



Christmas Dinosaurs in a Topsy-Turvy 2020

By Nancy Hale, Homeschooling Parent and Guest Writer

"I want a dinosaur one." Nathan's voice rang out sure and decided.

"Nathan, honey," I answered laying out a bell, a gingerbread man, and a Christmas tree, "a dinosaur isn't exactly an appropriate cookie cutter for Christmas ornaments."

"Mommy, that is what I want. Pleeese!"

I gave my husband an exasperated look as if to say my best-made plans were being shot through like a target on a range. Chuckling, my husband put his arm around me and said, "Hey, I know the feeling. I just go with the flow. I'm an 'unschooler.'"

The evening wore on as I witnessed my detailed "Project Bake Christmas Tree Ornaments" quickly spiraled out of control or at least passed what I thought was right for our home-educated family. The smell of ornaments baked and burned wafted through the house as little children smiled, covered in more paint than their ornaments. Finally, exhausted from chasing toddlers and kids and from smoke inhalation, I collapsed into bed, leaving more than a dozen salt-flour ornaments to dry out from their drowned state in acrylic paint and glitter. Sleep did not come easily as I thought how often I became exasperated when life activities and situations did not culminate in the way I had dreamed. I asked myself—my dreams or His dreams?

Am I the Only One?

I cannot believe that I am the only mother or homeschooler who grapples with these realities. You see, I have been involved in homeschooling for over 20 years—and still counting. Our oldest child, Lyndsey, now a college graduate, became the first student to proceed through my ambitious goal to educate our four kids. Our second child and only son, Nathan, is now finishing high school and will soon leave my tutorial care. Two more girls who are still at home, Kate and Sarah, need me to guide their learning for many years to come. I often ask myself if my ambitious goal was too big for me to attain. Was it truly Nancy's dream or God's?

Then comes the year 2020. How many of us involved in home education are tempted to grumble, complain, and moan when life throws us a curve ball and we don't even own a glove? Psalm 37:23-24 (NKJV) says, "The steps of a good man [or woman] are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand." In this psalm, David discusses the prosperity of the wicked, which seems so unjust. Yet David had seen victory, persecution, and worst of all, his own moral failings. Indeed, his plans had gone awry, and his dreams had failed. Even the wicked prospered, he noted. Despite all that, David knew his steps were STILL ordered by God.

Home-education is fraught with victories—some so small that they go unnoticed—and failures, which are always noticed. Sometimes it is so tempting to fret because our aspirations are not coming to fruition—at least in the way we had hoped. Although in an arguably different circumstance, in the psalm, David was tempted to compare his situation to that of others and despair. Despite his desperation, failures, and human suffering, he always came back to the Rock of his salvation.

A Reality or the Ideal?

In what aspects of your home or homeschool have you received a Christmas dinosaur instead of your ideal of a Christmas bell? Perhaps there are children who seem to grumble endlessly, a husband who does not live up to your expectations of his responsibilities as a father, a seventh grader who still does not grasp fractions, a seemingly constant bombarding of interruptions, a pregnancy not progressing as smooth as the previous one, financial setbacks, a serious illness, or an unexpected 2020? Maybe it is the mundane endless mound of laundry or the age-old question, "What's for dinner?" In such times, it is tempting to second guess our decisions.

Yet in all our efforts, from the daily responsibilities to the circumstances that threaten to swallow us whole, our steps are ordered by our omnipotent God. He has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us, and all things will work together for the good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose. Our steps are truly ordered by Him who will perfect all things in the end. We have this great hope and comfort in His open arms, and we can comfort each other with these magnificent promises.

I have a salt-flour dinosaur that hangs proudly from my Christmas tree, painted by little fingers with as much heart and soul as Michelangelo used when painting the Sistine chapel. Gleaming with red glitter, it is one of the crowning glories of each Christmas season and a reminder that my steps are indeed ordered by the One who made me and loves me. And when I am still tempted to despair, I can embrace and trust my God even when He gives me Christmas dinosaurs.

Nancy Hale, by her own confession, is a “long-term, coffee-loving, home-schooling mom to four children (one graduate and three still on the joyful journey).” She has spent 21 years in ministry to children and families. Today, she resides in Winter Haven, Florida, with “my three teens, one mini-Australian shepherd, one tuxedo cat, and my amazing husband, Tony, of 28.5 years.”

Submitted by **Wes Eby**, global representative of Nazarene Educators Worldwide and a friend to Nancy Hale.