

Waldorf Essentials

Early Childhood & Kindergarten
(including *Before the Journey*)
SAMPLE



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*Where is the book in which the teacher can read about what teaching is? The children themselves are this book. We should not learn to teach out of any book other than the one lying open before us and consisting of the children themselves. In order to read in this book, however, we need the widest possible interest in each individual child, and nothing must divert us from this. ~
Rudolf Steiner, Human Values in Education*

Rhythm in the First Seven Years

Birth to age 3. There is so much written on caring for infant, toddler and young child (see our recommendations.) I don't want to focus this space on saying what others have said so well. This will instead focus on practical measures to rhythm and learning how to hold the space for your children. I will start by saying that I have been an Attachment Parenting parent for the better part of sixteen years. I have nothing but the greatest respect for all the late nights, family beds, cloth diapers and gentle discipline that goes into parenting differently. It can be a challenge. After being at this for a while, I have worked on key components that help make this method of living and parenting as fulfilling for Mom AND Dad as it is nurturing for the child.

Many Waldorf resources would have you think that rhythm is just about deciding what day you will bake bread and which day you will do laundry. Rhythm of the home and of those in the home is much deeper than this. It is about holding the space. What does that mean? It means that you are emotionally able to approach the day and your child, this carries into your rhythm and further into how you live and what attitudes you bring to your child.

For years when I was a young mother, I watched seasoned moms. The good ones were like the Pied Piper to their children. It didn't matter what was going on, Mom was collected and her children seemed genuinely happy to be with her and obedient. (There's a word that might make you bristle, don't worry, we will talk all about discipline and obedience in another section.) I wanted to be like these Pied Piper moms. I wanted what they had. Their children enjoyed family time; any fights were dealt with swiftly, everyone appeared nurtured and happy. I pondered and prayed about how to bring this to fruition for my own children. At the time I was a mess. I was in an unhappy marriage and I was anxious and grumpy. I knew that we needed rhythm but I didn't know how to bring it about. All that I read was pretty cryptic. I decide what day to bake, clean, run errands and then the rest would fall in place. Right? No. Not right. This is the number one reason that people come to Waldorf and struggle. There is more to it. We have to hold the space. In order to hold the space, we have to be mentally healthy and emotionally ready. We have to be rested. We have to make a plan. Rhythm is ALL of these things.

After floundering for a while, I was lucky enough to have a great Waldorf teacher as a mentor and she helped me to realize just how much of it had to do with me. All of it had to do with me! Children generally act the same each day, we are the ones that change. In working with my mentor, I was taught how to spiritually work on me and then seek guidance for my children. This was a far cry from just praying for my situation to get better! The instant I humbled myself and sought guidance, things changed. This doesn't mean that you have to become religious to get your rhythm to work, far from it. I work with many families each year and help them to tap into Spirit where they are. It is the ego of humanity that separates us, we do not have to be separate. I found that rhythm and inner work went hand in hand. The better I was at tending to my own inner work, the better my parenting became. You are probably worrying now how that will even be possible, you have these tiny babes and you rarely get a moment to yourself. Don't worry, we will work on that next.

Sleep cycles are something you will hear a lot about in Waldorf circles and it is something I spend a lot of focus on. This part of your rhythm might send you kicking and screaming and flinging this book across the room! Stick with me! You will be a better parent and a more sane mother if you can get enough sleep. The sleep before midnight counts so much more in your body's restoration than the hours caught after midnight. This can be hard if you are used to staying up and sleeping in. Ask

yourself what sort of sleep habits you want your children to form and then go from there. These early years are very important for forming sleep patterns that last a lifetime. My recommendation is that you go to bed between 9 and 10 p.m. each night. This will give you plenty of sleep even with a co-sleeping, nursing baby. This should allow you to rise before your baby and perhaps get to feeling like a human before you have to put on your Mom face. If this isn't your first baby and you are struggling to get your footing or to regain your ground after another baby, remember to be kind to yourself. Getting your sleep sorted will help you so much. All children go through cycles and some struggle with sleep from the womb it seems, but you can find ways to work with it and not feel like a zombie all the time. A well rested mom is worth much more than a clean kitchen or folded laundry. Get your rest!

Once you are in the groove of getting more rest, that alone will help you with rhythm and holding the space. Holding the space is something that comes gradually as you become more confident about Waldorf, more connected to your children and more sure about your path. Give yourself time, but flex those muscles daily. When you do your part, you will find that the children will more often than not do theirs as well. Peace will abound. Of course there are times when it is stressful or you are tired or sick, fill-in-the-blank, but on the whole, a happy mama will make for a happy home.

Now for those nuts and bolts of rhythm that you read about when researching Waldorf. Everything has a rhythm, the day, the week, the seasons, the year... everything. You have it even if you don't think you have it. Rhythm just refers to the ebb and flow of your days. It is such an emphasized part of the Waldorf method that many might ask themselves "just why do we need rhythm?" Rhythm allows our children (and us) to know what to expect. On crazy days we might think "why do I do this to myself?" well it's out of those crazy days that positive change can come. These are the days where we learn. We can ask ourselves how we did at holding the space. Begin thinking of your current rhythm, write it down, how do your weeks feel? Are they hurried? Too busy? Do you get enough down time for yourself? Enough sleep? Sunlight? Water? Enough play time with your spouse and children? A date night? Those are the things to consider. Once you have written out your week, think about things that you personally want to change, while thinking about it, keep in mind that smaller changes over time tend to be much more lasting than vast changes all at once. Many Waldorf families find it easy to set aside days for doing certain things, for instance my week has at times looked a bit like this:

Monday – Cleaning in the a.m.

Tuesday – Afternoon play dates

Wednesday – Baking

Thursday – Errands/field trips in the late afternoon

Friday, Saturday & Sunday - Off**

**Off means that we don't have extra plans, but we do keep our home rhythms of eating and sleeping, etc. as best as we can.

While this is our general rhythm, school is of course in there too, generally being completed by lunch as we start our school day around 9 a.m. Since you are concerned with the early years, I would focus more on flow. Look at your rhythm and decide if you want to incorporate a circle time and story to your day. Don't get over zealous! Especially if your children are young, you will be at this for many years, ease yourself into it. If you have older children and are incorporating kindergarten, remember

to keep it light, bring your child into the rhythm of your days. This isn't school at home, remind yourself of this as needed.

In planning your rhythm, there are some fun things to keep in mind. Something many families work with is a color of the day, grain, planet and even scent. Steiner fathered some of these ideas, others were taken from religious traditions of old that are still alive today. I like to try and see if we can all dress somehow in the color of the day and also eat the grain of the day in a meal.

Day	Planet	Grain	Color	Scent
Monday	Moon	Rice	Purple/violet	Jasmine
Tuesday	Mars	Barley	Red	Clove
Wednesday	Mercury	Millet	Yellow	Copal
Thursday	Jupiter	Rye	Orange	Cedar
Friday	Venus	Oats	Green	Rose
Saturday	Saturn	Corn	Indigo	Myrrh
Sunday	Sun	Wheat	White	Frankincense

Lessons outside the home. Many kids these days are busier than we could have ever imagined; running to lessons all week long. I suggest that if you plan to utilize lessons as part of your schooling that you limit each child to one or two things, and that at least one of those things be some sort of movement class. I caution mothers against enrolling children under 7 or even 9 in any sort of dance class that disturbs the lower chakras. A great eurhythmy teacher once told me that the movements in some dance classes for children this age can awaken senses that they know not yet what to do with, so keep their movements pure and those chakras closed as long as possible.

