encourage parents to teach their children to write to learn, also known as writing across the curriculum. Mary Ann embraces the same concept because she understands how writing helps to generate thoughts and to organize them logically and concisely. Writing can bring experiences, thoughts and opinions together. We write to express ideas, share stories, document history, imagine the future, express love, and dispense humor. When students tackle a subject, they can experiment with different techniques and strategies for writing. They discover new ideas, new ways of thinking and new methods of expressing themselves. When you teach your children to document their thoughts, feelings, and ideas on paper, you are equipping them with a gift they will use for a lifetime. Mary Ann demonstrates the practical steps to develop this type of writing into a family lifestyle.

This book will be a useful guide for any teacher and especially beneficial to homeschoolers. Most homeschoolers are fond of Charlotte Mason’s educational philosophies which emphasize real-life activities over academic exercises. Mary Ann agrees with Mason explaining how writing assignments that are viewed as academic exercises cause the child to lose the adventure of writing. Mason’s admirers will appreciate how Mary Ann’s unique approach is in agreement with Mason’s philosophy “... we believe that children’s’ minds are capable of digesting real knowledge, so we provide a rich, generous curriculum that exposes children to many interesting, living ideas and concept.” Mary Ann will show you how families working on individual and joint writing projects can motivate children to catch the excitement of relevant writing and come to understand that the art of writing is a powerful life tool.

I became eager to try out Mary Ann’s methods when I read how she taught her children to write using a real-life approach following the

rules of an adult writing group. She posed as a mock publisher to lead her children through the writing process from query letters to contracts and finished publications, complete with book signings, and marketing techniques. What a great idea! About a dozen years ago when my grown children were young and learning to write they each created a book using *Creating Books with Children* by Valerie Bendt as a guide. Through the creation of their books they learned the writing, illustrating, editing processes but they never learned the query and submission processes. Here we are over a decade later writing again, with my youngest children, using Mary Ann's ideas. I look forward to adding more finished writing products to my somewhat yellowed and faded but treasured papers of childhood thoughts, stories, inspiration, opinions, and beliefs to our family files.

Although Mary Ann emphasizes forming a writing group, this is only one segment of her collection of ideas. This book contains much more. You will also learn how writing activities and rituals can be woven through the day, year, and even throughout life. Activities include ideas for family journaling, letter writing, Bible journaling, goal journaling, celebration journaling, apology letters, thank-you notes, and even writing to deal with loss and grief. This book is not about the educational nuts and bolts of writing, but is intended to celebrate and inspire writing in the home. Nurturing a Write Relationship will help you develop a family writing lifestyle and tradition.

- Section I teaches you the importance of creating a safe place to write, allowing children to experiment with language. Children will become confident writers when they receive support and encouragement as they move through the writing process.
- Section II details writing education principles. Mary Ann explains how to learn from great writers and how to be a writing mentor to your children. She also dispels several writing myths.
- Section III explains the publishing process for a writing group from vision to revision to the completed process.

- Section IV encourages you to develop a family writing lifestyle with family rituals, traditions, and celebrations and investigates a Biblical view of writing.
- Section V includes many ideas for integrating writing into daily life and closes with the twelve writing principles of a family writing lifestyle.

Mary Ann's book is full of several first-rate unique ideas to teach children to write that make writing a fun family experience. She provides an attractive combination of solid advice and clever insights on how to motivate and cultivate your children's writing. I'm giving this book to each of my grown children to support them in their efforts to teach their children to write. I hope your family will spend time developing a family writing lifestyle. I promise it will be time well spent and the benefits are many.





The right to write is a birthright, a spiritual dowry that gives us the keys to the kingdom.

Julia Cameron

I begin with the first sentence and trust to Almighty God for the second.

Laurence Sterne



Acknowledgements

With many thanks to:

—Robin Sampson and her staff at Heart of Wisdom Publishing for bringing this project to completion.

—John for his love and tangible support.

—Suzanne, Janelle, Erin, Kristine, Tracy, Michael, and Craig for allowing me to be part of their extraordinary writing group.

—PeggySue Wells for her partnership in writing the *What to Do When You Don't Know What to Say* series and other ideas she has inspired in this book.

Chapter 1



Introduction: Why Did I Write This Book?

