



Keeping in Touch

A quarterly newsletter for Catholic homeschooling families

Important: Changes to the Way in which KIT is Sent Out

Keeping in Touch is no longer mailed out to everyone. KIT will be printed and mailed out ONLY to those who specifically request it to be mailed. For everyone else, it will be available for reading or download from the new Cardinal Newman Faith Resources Inc. website at www.cardinalnewman.com.au

A list of email addresses of all recipients will be held so that when a new edition of KIT is put on the website, a reminder email can be sent out to all interested parties. If you would like to be placed on this list, please send an email to Shaun Fanning at tarlohill@bigpond.com. (Shaun currently maintains the KIT address list). This information will not be used for any other purpose.

If you would rather receive *Keeping in Touch* through the post, then please let Shaun know by email as above or by mail at 2142 Taralga Rd, Tarlo. 2580. These people are ***strongly encouraged*** to send a donation to cover the costs of printing, postage and packing. Suggested donation is \$10 a year. These donations should be sent to **Cardinal Newman Faith Resources Inc, PO Box 697, (342 Merrylands Rd) Merrylands. 2160 Phone (02) 9637 9406, fax (02) 9637 3351** or credit card details to fr@cardinalnewman.com.au.

Please consider receiving *Keeping in Touch* via email as this will assist the Cardinal Newman Faith Resources centre in managing the mailing, and will help to reduce their costs, which at present considerably outweigh donations.

Keeping in Touch is published about the 5th week of each school term. Contributions are welcomed from Catholic home schooling families, and from priests, religious and laity supporting them. Children's poems, stories and book reviews are very welcome. Teaching articles with ideas and encouragement for other homeschoolers are also very welcome. Please send all contributions on A4 paper, or (preferably) via email where possible. **This issue of KIT** has been edited by Sarah Fanning, 2142 Taralga Rd, Tarlo, NSW 2580.

Contributions for the next issue should be sent to
The Elvis Family, PO Box 968, Mittagong,
NSW 2575 or
elvisfamily@optusnet.com.au

April Camp
Bookings for the Catholic Homeschooling Family Retreat at Fitzroy Falls will be accepted *from 1st October only on a first in, first served basis*. \$50 deposit plus name and address to Michael and Helen Brearley, Whitmuir, Park Road, Wingello, NSW

In the Heart of the Home: A book review

When I first read an advertisement for Elizabeth Foss's book, "Real Learning: Education in the Heart of the Home", I felt I must have this book. Here was a book in Charlotte Mason style but written by a Catholic mother who was expecting her seventh child and understood the theory and the reality of homeschooling as a Catholic mother today. Thankfully our wedding anniversary was approaching soon, so I ordered it for my husband to give me and looked forward to our anniversary coming so I could read it.

From the very beginning I was torn in my response to this book. The educational philosophy side of it I found a little heavy in the beginning and so did not finish it but flicked further into the book. The chapters on individual subjects I found to be mostly very good and enjoyed reading them. Most chapters also include collections of short writings on the topics by other homeschooling parents. Illustrated by pencil and felt pen drawings of real life homeschoolers, it is certainly very attractive and I often found our children at it just to look at the pictures. The book is also laced with quotes from Scripture and the writings of the Pope.

Later in the book are useful chapters on housework and clutter, special needs children and burnout. Some recipes for helping celebrate feast days are included as well as a very interesting three year cycle reading list divided into lower and upper primary and lower secondary Of course, no Australian books are mentioned.

As with most Charlotte Mason books, I felt a bit overwhelmed at the thought of what incorporating this method into our family's homeschooling routine would mean. I just am not at that stage yet. For most of this book Elizabeth Foss promotes Charlotte Mason's philosophy as the solution to all our homeschooling needs. However,

towards the end of the book, she does give the following very useful advice:

So what's my style? It is a learning-lifestyle education, approached prayerfully, and tailored to my children. My style isn't what's important. What is your style? Don't buy another book, another manipulative, until you take a good, long, prayerful look at yourself, your family, your home and your goals. What approach suits you? You have your pick. Choose wisely.

It reminds me of some very useful advice a priest once gave me – only to take on those things which you can do and remain at peace. For me at this point, I cannot take on wholehearted Charlotte Mason. But I don't have to. I can pick and choose. I can glean what I find personally good and applicable to our situation and use it. And there is much good in this book.

So, would I recommend this book? Yes, I would. It has many interesting things to say. And, now that you've read the quote I didn't get to until almost the end of the book, you can go into it forewarned and gather in a rich harvest.

"*Real Life Learning: In the Heart of the Home*" costs \$29.95 plus postage and is available from Fountain Resources, PO Box 2051, Magill North. SA. 5072. ph (08) 8365 8921, fax (08) 8365 7156 or email admin@fountainresources.com.au

reviewed by Michele Vieira.