I allow my children to take up to two outside lessons each. This has depended greatly on our rhythm, the ages of the children and how it worked with our family. We have also had long periods of time when none of the children had activities outside of church and friends. Do not let society dictate your parenting. A toddler and preschooler do not need excessive socializing. A kindergartner doesn't need to take the same number of classes that an older child would take. Remember that you are in charge!

Storytelling

Storytelling and Waldorf education go hand in hand – this really makes some people stressed out! I get a lot of “I am not creative!” or “I can’t tell stories!” Storytelling is a dying art. Some of us sadly came from homes where there were not many stories. I can’t remember many. Most adults of my generation were television addicts or at the very least, the television was a large part of home life. Television and now computers and other electronic devices have taken the place of storytelling in many homes. It is not unusual for me to work with a family for first grade and have all the Grimm’s stories be brand new – even popular ones like Snow White and Cinderella. Coming to Waldorf for your family is a way to rekindle storytelling for yourself and your children.

Before we jump into creating your own stories, let’s talk about ways that you can make stories that you may know or may read in this curriculum come to life. Pick a favorite story. For simplicity sake, let’s pick a fun simple one like The Giant Turnip. The basic parts of this story are that there is a giant turnip in the ground and it takes the farmer, his wife, a child, the dog, the cat and a mouse to pull it from the ground.

The story can be told very simply....

There once was a farmer that loved turnips. He prayed one year for a giant turnip crop. His wish came true. Instead of many small ones, he had one giant turnip. He tried and tried to pull it from the ground with no luck. He called his wife to help. She held on to the farmer and they both pulled with no luck. They called their son. The son held on to the wife who held on to the farmer and they all three pulled with no luck. The son called the dog. The dog held on to the son who held on to the wife who held on to the farmer and they all pulled with no luck. The dog called the cat. The cat held on to the dog the dog held on to the son the son held on to the wife, the wife held on to the farmer and they all pull with no luck. The cat called the mouse. The mouse held the cat’s tail, the cat held on to the dog, the dog held on to the son, the son held on to the wife, the wife held on to the farmer and they all pulled and pulled and pulled. Suddenly POP! They all ate turnip stew for months.

Then you can make it more elaborate...

In a land far away, there was a farmer that loved turnips. He planted rows and rows and rows of turnips and his wife helped him each year at harvest. One year the farmer prayed for a giant turnip crop. He planted his rows and oddly only one plant came up. This was no ordinary plant, this plant was giant. A giant turnip. He cared for it lovingly all season long and when it came time to harvest, he tried and tried to pull it from the ground with no luck. Confused and hungry, the farmer called his wife to help. She wrapped her arms around the farmer and they both pulled and pulled but with no luck. Then the farmer decided to call his son. The son was tall and strong, surely the three of them could pull the turnip. The son held on to the wife, she held on to the farmer and they all three pulled and pulled with no luck. The son decided to call the dog. The dog was a big sheep dog that the farmer used to herd sheep. Surely with the dog they could pull the turnip. The dog held on to the son, who held on to the wife, who held on to the farmer and they all pulled and pulled with no luck. The dog called the barn cat. She was a strong mother cat who had given birth to many great hunters, surely the four of them would be able to pull the turnip. The cat held on to the dog, the dog held on to the son, the son held on to the wife, the wife held on to the farmer and they all pulled and pulled with no luck. The cat called the mouse. This was no ordinary mouse. This mouse was super. He was tiny but he

was super. The mouse would brag that he could tie up ten bad guys all with one hand! The mouse grabbed the cat's tail, the cat held on to the dog, the dog held on to the son, the son held on to the wife, the wife held on to the farmer and they all pulled and pulled and pulled. Suddenly POP! The farmer, the wife, the son, the dog, the cat and the mouse went sailing through the air. The turnip had popped out of the ground and was so giant that the wife could not bring it inside. The farmer and the son built a giant bonfire outside and the wife cooked soup. They all ate turnip stew for months.

By adding details to the story, you can make a simple story more detailed for an older child, or just change the story up to extend its life. Reversely, you can take a more complex story and pair it down as well.

When bringing a new story to your child, even one from a picture book, it is always a good idea to read through it first if possible. This will help you bring the story to life for yourself and allow you the space to alter it for your child if needs be. More than once I haven't followed my own rules and regretted it! I have been stuck in the middle of a story and as if the words won't stop, I kept telling it, wishing it would end or lightning would strike me or something! These are times I will never forget.

This leads me to the often feared (at least among new Waldorf parents) memorized story! While books are wonderful and illustrations can certainly add to telling your story, there are few things better than telling a story – even if it isn't your story. A story from your mouth will captivate your children more than any book. Sometimes memorizing a story can seem like a daunting task. If you start with smaller stories and then build up to larger ones then you will have the opportunity to flex your storytelling muscles. I often use props or draw pictures to help me remember key elements. When I am memorizing a new story, I read it through once or twice before bed. I tell it to myself as I am falling asleep. In the morning, while getting dressed I will tell it to myself again just to be sure I haven't left anything out. Then before telling it, I decide if I need any props – these can be easy, anything from peg dolls to play silks serve as wonderful props. Telling the story can be magical if you lay the stage. Of course on the fly is great, but curled up together on the sofa or while lying in bed nursing a younger sibling is golden. I will often tell stories while we are in a waiting room to get the car oil changed or while waiting our turn to see the chiropractor, these times of needing them to be a captive audience lend themselves well to brand new stories.

When it comes to a story that you make up, again start with something easy. While there are many stories that heal and many opportunities to tell them, when you are just getting started, you may want to keep it simple. The stories in our curriculum are such stories. They were born out of my young son's love of the color orange, gnomes and animals – especially turtles. I began when he was 2 years old telling him stories of Super Sam the gnome. As a lover of stories, I was forever working to come up with a new adventure for Super Sam and his friends. These stories have become a staple in our home and two years ago Baby Bird (Super Sam's sister) joined the stories.

How do you start? If you are new to making up stories, take some time alone, walk through the park, sit in the grass, gaze out the window on a snowy day... all of these are very meditative states... I like to think about the animals in the grass or under the snow. What might they be doing? I begin to build structures in my mind of housing for animals, gnomes and fairies. Before I know it, the gnomes have someone to save or a party to plan. The biggest obstacle to coming up with a story is ME! I need to become small again. I need to remember sitting with my grandpa and listening to him talk to me about goldmines in the sky. Once I can step out of myself and become Missy (don't call me that, I won't answer!) then I can come up with so many stories!

Repetition is an important element in story telling, but one that is often lost with today's age of fast paced life. Without meaning to – sometimes even if we are strict about guarding it – our children become busy. Lately I have come to believe it is in the air. Children are constantly moving. Most parents can't imagine telling a story twice to their child, let alone three times! I say try it anyway. Often when I tell the kindergarten stories from our curriculum, I will start very simply on the first day, then a bit more in depth the second, and by the last telling, Super Sam is telling it to me. He loves to use the props and put his own spin on it. I always know when it is a story that he really connected with because he wants to tell it to me again at bedtime.