*Writing is an exploration.
You start from nothing and learn as you go.*
E. L. Doctorow

I never intended to write this book. My children had actually groaned through the years as I asked them to participate in dinner table writing games. My husband, who hates to write, and children had laughed at me, constantly making fun of my unusual pen-to-paper traditions. Sometimes they would invite their friends to our celebrations so they could witness in person how crazy I was. As teenagers, my daughters would even include their boyfriends. Then **everybody** could laugh at me.

Yet my oldest daughter recently asked, “Mom, can you write down all those silly traditions so that we can do them with our kids?” I was shocked...my offspring wanted to continue the craziness? (I never doubted that laughter was the most important part of the process.)

I am writing this book because the strength of traditions lies in passing them on. This book is offered as a gift to my children and grandchildren. As a reader, you are welcome to share the journey with your own family.

The family is a natural writing group, a safe place to encourage a passion for writing. The professional writing group I participated in for ten years was a safe place to share our writing and our lives, encourage one another’s projects, as well as develop a joint book project. At the same time I was involved with the adult writers’ group, my ten-year-old

daughter was invited to join a children's writing group. The young writers enjoyed meeting real-life authors, so their teacher invited me to meet with them and explain the publishing process. Then I thought of a crazy idea which their teacher enthusiastically embraced: I wanted to pose as a mock publisher, to lead the children through the authentic process, from query letters to contracts to finished publications, complete with book signings, interviews, and other marketing techniques. Over the course of one year, these young writers learned how to move from brainstorming ideas to selling a completed product. The publishing process is outlined in Section Three as a model for any writing group to follow.

I knew from my experience as a Suzuki music teacher that when music study is relegated to being an academic subject, children cannot flourish musically. Children do not become fluent musicians by practicing an instrument for thirty minutes a day. Immersion in a musical world, where musical experiences are woven throughout the day in the fabric of children's lives, creates natural musicians, from daily listening to great works of music and attending concerts, to singing and playing instruments with one's family and friends. A musical lifestyle must first be modeled by parents and mentors. Children learn most effectively when they feel that they are honing skills which are relevant and useful in their present daily lives as well as for their future.

Creating fluent writers requires the same immersion. When writing assignments are viewed as academic exercises, the adventure of writing is lost. When families can develop their own writing-group community for working on individual and joint writing projects, children catch the excitement of relevant writing. They come to understand that the art of writing is a powerful life tool. In the chapters to follow, you will see that writing activities and rituals can be woven throughout one's day, year, and even throughout life. More important than developing natural writing skills, however, your family will also experience one of the most tangible ways available to nurture relationships. Expressing ourselves through the written word cannot help but be relational, as we process life's challenges by putting pen to paper.

This book is not about the educational nuts and bolts of teaching writing. I will wisely leave that to the expertise of trained English teachers. This book is intended to celebrate and inspire writing in the home. You

will find my favorite quotes about writing inserted between chapters in this book, and Scripture verses in Chapter 15 to use as writing prompts for journaling. Before you can share the adventure of writing with your family, you must experience it yourself. Do not read further until you find a corresponding journal to keep handy as you read the following chapters. Write down your responses to quotes, questions, and verses; brainstorm about ideas for your family, and record flashes of insight. Stop reading and start writing whenever you feel inspired.

Think of *Nurturing the WRITE Relationship* as inspired by a homophone. Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled in various ways and have different meanings. Some examples are knight/night and meet/meat. This book is based on write, rite, and right. The integration of these words summarizes this book in a nutshell:

- Write Understand the importance of, and develop the use of, the written word.
- Rite Understand the importance of cultivating rituals in family life.
- Right Understand the importance of communication in developing right relationships.

This book is a baton. Our oldest daughter graduates from college this spring, our younger daughter is a college freshman, and our son attends high school. This baton is lovingly handed to you, especially those of you with young children. The bond you cultivate through these writing traditions can build a foundation which will last a lifetime.

Writing rights things.

Julia Cameron



Section I

**Finding a
Safe Place to Write**



One of the most potent writer's blocks I know is the fear of loneliness that people associate with the writing life. Not writing is the lonely thing.

Julia Cameron

For me, writing something down was the only road out... I hated childhood, and spent it sitting behind a book waiting for adulthood to arrive. When I ran out of books I made up my own. At night, when I couldn't sleep, I made up stories in the dark.

Ann Tyler

I started writing when I was five. It never occurred to me that it was something you were supposed to worry about. You learn to write by doing it.

