

# A Mother's Garden

by Kimberly Fletcher



Several years ago when my children were still young, they gave me a beautiful gift. They made a picture of a flower pot with each of their precious faces filling the center of each flower in

the pot. It was just a simple little gift. It didn't take a lot of time and cost next to nothing but it has become a priceless treasure that I keep on my wall and look at again and again to remind me of the garden I am nurturing in my home—the most important garden I will ever grow. And the most remarkable thing I see when I look at the picture is not just how much my children have grown, but how much I have grown in the gardening process.

By far, I would have to say the most valuable lesson I have learned is just how important I am in my children's lives. As they have grown and started families of their own, I have witnessed first-hand just how important—and critical—our influence is, not just for their own welfare, but for the destiny of our very nation. What we teach our children today will determine the policies, voters, and candidates of tomorrow. We are painting the future picture of America every day through the lives of our children—and there is no more important

work we will ever do. Something else I have discovered, much to my deepest dismay, while we once used to be able to count on schools, media, and the community at large to help support our efforts in raising our children, today we cannot.

I have been completely disheartened to see, not only what our children are being taught in school, but what they are not. While our classrooms and schoolbooks were once filled with the stories of great patriots, miracles, and the principles of liberty that lead to good citizens, today they are filled with stories of why America is not so great. Instead of raising patriots, our schools are graduating future citizens who have no love or respect for their country.

While it is true, there have been many forces working against us feverishly trying to destroy this last bastion of hope for the world; in the end, we are the keepers of the flame, not the schools, not Congress, not the media. If our schools aren't teaching our children about America's history and heritage, then we need to be. If the media is not going to present truth and facts, then we need to. It is not the government's job to raise and teach our children, it is ours. We cannot count on others to do our job for us. The schools and

churches are a support and resource for us as parents, not a replacement. If that resource is not supporting us, and is even going so far as to contradict everything we are teaching our children, and all the things we want them to know, then it is our job to change it, replace it, or counteract it.

## Weeding the Garden

Anyone who has had any experience in gardening knows how hard it is to control weeds. If you are not consistently dedicated to pulling the weeds, they will soon overrun your garden—especially after a hard rain. You must battle the weeds at the root if you want to keep ahead of them and you need to be especially diligent with stubborn weeds as they can quickly choke the life out of your plants. We need to use the same skills and principles in weeding our Liberty Gardens.

When I started Gardening and began assessing the influences in my children's lives, I realized that one of the greatest threats to my little Garden were the schools our children were attending. I was astonished at the kinds of books in their libraries, the absolute falsehoods I found in their history books, and the constant underlying messages of "parents just don't understand you." I couldn't believe how many things our children were learning in school that were going directly against everything I wanted them to know and value.

I know many parents who have come to this realization and, like me, wondered what they could possibly do about it. I mean, our children have to go to get an education right? Some concerned parents have chosen the "change" route and tried to make the system better by helping to choose curriculum, rewrite textbooks, get involved in the PTO,

volunteer in their children's classrooms, and even run for school board. Other parents have chosen the "replace" method and have chosen private school, charter school, or homeschooling. Still others have gone the "counteract" route and work very hard to provide strong positive influences that will counteract the destructive ones. I have tested all three methods.

I served on the PTO, volunteered in my children's classrooms, and even ran for school board. I served on the school site council where I had direct input on classroom curriculum and where school funds were spent.

I tried to change it. But it didn't take long for me to realize that the current system was too well established and too deeply entrenched to change. At the pace things were "changing," our children would be having children before I would see any real change. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for making things better for the future, but my children were my future. I wanted the best influences for them now and time was running out. So that brought me to the "replace" option.

We tried it all—private school, charter school, and homeschool. And while the final decision our family prayerfully came to was homeschooling our children, I quickly realized that it is not for everyone. I also realized that even if you homeschool, you still have the constant threat of noxious weeds creeping in on your tender plants. The fact is, it doesn't matter where your children go to school, what matters is that we as parents, are engaged in their lives and doing all we can to create positive influences—and be the greatest positive influ-



ence we can ourselves.

From my experience in trying all three options, I can tell you that the most valuable lesson I have learned is that, regardless of how you decide to formally educate your children, "counteracting" is the most successful and effective tool in weeding our Gardens. It is so successful that in time, you can establish every gardener's dream—an almost weed-free garden.

I read a story once about a church leader who went to visit one of their small congregations that had been cut off from the rest of the world behind the Iron Curtain for years. He was very concerned for the youth of the congregation because he said, "strange ideologies were taught and pernicious doctrines promulgated every day in the schools and in the captive press. Every day the children listened to the doctrines, philosophies, and ideals their teachers related."

Knowing the reality of the old saying, "constant dripping will wear away the hardest stone" he feared the children would be swayed by the "constant dripping" they were receiving. When meeting with the parents he asked about their children. "Do they retain their faith?" he asked. "Are they not overcome by the pressure of their teachers? How can you be sure they will not leave the simple faith in God?"