Healing stories and stories to help with behaviors are a great way to bring correction or balance to your home. There is a wonderful book by Susan Perrow called *Healing Stories for Challenging Behavior* that I have gone to time and again for story ideas to help bring balance to our home. I highly recommend this book for your home library, more information is available in our resource section.

Examples of healing or behavior correcting stories can range from *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* to *The Fisherman's Wife* and many stories in between. A healing story is one that can help a child work through emotional set backs or trauma. Last year, my great-aunt passed away. She left behind many relatives and a grandson that adored her. We were all very sad by her loss. My mother called me within a day of her death asking for help. In tears she asked "I need a story and you are the best story teller I know. Will you help me with a story worthy of your Aunt Linda?" Of course I would! I pulled our Susan's book and found a beautiful story of transformation that my Aunt Linda would have loved. Through tears, my mother told it at the funeral, intending the recipients to be the children most touched by my aunt, her grandson and Super Sam. There wasn't a dry eye in the whole place. Healing stories heal.

Conversely, correcting stories correct too! A few months back, Super Sam was playing with his two favorite buddies. As often happens when there is a threesome, one child was left out. This little boy was very sad and of course the other two didn't mean to upset him. That evening I told Super Sam a little story about his gnome friends and how one felt when left out of a celebration. Sam instantly understood and vowed to work harder with his friends.

Storytelling isn't just a skill to learn, it is an art. Take the time, you have plenty of years to perfect it.
Be the mom that children flock to... you are in training for grandparenthood!



Part Two
The Curriculum
Before the Journey
By Melisa & Erik Nielsen
Illustrated by Amber Hellewell

The primary task of a Waldorf teacher is to understand the human being in body, soul, and spirit. From this understanding will grow the approach, the curriculum, and the methods of an education capable of addressing the whole child. ~ Roberto Trostli, Rhythms of Learning

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Introduction

A few months ago when I had the prompting to write this volume, I intended for it to be an answer for those with preschoolers that were unsure of how to weave a life with a child in that age group without actually moving forward in academics. Many things became apparent to me as the book came together, one is that we often as mothers worry about our children far more than we should, we lay guilt on ourselves and on one another for things that should just be enjoyed. All of us have been to the playgroup where someone has been bragging about how smart little Johnny is or how Betsy knows all of this or that... those moms are easy to find. What I didn't expect was to realize just how insecure many of those mothers really are – this is why they often extol the academic virtues of their three year old! For some reason mom needs a boost and rather than being comfortable with herself, she will often hunt for that recognition through her child. When I realized this, I was pretty shocked. I thought about how much we lie to each other – I used to think we really only lied to ourselves, but we lie to each other! The other interesting thing I observed while researching this book is that when mothers are balanced and cared for, meaning they feel spiritually strong and they are honored by their mate and the rest of their family then they do not play the lying game. These moms just play with their kids! When mom starts to feel frustration at dad or pressure from her family over this or that, coupled with neglecting prayer or meditation, time alone, etc. then we start to see a mom crying for help – she may not see it that way and she may get really upset when someone tries to point it out to her, she has to discover it on her own and then make her own path toward a healthy relationship with herself – when she does that then everyone else will honor her too. I found that moms who can learn to do this honoring of herself when her children are young often have no need to even think about the lying game and are in fact pretty good at noticing others that do it and steer clear of that energy.

It is my hope this book will help mom relax a bit and enjoy the journey, to get to know herself as she enjoys the rhythm of life. I believe our time here on Earth is to learn and gain knowledge, knowledge about ourselves and those we came here to be with, knowledge that we will need later.

When my older children were younger I had a pretty good Waldorf support community most of the time and I never felt like I *needed* something more. Today things are different, the method is growing by leaps and bounds around the world and parents are coming to it with younger children wondering where on Earth to start. Most information on the market does not begin until kindergarten age, which in Waldorf speak isn't until age five or six, and for new families that are coming from more mainstream thinking, that is a hard transition. I see a troubling trend of parents so worried they will miss something that they lay out money for guides that appear to be Waldorf but really only start this process of schooling with a young child, so I decided to write this as a guide to flowing through life with a little person, in doing so, it became so much more. I think families of all sizes will enjoy this book and I hope that most moms will find themselves in at least one of the characters. It is written quite different than all my other books, it is my first stab at fiction! It was a lot of fun to put together, a bit of me lives in each of the mothers at their various stages. If you are blessed with a toddler or preschooler, I encourage you to take advantage of this time to learn new skills and build your library. There are several books mentioned in the appendix that you can take your time to purchase while your children are young that will stretch you far beyond these beginning years. Learn the crafts of Waldorf education, knitting, doll making, painting and drawing – this time is such a blessing for you, you have the wonderful luxury of tending to the daily needs of a small person that thinks the world of you, your only job is to play. Have fun Mom!

Chapter 2

Winter

Meet Jennifer: She is the upbeat divorced mom of three active children, William is 8, Sariah is 6 and Hannah is 2. Along with being divorced she is trying to find herself, she has two best friends, one is Pagan and then other Jewish, right now Jennifer is falling somewhere in between. She runs a business from her home and works to have a good relationship with her children's father, Jack, although it can be a challenge. She longs to have someone love her the way she deserves to be.

December 1

Jack called me this morning. He sure knows how to start my day off! He wanted to discuss our visitation this month. Sometimes I think being divorced from him is as hard as being married to him was! If it wasn't for the divorce decree I just don't think we'd get anywhere. I asked him if he would be willing to let me have the children for Saint Nicholas and the Winter Solstice and then he could have them for Christmas. I hate feeling like they are being bartered – they are children, not things. Things got heated and so I excused myself from my end of the conversation to go pray. I am always amazed at the affect it has on me and how I present myself. I called Jack back and apologized for getting upset and we decided he would come to my house for St. Nick and the Solstice and I could go to his for Christmas morning. Thank goodness that is resolved.

The kids are so excited for Saint Nicholas, they have been buzzing for the last two months. I am putting the finishing touches on Waldorf dolls for both girls and with William being so into knights these days, I was able to talk Jack into getting him a great castle set I found.

I am trying not to be overwhelmed with Advent. There is so much I could be doing. I decided that since the kids would be with Jack for Christmas that I would have my Advent ending just before Yule so we don't miss anything. I have this long list of things I want to do... baking, knitting, crafting, more baking, reading... but I think I came up with a plan that will keep me sane and the kids loving it. I am going to take the month off from teaching school like I have done in the past just so we can have fun, we work so much, I work so much – we need a break.

Last week, we started advent and we had a ball. The kids got home from spending an overindulgent Thanksgiving weekend with their dad and I greeted them with a fire in the hearth, hot cocoa and sugar cookies I spent the day making and decorating and was all ready with the *Festival of Stones* (by Reg Down) book! We have fallen in love with the book this year. I think they are all at the ripe age for it. We started it in the fall and I was so excited to see that they are a series. I just love that they are a collection of little stories that can take us through the season. Of course I spun my own tale as well. I can't get one over on them, they wanted to know what our gnomes were doing for advent – good thing I was prepared! I spun a story based on the nature table cycle that way it will be easy for me to add to each week.