Madeleine L'Engle



Chapter 2



No Safe Place to Write

*The whole duty of a writer is to please and satisfy himself,
and the true writer always plays to an audience of one.*

E. B. White

I still remember the knot in my stomach. I dreaded going to school that day in fifth grade.

Our 25-page world geography reports were due. As always, I had become totally lost in the project and written a 565-page novel, complete with dialogue and characters for each country. I never set out to write a lengthy volume...it just happened. But then that fateful day arrived when I needed to bring it to school and face the taunts of my peers. I often tried to hide my writing in my desk, but inevitably the moment would come when our teacher said, "Please hand in your papers."

"Teacher's pet...teacher's pet...you just want to make the rest of us look bad." My classmates' comments haunted me. There was no way for me to explain to them that I simply loved to write. No malice was intended.

There was no safe place to write in school. Having been promoted early in elementary school, I remained the youngest and smallest student in each of my classes. As an only child, I had no older siblings to protect me, and I was easily intimidated by my bigger classmates. Understanding teachers would discreetly excuse me from physical education activities, a daily nightmare where I could not physically compete with my peers, to read books on the sidelines. I would pray that it would rain during recess

so we could remain in the classroom to continue working and writing. Yes, I was an odd child. I identify with Katherine Paterson, the Newbery Medal-winning author of children's books, who writes:

When people ask me what qualifies me to be a writer for children, I say I was once a child. But I was not only a child, I was, better still, a weird little kid, and though I would never choose to give my own children this particular preparation for life, there are few things, apparently, more helpful to a writer than having once been a weird little kid.

I'm sure there are plenty of fine writers who have overcome the disadvantages of a normal childhood and have gone on to do great things. It's just that we weird little kids seem to have a head start.

Katherine Paterson
Gates of Excellence

Like Katherine Paterson, I found refuge in the world of books and writing. It was my safe retreat, a place where life could be any way I desired. Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* was one of my favorite books. I was entranced with the lands named Dictionopolis and Digitopolis. Norton Juster understood those of us who are citizens of Dictionopolis and have a passion for words above all else. Authors and characters were my personal friends.

Something magical and powerful happened when I began writing. To be alone with pen and paper was sheer bliss. I would become totally immersed in the creative process, losing all track of time, similar to my experiences of playing the piano and composing music. I would later learn that this experience is called "flow," a psychological state of surrender. As an adult in an age of technology, I've found the process of putting pen to paper has changed into using a computer, but the magic remains the same. Research and writing were to become my adult passions.

Through reading the biographies of other authors, I have discovered one childhood trait they shared in common—the world of books and writing was their refuge and escape from a hostile world too.

While other students may have discouraged my writing, exceptional teachers encouraged it. My high school honors English teachers were a lifeline for me. These mentors shared their passion for literature. They required us to daily WRITE...WRITE...WRITE...write about our personal experiences, write about what we knew. They emphasized a clear, concise writing style, forever crying to “eliminate the jargon.” One experience during my sophomore year stands out.

Our honors class was filled with bright, unusually verbal students. Lively debates about literature were common. Of course, I never said a word. I had learned from past school experiences that staying invisible was my safest coping mechanism. My teacher entered the class one morning and said, “It is time for all of you big-mouths to be quiet for a minute. Sometimes people can write what they cannot say. I want you to listen to an excellent piece of writing.” We assumed that she would read a work by one of her favorite authors. I was shocked as she proceeded to read a paper that I had written. The class was silent, and my teacher affirmed me without mentioning my name. Her message was clear—keep writing.

My home was a safe place to write. Writing was part of our lifestyle. Books were everywhere. My mother had been a journalist in her youth. My grandmother had been famous for writing letters so beautiful and profound that they could be framed. Writing to friends, writing thank-you notes, writing at every opportunity was a given in our home. My mother immigrated to the United States as a young person and remained intimate with friends she had not spoken with in decades. They had written letters—not notes, but deep, personal, lengthy conversations on paper. My mother also put love notes in my dad’s lunchbox when she prepared his lunch every morning.

I grew up knowing that writing was a critical part of life. It made anything possible. Even today I solve problems by writing. I process life by seeing it on paper.

As much as I enjoyed a lifetime of writing, however, I never intended to become a professional author. That career path took me by surprise. I published my research after graduate school and continued to write for various journals. The articles soon developed into books. Having left my