The parents responded, "We mend the damaged reservoir each night. We teach our children positive righteousness so that the false philosophies do not take hold. Our children are growing in faith and righteousness in spite of almost overwhelming pressures from outside."

The church leader shared the experience he had with these devoted families saying, "Even cracked dams can be mended and saved, and sandbags can hold back the flood. And reiterated truth...expression of love and parental interest can save the child and keep him on the right path."<sup>1</sup>

I have read many stories of families who had been trapped behind the iron curtain for years being taught godlessness and yet when that iron curtain collapsed thousands of families emerged with their faith intact because their parents tended and nurtured their Gardens.

### The Powerful Influence of Parents

The first thing the communists did when they raised that curtain was to purge the country of religion.

They closed churches and outlawed worship but they could not destroy the faith of the people, because the parents shared their faith and taught their children so carefully at home, that the false teachings and propaganda they received from school rolled off them like water off a duck's back.

This is the power and influence we have as parents. And this is the influence destroyers of liberty and virtue fear most. Two of the most vicious destroyers of liberty and virtue—Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler knew this. Stalin said, "Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed." Stalin went to great lengths to limit the influence parents had on their children. Hitler used the same tactics



when forming the Hitler Youth programs and instituting youth sports programs on Sundays so the children couldn't go to church and be influenced there.

Religion was highly frowned upon and even outlawed under Nazi rule. Oh, they were allowed to keep their churches open, but they were stripped of all authority and influence, and dictated what would be taught and when. The teaching of God and prayer in schools—even Catholic Schools, was forbidden. One day children were attending catholic school reciting the Lord's prayer to the Crucifix and the next day the Crucifix was replaced with the Nazi flag and the children were reciting "Heil Hitler!"

Why do you think Hitler worked so hard to create a division between parents and their children? He even went so far as to encourage, and reward children for spying on their parents and reporting any infractions of "the rules." He made every effort to turn their parents into the enemy. Why? Because he knew he was investing in his own future. "He alone, who owns the youth," Hitler declared, "gains the future."

The strategy of Hitler and Stalin was simple—take away the parents, the churches, and individual thought, and you have the people. Hitler and Stalin went straight to the children and taught them what they wanted them to know and believe. They created as many barriers as they could to any and all influences that contradicted their influence—especially the parents. We face the same powerful forces today. But, like those that emerged from the iron curtain with their faith intact, we too can—and must—emerge a strong, confident, moral, and free people and it all begins with a few tiny seeds planted in the tender hearts

of our children.

Just like those children from the Soviet Union, our children are being taught "strange ideologies and pernicious doctrines" every day. They hear it at school. They see it in the media, in their music, on TV. Every day our children are listening to doctrines, philosophies and ideals that are directly contrary to everything we stand for—and they hear it over and over like "constant dripping." But if we tend our Gardens and teach our children carefully at home, then they will grow in liberty and virtue in spite of the almost overwhelming pressures from outside. I know this is true. I have witnessed it firsthand.

The two things destroyers of liberty fear most are faith and parents. Combine the two—faithful parents—and you have the greatest and most powerful weapon against tyranny. Hitler clearly recognized this. He lamented, "It is always more difficult to fight against faith than against knowledge." It is also much harder to propagate a lie when you have been infused with truth and taught how to recognize it. Hitler's strategy was "make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it." Our strategy needs to be teach the truth, teach with love, reinforce it with stories and they will embrace it!

While elections, public policy, and government oversight are important things to participate in, it is so vitally important that we remember what matters most. The greatest and most important contribution we can make in preserving liberty is what we give the future—from the Gardens we are planting in our own homes today.



*When you look into the eyes of your children and grandchildren, when you picture their greatness and*

*potential, do you feel that they are getting the education that is up to par with who they were born to become?*

—Oliver DeMille, A Thomas Jefferson Education

<sup>1</sup> Faith Precedes the Miracle, Spencer W. Kimball

### Discussion Questions

- ★ *Have you had similar experiences to Kimberly in finding outside influences trying to override what you are teaching your children about America and faith?*
- ★ *What is something you've done to combat those influences, or something you'd like to try to do?*
- ★ *What was your favorite part of this article? What was the overall take away feeling you had after reading this?*
- ★ *Why do you think, as mothers, we sometimes question the power within us to be the great influencer in our children's lives that God has called us to be?*
- ★ *What historical examples does Kimberly talk about of children being strongly influenced by dangerous political leaders, and what is the warning those examples give to us today? How were they combated by faithful parents behind the iron curtain?*
- ★ *What is one way you love sharing your faith with your children?*
- ★ *How can we invite God to be a part of growing our garden?*
- ★ *What about this article gives you the most hope?*