I have also been working through a great Steiner lecture for inner work, *Signs and Symbols of the Christmas Festival* and I am so impressed with what I have taken from it and so confused by what I don't yet understand! I know that it just takes time. I know that my understanding deepens each time I read

his work or listen to the audio lectures. I know that since my divorce, I have allowed myself to really dig deeply into my spiritual self, a side that I could only scratch the surface of when I was with Jack. I don't blame him, I just think our relationship consumed so much of me that I wouldn't look at myself the way I needed to. I dream of a man that I could share this journey with, one who I didn't have to explain myself to everyday, someone who just knows me. Does he exist? For now I'll just spend my evenings with Steiner!

The Gnome's Yule Tide Advent Mystery Part 1

Deep inside Mother Earth where the root babies sleep, the gnomes are working all year long, tending the root babies, gathering the stones, making sure all is well. All of the gnome kingdoms over the Earth work together by taking care of their own space and enjoying their own inner work of gaining wisdom. King Melchizedek, the high king and ruler of all the gnomes, was righteous and wise and led his gnomes to do their work with great care and helped them to gain all the wisdom they came to this earth to gain. Each year the king issued a wisdom challenge to all the gnomes. The Creator picks three of the wisest gnomes to come before the king for the challenge. If they complete the challenge, they move up to help in other parts of the kingdom.

Knock, knock, knock went King Melchizedek's crystal gavel as he called the gnomes to order. "My brethren and sisters, please come to order. We have much business to cover on this first day of Advent."

All the gnomes filed into the great crystal meeting hall and took a seat on their amber benches. King Melchizedek gave the signal to Alpha and Omega, the wisest of the number gnomes and all at once the cavern was lit to splendor, including a large beautiful pine tree adorned with beautiful lights and shapes from nature.

"Three of you have been called by our Creator to take the wisdom challenge, if you are one of these three please step forward." said the king.

Out of the corners of the hall came three gnomes, one was a boy gnome, and two young girl gnomes. The boy was William, a young gnome that proved wise for his age and the girls, Sariah and Hannah, were both born wise and very beautiful with long golden braids and vibrant green eyes. The three approached the king, walking brave and tall. The king looked very pleased for he knew these young gnomes well, they had been wonderful at tending the root babies and had shown great potential at knowing just where to gather the prettiest of stones.

"Are you three ready for your challenge?" asked the King.

"We are," said the three as they looked at one another with hope and faith.

"Then let us begin," announced the King. "You can see our tree has many symbols from nature on it. Your first challenge is to bring me something from the mineral kingdom. It must be something that is a symbol of strength and stability."

The king excused the three from the hall to start their challenge and the remaining gnomes finished their meeting by singing winter songs.

"In the Advent garden,
Dark the night below,
Earth is waiting, waiting, waiting,
For the stars to glow."

William, Sariah and Hannah walked to the gnome kingdom doorway and talked about what they were to find.

Sariah spoke first, "There are so many stones it could be! Chrysocola is a great stone for strength but isn't known for its stability."

"Perhaps," pondered William, "we should take a walk in the night air and that will help." The girls agreed and they each stepped through the mushroom doorway into the night. The air was brisk and quiet. Only the owls could be heard and even they were low. It was the first night of advent, all the creatures of the Earth waited in anticipation for the Winter

Solstice and the return of the sun. The days had grown so short and even though the first snow had just fallen, everyone in the forest seemed to look forward to the arrival of spring.

Hannah walked meditatively and then suddenly squealed with delight. Her happy sound could be heard all across the forest, even the trees groaned as their sleep was disturbed.

“What is it?” asked William. “Have you solved the mystery already?”

“Yes I think I have!” she shouted. Again the trees around her groaned as if to tell her to quiet down, but Hannah was a happy gnome, she was never calm, never quiet and the trees knew they would just have to wait until she went back to the mushroom doorway before they would get proper rest.

“Carnelian is a perfect stone. It clears negative energy and sorrows, it protects against fear and anger and it helps to stabilize energies...” she paused and said “My mother is always sending them to me to help me with my outbursts.”

The other two gnomes giggled. They both loved Hannah very much and knew that her outburst were part of who she was, she was just energetic and happy, like a butterfly jumping from task to task until she was done.

“Why don’t we meet near Hematite’s cave tomorrow and ask him for some guidance in mining carnelian so we can take it to the king at our next meeting?” asked Sariah. The three gnomes agreed and parted for the evening.

With that, I ended the first night’s story. The children were delighted that I used their names for the gnomes, I hadn’t done that before and they got all giggly and silly on their way to bed. Hannah tried so hard to stay and listen but of course she’s still so little so we let her walk around and play blocks while we curled up to the hearth. I am a lucky mother.

I also started the first week of our advent nature table. I wanted to put together a fun progression for the kids that went with our stories so each week when they come home from their dad’s house they have something new to look forward to. Last week it was completely bare, save a white cloth for snow and some of our favorite stones. Since the first week of the nature table represents the mineral week, I had a little fun and went to the candy store to find some rock candy – they loved it! I had it waiting on the nature table with some of our favorite crystal clusters and stones we had gathered in the fall.

Oh dear, I just looked at the clock, I do lose track of time at night when they are gone. I miss them so much. I guess I’ll write this week’s gnome adventure in tomorrow’s entry. I think I’ll knit and go to bed.

**Author’s note: Advent can be tricky depending on if you want your advent to end the Sunday prior to Christmas or the Sunday prior to Yule (Winter Solstice) in this book, because of the blended family situation I am going to use Yule as the end point to show how easily it can be done, but will give examples of verses that can be used for both Christian and non Christian homes in the festivals section at the end of the book.*

Also, traditional advent has a wreath lighting as part of the weekly gathering, feel free to include this as well. I have omitted it for this book because I wanted to include other ideas that perhaps were not so well known.

Grandma's Sugar Cookies

1 cup shortening
2 cups sugar
2 eggs
1 cup buttermilk
4-5 cups+ flour
½ tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
2 tsp. baking powder

Cream shortening, sugar and eggs. Add buttermilk. Sift salt, baking soda and baking powder with 1 cup of the flour. Add to mixture. Add remaining flour. Mix until it can be worked by hand then roll out and cut or drop by the spoonful on a cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 10 minutes. Suitable for royal icing decoration.

Royal Icing

3 TBL meringue powder
4 cups powdered sugar
6 TBL warm water
1 tsp of flavoring

Beat until peaks form, five minutes plus depending on your mixer. Thicken or thin for proper consistency to decorate sugar cookies. Dries hard.

December 2

I tend to run and run when the kids are gone, getting work done so I can play more when they are home. It was so late last night when I crawled into bed even Food TV had infomercials on it! I do think I am very lucky to have the alone time to recharge each week, between that and getting up at 5 a.m. I feel like I get the inner work time I need – it's a good thing too, I've got stories to brew! This week my meditations for advent have focused more on the Steiner lecture I have been enjoying (*Signs and Symbols of the Christmas Festival*). The imagery is amazing. I feel so blessed to have resources like the Steiner archives to grab the lectures for free when I have extra reading time.

I have been pondering this verse by Steiner:

*Deep in the ground of the human soul,
Of victory assured,
The Spirit-Sun is living.
All through the winter of the inner life
The faithful heart divines it.*



Part Two
The Curriculum
Kindergarten for the 4/5 year old
By Melisa & Erik Nielsen
Illustrated by Amber Hellewell

The primary task of a Waldorf teacher is to understand the human being in body, soul, and spirit. From this understanding will grow the approach, the curriculum, and the methods of an education capable of addressing the whole child. ~ Roberto Trostli, Rhythms of Learning

February plans for the 4-5 year old

Notes for this month - Involving older children. I know I am not the only one with big kids. Often we sell them short in their roles with siblings. It is so easy to lump all of our children together rather than looking at each age group and noticing how they are each growing. At the time of this writing, I have children that are 16, 14 and 12 in addition to my little ones that are 6 years and 2 years. We worked really hard to lift up the big kids with expectations that are appropriate for their age group and also their sex. My older two are both boys, their needs are different than a teen girl's would be. Boys in this stage often want time alone and we have to work to keep those lines of communication open. Teen girls need to stay busy with moral activity so they aren't easily drawn into the culture of our time. In working to meet their needs, they each help me with the younger children. Several times a month, they have each taken a day of Super Sam activities. I allow them to read the month's plan and decide what day they want. This allows them to recapture that fun they all remembered and if you didn't have a Waldorf beginning for your older children, this is the time to let them learn about story telling and really get into play - you KNOW they want to, even if they resist.

This month's suggested handwork for mom (see online portion for instruction.)

Week one: Candle making & make a Brigit doll (entirely optional). Make a journal (optional, see story)

Week two: Needle felting

Week three: continued needle felting

Circle Time

Opening verse:

The earth is firm beneath my feet,
The sun shines bright above
And here stand I so straight and strong,
All things to know and love

For colder climates:

Once there was a snowman, snowman, snowman,
Once there was a snowman, tall, tall, tall.
In the sun he melted, melted, melted.
In the sun he melted, small, small, small.

Snowflakes so light,
Snowflakes so bright,
Cover the earth
And make it white. ~ I. Tupaj

Let's put on our mittens
And button up our coat.
Wrap a scarf snugly
Around our throat,
Pull on our boots,
Fasten the straps,

And tie on tightly
Our warm winter caps.
Then open the door....
...And out we go
Into the soft and feathery snow.

For warmer climates:
Flaming light,
Shine so bright,
Flaming light,
Give your might,
Make us strong and make us bold
Turn our word to living gold.
~M. Meyerkort

Summer showers, summer rain,
Wash the flowers all clean again,
wash the flowers all clean again.

FOR ALL
Make new friends but keep the old
One is silver and the other is gold.

Week one (mineral) - Super Sam & Brigit

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Prepare your recipe.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Make candles together.

Depending on the age of your child, decide what candle making or decorating activities feel safe for you. If you have a very young kindy child, one that is early 4, or if you are modifying these lessons for a 3 year old, then think about decorating a ready made candle. If your child is 5 or 6, they can easily roll a beeswax candle from a sheet or they can help you dip candles (see our photo tutorial) - I promise it isn't hard!

**As a fun treat this month, perhaps you could keep a journal like Super Sam's and make drawings of the animals you talk about. (see our video on book binding)

Super Sam stepped onto the boat and found a cozy place to settle in for his journey. His first stop was a place colder than where he lived. He was nervous but very excited. For two days, Super Sam took turns helping the other gnomes prepare food for each other and each night he wrote in his journal about the gnomes he met and the stories they had to tell.

On day three, the ship stopped at an island. It was cold and snowy. Super Sam pulled his coat tighter and his hat down over his ears. He put his backpack on his back and stepped off the boat. A beautiful little gnome dressed all in white with long red braids greeted him.

"My name is Brigit," she said, "before you make your journey to warmer lands, the king wanted you to come and visit our fishing village so you could learn all about fish."

Brigit took Super Sam to her home and fed him a yummy fish stew with a special braided bread that was as pretty as her long hair. She showed Super Sam to his room where he snuggled into a soft feather bed and slept cozy all night. In the morning he was surprised to see Brigit at the stove. She seemed to be making something.

"Good morning," said Super Sam, "what are you making?"

"I am making candles to trade in the market for fresh fish. Would you like to help?" Brigit said.

"I would love to, please show me," said Sam.

For the next few hours, the two gnomes stood at the stove patiently dipping candles. When they were finished, Super Sam put a few in his backpack for his journey and then the two set off to the market to trade the candles for fresh fish. While they walked, Brigit told Super Sam all he needed know about the fish in the waters by her island and how all the gnomes in their village worked hard to keep the water clean so the fish were healthy. She went near the water and fish jumped right into her arms, she showed Super Sam how to handle them. He took lots of notes in his journal.

The next day, Super Sam went back to the boat for the next part of his adventure.

This week on the nature table... This is the mineral week. This month you could try to bring some light to these colder winter days, how about finding February's stone, amethyst and bringing it to the table. It is such a pretty addition to a table filled with quartz points or other stones and it gives a splash of color when we may feel like we are trudging through another month (thankfully a shorter one!) Now if you are in a warmer climate or celebrating life on the other half of the world, see if you can find some purple stones as well, your table is likely to look brighter and cheerier with your climate than those of us in the cold of winter, so maybe you can play off of that with a pretty purple silk?

Often when we have holidays in the month that don't quite flow with the rhythm of the nature table, for instance St. Valentine's Day, I will put together another small space with something to remind us of the holiday.

Recipes... Now I will admit that I have not tried this recipe. I am not a fish fan, too many summers eating fish and nothing else while visiting my dear grandparents at their cabin by the lake. I was a picky eater! This recipe comes from a favorite little resource of mine, "The Waldorf School Book of Soups" - it is customary in some schools to have a soup day. I try to do this at home, especially in the cooler months, but also a chilled soup in the warmer months. I have some chilled recipes if you'd like, just email me. We will be making a potato-leek chowder (recipe below, from same source) at our home, I just wanted to give some options.

Fish Chowder

2 1/2 pounds chopped, uncooked, boneless white-fleshed fish

5 cups fumet or fish stock

sea salt and pepper

1/4 pound of bacon
2 onions, finely chopped
2 cups uncooked potatoes, peeled and diced
1 cup milk, strained and scalded
1 cup heavy cream
pinch thyme
few grains nutmeg
1 T. parsley, finely chopped
1 T. butter
saltines

Fry bacon until nearly crisp. Remove some bacon fat and make a roux with it to thicken soup. Add onions, sauté until transparent. Wash fish. Heat fumet. Add bacon and onions. Add diced potatoes. Cook until potatoes are done. Add fish. Add milk, cream, thyme, parsley, sea salt, pepper, nutmeg. Heat through. Just before serving add butter and crushed saltines.

Potato Leek Chowder:

3 large leeks
5 red potatoes, peeled & quartered
1 T. butter or substitute
1 can chicken stock or vegetable stock
1 cup of milk (or less if you want a thicker soup)
1/2 cup plus grated cheddar cheese
sea salt and pepper

Wash leeks well and use only white bulbs and the upper, good portion of green stalks. Slice leeks. Peel and quarter potatoes. Melt butter in large stock pan and sauté leeks until a little tender, add potatoes and brown a little. Add stock and bring to boil, then lower heat, cover and simmer. When all is tender (15 min or so) add salt and pepper to taste and the milk and cheese. Serve when hot.

To accompany your soup, use the snack bread recipe from October's lessons and braid it into a nice loaf like Brigit's hair.

Week two (plant) - Super Sam meets Sita

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Make raw apple pie together.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Paint or model together.

Three more days on the boat and Super Sam was ready for some warmer weather. The boat was cozy when he was down below, but the times on the deck were cold indeed. Super Sam made friends with Mr. Mouse who was on his way to visit his family in the warm desert. Each night Mr. Mouse and Super Sam told each other stories of their home. It made Sam miss Holly and Lola, but he was glad to have a new friend. That evening Super Sam lit his star candle and dreamed of home.

The next morning, the warm air touched Super Sam's face. He opened his eyes and was excited to be in the sun. He pulled short pants from his backpack and put away his wool socks. As the boat docked

at the next island, Super Sam said goodbye to his friend Mr. Mouse and said hello to Sita. Sita had long brown hair and darker skin than Super Sam. He was delighted to follow her to her village to meet her friends. During their walk, she explained that they ate mostly fruit, nuts and seeds. She showed him some seeds he had never eaten before and introduced him to animals that were very different from those he knew in his forest. He met big cats (much bigger than Sunbun) and elephants. Sita taught him about the crocodiles but warned him to stay away unless he was with another gnome that could help. Super Sam was fascinated and stopped twice on their walk to take notes.

When they reached Sita's village, she helped Super Sam get settled and then they worked together to make a yummy apple dish for dinner.

The next morning, Super Sam helped Sita check on the animals that needed care. They visited meerkats that were snarky and very busy and also a lioness with brand new cubs. What a treat for Super Sam.

The next day he was off again, back on the boat. One more new land before he would begin his trip home. He had learned so much so far, he would have so much to tell the king.

This week on the nature table... Continuing with the purple theme, with this being the plant week, do you have any purple flowers? In cooler climates, some crocus may be popping up, I love the yellow and purple flowers peeking up through the snow.

Recipe... I love this recipe....the only problem is that I rarely get to making the pie crust because we tend to eat all the pie meat before hand! This is such a treat on a hot day. If you are in a warmer climate perhaps you'll enjoy this no bake recipe. For my friends still shivering right along with me, this is a week to think about how warm Super Sam must be on his adventure. Warm up your house a bit and spend some time thinking about warmer months to come. Enjoy the pie! I am not sure where the recipe came from, it was from a raw cooking book, but I only have the recipe, not the book, so if you know the source, please drop me a line so I can credit them.

Raw Apple Pie

Crust

1 1/2 cups of sunflower seeds
1 cup of raisins
half an orange
1 thin slice of lemon, including the skin, remove pips
2 tablespoons of chocolate powder

Filling

4 large apples, peeled and cored
3/4 cup of agave nectar
1 dessertspoon of cinnamon powder
pinch of cloves
1/2 lemon

To make the crust: Juice the orange and discard the skin and pulp. Place all the crust ingredients in a food processor until finely ground and the mixture sticks together. Press the mixture into an eight inch pie dish. Form the crust, pushing it right up to the edges.

To make the filling: Juice the lemon. Process half the apples for about a minute in the food processor. Add the rest of the apples and all the other filling ingredients. Process again until everything's mixed and chopped into small pieces but not mashed. Put this mixture into a sieve to strain the excess juice off. Keep this juice - this is where I get lost with a spoon! I could just sit down and dig in.

Put the mixture into the pie crust and smooth it out. It should come to just below the pie crust. Put this pie into the fridge or freezer to set for about an hour. Garnish with fresh coconut or apple slices. Pour the juice over each slice before serving.

Week three (animal) - Super Sam & the Strange Land

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Make roll and cut cookies. Need a recipe? See October's lessons.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Draw animals together - or maybe Super Sam's ship?

This week is a week for you to make up. Remember those books from your childhood where you could choose your own adventure? What would your child love? Children of this age generally love animals. What sorts of animals can you visit that we have missed? Do not worry about being able to carry a story, just lead with the foundation we have here... he's on a journey, where would he go next if Super Sam were your child? It doesn't even have to be a real place - in fact I know where our Super Sam will go... he'd want to go visit dinosaurs. Now remember children of this age do not have the concept of passing time, they also are not ready for a scientific explanation of things. I am very vague when it comes to talking about these things with him. He LOVES the dinosaur museum and we go and talk about the long necks and the giant turtles that lived long ago, we talk about the T-Rex and the ones that fly, but we are again very vague. Keep in mind, this is a little boy's adventure, some girls may enjoy a trip to an island of fairies or unicorns. Boys and girls can be very different, but do not stereotype them. Think about what your child likes and craft this week's story on that foundation - maybe it is dragons instead of dinosaurs??

This week on the nature table...If you feel like it, continue your purple theme. Most children by the age of 5 or 6 have figured out their colors, this is a natural progression in these kindergarten years. Last week, you learned to needle felt, how about adding something from the animal kingdom to your nature table?

Recipe... Do you have a favorite roll and cut recipe? If so, maybe you can find a cookie cutter with this week's animals? Get creative.

Week four (human) - Super Sam and the Voyage home

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Make nut butter clusters.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Paint or model together.

What an adventure! Super Sam was glad to be on the way home. He had a journal full of adventures and had learned enough about the animals on his travels that he could write a book for the king's library. Super Sam got comfortable in his spot and prepared for the long journey home. He put back on his wool socks and long pants. He took out a fresh candle and lit his star lantern. He took out his pencils and crayons and went back through his journal to add color to his drawings. Before long he was drifting off to sleep.

By morning, Super Sam noticed there were more passengers on the ship. Some fairies that were tired of flying, some gnomes with darker skin and long brown hair like Sita that were on the way to visit family in the forest, a family of weasels looking to build a new home in a new land. The boat was busy with activity. Super Sam looked around, they all looked hungry. He remembered a recipe Sita taught him and quickly put together a snack for the new passengers. They spent the rest of the day telling stories about their families and travels. Each one took turns helping the captain with their assigned chores.

That evening Super Sam was filled with joy, so many new friends. As he went to sleep, a new song was drifting in his mind...

Make new friends but keep the old
One is silver and the other is gold

He dreamed of his adventures and all he had seen. When the sun rose he would be home.

This week on the nature table...This is the human week. How about a cute little needle felted gnome on the table to welcome Super Sam home?

Recipe... Nut Butter Clusters

1/3 cup honey

1/2 cup raw almond or peanut butter

2 T. sesame tahini

1/4 cup protein powder

1/4 cup milk powder

1 cup of something :) raisins, oats, chocolate chips, nuts....something

Combine the first three ingredients and then mix in the rest. Roll into balls.



Part Two
The Curriculum
Kindergarten for the 6 year old
By Melisa & Erik Nielsen
Illustrated by Amber Hellewell

February Plans for the 6 year old

This month's suggested handwork, child and mom (see online portion for instruction.

Week one: Candle making

Week two: fingerless gloves & finger knitting

Week three: Chore Chart

Week four: heart banner

Circle Time

Opening Verse, daily at the beginning of circle time:

The earth is firm beneath my feet,
The sun shines bright above
And here stand I so straight and strong,
All things to know and love.

Archetypal movement verse:

"I see!" said the Bee, "I can see to the top of the tall, tall tree."

"Ahh," said the Star. "I can see far."

"Ohh," said the Gnome. "My home is in the stone."

1. In the winter garden through the falling snow
Stars are gleaming, streaming, gleaming
down to earth below.

2. In the winter garden seeds lie warm below,
Flowers are waiting, waiting, waiting
for the spring to blow.

This is great if the snow is starting to melt where you live:

Once there was a snowman, snowman, snowman

Once there was a snowman, tall, tall, tall.

In the sun he melted, melted, melted

In the sun he melted, small, small, small

Finger knitting verse (it helps to watch the beginning of the knitting video segment)

Here is your pond

And here is your fish

Watch as he jumps out!

Shine, shine little candle flame,
in feasting take your part,
and as you burn yourself away,
O shine into my heart. ~ Sylvia Beets

Week One (mineral) - Mama takes Toby to the King

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Prepare your recipe.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help. Dip candles together.

**If you don't want to dip candles this year, you can still participate in some sort of Candlemas activity. Decorate candles or roll some sheets of beeswax. Celebrate this day. It is half way between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, spring is coming!

Super Sam was worried and confused. He wasn't sure what to do about Toby so he went to see Mama and Papa. He helped Toby get all dressed in his new winter clothes and he lent him a pair of snow shoes and off they went through the forest. Toby was quiet but Super Sam tried to be playful.

"My mom is really good at solving big problems, she will know what to do," Sam said.

Soon they were across the forest and at their door. Baby Bird greeted them and called to Mama. Mama listened to Toby's story and she gave him a big hug. She was worried that he really missed his own mama. She got her coat and some snow shoes and announced:

"We are off to visit the King!"

"But Mother, I am not dressed for it!" said Super Sam.

"No bother! He will see us in our Sunday best or in our work clothes. He loves his people," she replied.

Off they went to visit the king. Once at the palace, the three gnomes stood waiting for the king to speak with them. Toby had never been to the palace and he was in awe of all the shining crystals it was so pretty. Soon the king came in. Mama began to explain about Toby and the king's face turned sad.

"Come here my boy, tell me what you know about yourself," said the king.

"I can tell you what I remember sir," Toby began. "I have seen many moons and I lived most of my life by the big water. My family made a living fishing and selling fish to our neighbors. One day my father left to sell fish and didn't return. Then my mother got ill and I tried to find help. I got lost. When Super Sam found me, I had been alone for a long time. I have tried to find my way home but I worry there isn't anyone there," Toby cried as he spoke to the king.

"There, there," the king tried to comfort Toby. "That doesn't mean something has happened to them, it just means you are lost. We can't help you find your home now, but we can help you learn how to work here in the forest until it is warm enough to go looking. Super Sam, do you have room for Toby?"

"Yes, sir! I can let Toby stay with me for a time." Said Sam.

"Wonderful. We all need to help each other when we are in need. Toby has lost his way and we will help him learn and then help him find his way again," said the king.

Mama took the two gnomes back to her house and made them a big lunch before sending them home. "I think the first thing you should teach Toby, is how to dip candles. We need more and it is time," said Mama.

Super Sam agreed, he had forgotten all about Candlemas and Brigid's day! He took Toby home and put on the pot for melting wax and the two gnomes spent the afternoon getting to know each other and dipping candles.

This week on the nature table... This is the mineral week. It can be so hard to find a mineral representation in the depth of winter if you are covered in snow. Now that we are half way through the school year, most six year olds are asking for more. Make sure you have placement right, this year is for 5.5 to 6 year old's. We will be ready to start first grade in the fall. If you are struggling to find something for the nature table this week, on Monday, go on a walk together and see what you can find, let your child lead the way.

Recipe... Braided Hair or a Sun Loaf. I use the snack bread recipe a lot, it is super versatile and in this case can make some beautiful braided bread or a circular loaf in the shape of the sun.

2 cups warm water
1 TBL yeast
a large spoon of honey

Let sit and allow the yeast to do its thing - get spongy. After about 10 minutes, begin adding flour, a cup at a time, sprinkle in a 1/2 tsp. of salt and mix the dough until it is no longer sticky to the touch. Let it rest for 20 minutes. Shape and raise until doubled. Bake at 350 F for 20-25 minutes.

Week two (plant) - Toby Settles In

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Prepare your recipe. As a symbol of Valentine's Day, think about taking cookies or other baked goods to the needy or retirement homes. Many elderly have no one visiting them regularly, a bright and happy child's face usually makes their day!

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Finger knitting together. If your child is already an accomplished finger knitter, then perhaps hand knitting? or spool knitting? These are all steps toward knitting this summer or fall. Finger knitted line is a great way to make a clothes for doll clothes or a climbing rope for little toys. Of course bracelets and wrapping paper ties, necklaces and dog collars.

Super Sam wasn't used to living with anyone other than Lola. He had lived alone for a long time. He was happy to have Toby to share his space with him. Super Sam tried to teach Toby to cook but the soup was runny and the rolls were flat. Super Sam had to rethink how he would teach Toby. He thought, "how would Mama teach?" He remembered that Mama was patient and kind. Super Sam left Toby to fold towels and he went for a walk to pray and ponder how he would help Toby learn. Super Sam asked for patience and he listened to the words from heaven. He walked quietly through the snow. Then he felt the answer. "Toby likes to work with his hands, he ties his own lines for fishing, maybe I should teach him how to work with his hands first! Then he will feel confident and we can move on to cooking!"

Super Sam ran home and gathered yarn. He made a cup of cocoa and stoked the fire. He and Toby sat together in front of the fire and Super Sam showed him the very first steps in knitting. They began with finger knitting. "I need a new clothes line," said Super Sam, "and this is how I make it each winter so I have a fresh strong one in the spring when I can begin to hang clothing outside."

Super Sam helped Toby. He taught him the verse Mama taught so many years ago... "here is your pond and here is your fish..." In no time at all, Toby had a long rope and while he was working, Super Sam was making a special gift for Toby.

"Toby," said Sam, "I noticed how red and chapped your hands are. I made you some gloves that will help them stay warm while we are out doing the farm chores."

"Thank you Sam!" said Toby. "What are chores?"

Oh no! Sam has a lot of work to do with Toby.

On the nature table... This is the plant week. Late winter usually shows us some gorgeous flowers that make us excited for spring. Do you have any crocus or tulips at your home yet? Maybe you have some forced bulbs you can put on your table?

Recipe... Yummy Pound Cake

1/2 cup butter
1 1/3 cups sugar
3 eggs
1 1/2 cups flour
1/4 teas salt
1/4 teas baking soda
1/2 cup sour cream
1/2 teas vanilla

Preheat oven to 300 F. Grease and flour a 9x5 loaf pan. Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, one at a time. Beat thoroughly. Sift flour with salt. Dissolve baking soda in sour cream and add alternatively with flour. Add vanilla, mix. Bake for 90 minutes.

Week three (animal) - Toby Learns about Chores

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Prepare your recipe and maybe make butter? We make butter each week and Super Sam never tires of watching cream do its thing as it suddenly becomes sweet, creamy butter.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. Make chore charts together. What chores does your child do? What can they now take on? Around 6 to 6.5yrs, I start having my children regularly step up to the chore plate. They start as simple chores like unloading the dishwasher or feeding the cat or folding towels. Each year their chores grow. A chore chart can be a great reminder. I don't tend to use the chart for prizes or anything like that, but more as a visual of what we accomplished.

The sun was rising and Super Sam got up to warm the mushroom house by stoking the fire. Toby was still sleeping. Super Sam knew that today Toby needed to learn how to do chores. When people live together, everyone must help and Toby just needed to learn how. He started some cocoa and woke Toby. "Today is the day," he said. "It is time to teach you how to do farm chores so when you have your own place then you can have animals too." Toby didn't seem as excited as Super Sam was. Toby was slow to climb from bed and even slower to pull on his socks and shoes.

The breakfast table held a basket for eggs and three glass jars for milk. Next to that stood two bowls of hot oatmeal. The oatmeal was heavenly. Nuts and berries and raisins and a thick slab of butter and just a dash of brown sugar. The two gnomes ate their breakfast, drank their cocoa and prepared to go outside and work. Super Sam made a list with pictures on it, since Toby could not yet read.

To Do
gather eggs
tidy chicken coop and lay more straw
help dragon clean his stall
check on all animals in barn and feed them
visit Bessy and get milk
make butter
grind wheat

Toby thought Sam's list looked so long, but he decided that he would give chores a try. He got excited about working with the animals, he loved petting them and even though the dragon was a bit scary, he trusted Sam.

The two gnomes put on their gloves and started their chores. After working all morning they were both hungry.

"The farmer's wife will feed us," said Sam, "let's go visit the farm and get some milk."

When the gnomes got to the farm, there was a wonderful lunch bounty ready for them. egg salad sandwiches and warm soup. The gnomes got their fill, thanked the farmer's wife and headed to the barn to get milk and visit Bessy.

When the gnomes returned home, they made butter and ground the wheat. Then Super Sam was glad to have left over sandwiches and soup from the farm because he was tired! The gnomes ate soup and sandwiches for dinner and then fell into bed.

"Chores are hard," said Toby as he lay in bed, "but I learned a lot, thank you Sam."

"Chores can be hard, but doesn't it feel good to see all we have done today?" said Super Sam.

"Oh yes! We did a lot and it all made me think of the kinds of animals I might want when we build my house," said Toby with excitement in his voice.

Super Sam fell asleep with a smile on his face. He was glad that his new friend was thinking about staying in the forest.

On the nature table... this is the animal week. What kinds of animals do you think Toby will want? Do you see any wildlife out in the snow - or if you don't have snow, do you see any signs of the seasons changing? On a recent trip to Idaho to visit grandparents, we spotted a fox in a field, Sam got so excited. It is fun to see animals in the wild.

Recipe... Creamy Homemade Tomato Soup (and egg salad)

I will just assume you know how to make egg salad. This is a good age to let them help if you don't already. I found that helping also gets the wiggles out and makes for a less frustrated mama over all.

This is soup for a family, we make it and often add brown rice and snack bread rolls to it. It is very filling in the colder months.

2 large cans of tomato puree or strained tomatoes (my kids like it smooth)
2 cups cream
1 cup milk
4 cloves of garlic, chopped or minced
chopped basil
4 TBL butter
salt
pepper

Warm ingredients together over a medium heat, be sure not to scald, slow and steady. I like my garlic chunky and in truth, 4 cloves is never enough.

Week four (human) - Toby Talks about his Family

Day 1: Tell story. Build the scene with toys and play together. Draw houses together if you'd like.

Day 2: Tell story again, use toys as props. Bake your recipe.

Day 3: Tell story again, let your child help if they want. In our home, we look at family albums and talk about loved ones that have passed on often. My children love to look at pictures from years ago and hear stories that I remember from my childhood. Take the time to work on memory books, either on paper or online, give your child a sense of family. Write the stories down. These are important steps in knowing where we come from.

Super Sam woke to a beautiful late winter day. The sun had been warmer than usual and the day before, Toby noticed that the ice on the river started to melt. He had a surprise for Super Sam this morning. He made muffins and cocoa and was extra quiet. He also quietly dressed for the day and took care of all the animals, made butter and packed them a lunch - all before Sam got up. Super Sam was so excited to see all Toby had done.

"I have a surprise for you today, Sam." Toby said. "I noticed there is just enough melted ice for us to go do something I am really good at... FISHING!"

"We have to do the...." Sam started.

"The chores? I did them all! Look, I even marked them off our list." Toby showed Sam the list he had drawn for himself.

Sam was proud of Toby and excited to spend the day fishing. The gnomes ate their breakfast and gathered some warm blankets and then set out for a day of fishing. As they sat, Super Sam told Toby stories of his childhood there in the forest. He told him funny things that he and Baby Bird used to do and all the fun they had with Papa. Toby got very quiet.

"I miss my father," said Toby, "but fishing helps me feel close to him. When I was a baby, he would carry me on his back while he fished. Mother would put the fish in a basket and take it to market. We lived in a small, warm hut by the big water."

"Toby, do you think that maybe your parents could have moved?" asked Sam. "Two years ago there was a flood by the big water and many gnomes lost their homes and either went to work in gardens to help farmers or came to the forest. I wonder if that could have happened and that is why you couldn't find them?"

Toby's eyes got big and he began to smile. "Super Sam! I bet you are right. I bet father came home and he and mother moved. Maybe they are out looking for me. I want to plan a house so when they find me, they will have a place to live!"

Toby was so excited. He knew that building a house would be a few months away in the spring, but he was excited and started talking to Sam about what he wanted in a house.

On the nature table... This is the human week. What sort of gnomes do you think Toby's parents are? Maybe you can model them for the nature table? or if you have been making little gnome people then you have a spare set that could go there instead. Another idea would be family pictures - loved ones often find their way to our nature table, it makes them feel close.

Recipe... I am not a fish fan, too many summers eating fish and nothing else while visiting my dear grandparents at their cabin by the lake. I was a picky eater! This recipe comes from a favorite little resource of mine, *The Waldorf School Book of Soups* - it is customary in some schools to have a soup day. I try to do this at home, especially in the cooler months, but also a chilled soup in the warmer months. I have some chilled recipes if you'd like, just email me. We will be making a potato-leek chowder (recipe below, from same source) at our home, I just wanted to give some options.

Fish Chowder:

2 1/2 pounds chopped, uncooked, boneless white-fleshed fish

5 cups fumet or fish stock

sea salt and pepper

1/4 pound of bacon

2 onions, finely chopped

2 cups uncooked potatoes, peeled and diced

1 cup milk, strained and scalded

1 cup heavy cream

pinch thyme

few grains nutmeg

1 T. parsley, finely chopped

1 T. butter

saltines

Fry bacon until nearly crisp. Remove some bacon fat and make a roux with it to thicken soup. Add onions, sauté until transparent. Wash fish. Heat fumet. Add bacon and onions. Add diced potatoes. Cook until potatoes are done. Add fish. Add milk, cream, thyme, parsley, sea salt, pepper and nutmeg. Heat through. Just before serving add butter and crushed saltines.

Potato Leek Chowder:

3 large leeks

5 red potatoes, peeled & quartered

1 T. butter or substitute

1 can chicken stock or vegetable stock

1 cup of milk (or less if you want a thicker soup)

1/2 cup plus grated cheddar cheese

sea salt and pepper

Wash leeks well and use only white bulbs and the upper, good portion of green stalks. Slice leeks. Peel and quarter potatoes. Melt butter in large stock pan and sauté leeks until a little tender, add potatoes and brown a little. Add stock and bring to boil, then lower heat, cover and simmer. When all is tender (15 min or so) add salt and pepper to taste and the milk and cheese. Serve when hot.