"When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its corner-stone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward – in a word, a man. The historic Christian Church was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link." (G.K.Chesterton, '*Heretics*')

Real Life Learning: In the Heart of the Home – Sarah Fanning

“I’ve just read this wonderful book...” Recently three homeschooling mothers with whom I am friendly, one a mother of ten, one of eight, and one of seven, read ‘Real Life Learning’, by Elizabeth Foss, an American homeschooling mother of seven. It is a description of how she homeschools via the Charlotte Mason approach.

I have a lot of sympathy with the Charlotte Mason approach. Integrated learning is a good idea. When my older children were in primary school we used it a lot – except for maths – and it was fun. But it required a great deal of preparation and thought and planning on my part. Once they got into secondary subjects I found it impossible to pursue, particularly in concert with attempting to keep the house at least sometimes clean and tidy and look after babies. I think the idea of sitting down to a ‘closure’ of the day of Bible study and afternoon tea, with the best tablecloth, china, silver and delicious cakes, a lovely thought. I could possibly manage it once a term. Once a day? Evidently Elizabeth Foss is closer to God than I am.

I still like the idea of integrated learning, and I am edging back that way with the younger set now my ‘baby’ is nearly three. However, I am astounded at what the author seems to fit into her day /week /month /term /year. As with so many books of this sort, it makes me feel inadequate and delinquent. One reason we do not watch television (apart from some football on the weekends) is that we don’t have time. Partly this is the result of poor organization on my part; I do not plan ahead well; but a lot of it is that there is so much to be done.

Apart from everyday life, such as lessons, minimal housekeeping so the house doesn’t descend into complete disorder, cooking, laundry, shopping, etc., there is the getting of children to activities such as ballet and music and soccer, visiting friends, attending Mass, and so on; and this doesn’t even

include what the older boys do about the place, such as animal husbandry and DIY. By three in the afternoon I am not inclined to set the table for afternoon tea, nor are the children usually present to be involved; those not still at their books are likely to be engaged in other occupations more interesting to them than eating biscuits at the table.

As to burn-out; my own observation is that burn-out is generally the result of two things, one of which leads to the other. The first is exhaustion, and the second, which succeeds it, is diminution in private mental prayer. The result is burn-out. The answer, in my case, is start praying again. Extra sleep isn’t often an option.

How did this remarkable woman not only find time to educate her children, mind, heart and soul, to lead them to virtue, to keep a tidy and clean house, AND, whilst pregnant, to write a book about it all (especially one so beautifully presented and illustrated)? Wistfully, I will have to acknowledge as I wade through the detritus of dress-ups, crayons, guns, half-tanned sheepskins, discarded jumpers and coats, tangled hair-ribbons and solitary shoes, to reach the kitchen where I will consider the matter of what on earth we are going to eat for dinner, that I am not made of the same stuff. Ideally, I would like my children to finish as well-rounded, educated, cultured, convinced Catholics. In fact, I will heartily praise God if they simply finish as convinced Catholics who are able to read and write.

Having said this, it is a lovely book. For those of you out there with the self-discipline to throw out any item you have not used in the last three months as a first step in a campaign to an efficient house, this is the book for you. For those who like me can’t remember what you last used three months ago, this is a book full of pretty pictures and very good advice!

Father James Tierney

Fourteen years ago, when my oldest daughter was born, we unknowingly received a great gift from God. Yes, our daughter; but she we already knew to be a treasured gift. The unknown was the priest who happened to be standing in for our parish priest when our daughter was baptised.

Fr. James Tierney had entered our lives, and thanks be to God he has remained ever since, a cherished friend, a beloved priest, and the source of much invaluable knowledge we might never otherwise have learned, such as how to light a fire with wet wood, or the Church's fundamental support of parents as educators. Our children do not realize how privileged they are to have grown up with so fine a mentor, model and teacher.

When we first started homeschooling I was lacking in confidence and overwhelmed by negative advice. It was Fr.Jim, by then our parish Administrator, who began to provide the support and information to help us persevere, after learning from my son that he was being home schooled. Often after Mass the boys would trot out of the sacristy bearing one of the familiar yellow envelopes of cuttings, articles, quotes, etc; 'From Father', they would tell me, handing it over. Always it was heartening, and often illuminating, to receive these quiet tokens of approval.

After one religion lesson at home I approached Father with a request: could he show our children, and their cousins and some friends, the sacred vestments and vessels at close hand, and instruct them in their correct names? Father, as usual, gave more than was asked, and this led eventually

to regular weekly catechism lessons in the presbytery, attended not only by our children but by others from the parish school. Catechism lessons always began with tea and biscuits and cheese, and usually a cake, on the presbytery verandah, while the children played wild games on the soft, springy lawn, including leaping off the roof of the car-port! Officially lessons began at 3.15, but our boys began to get there earlier and earlier 'to help Father get ready', until I began to think Father would have no time to finish lunch before his assistants arrived!

This catechetical aspect of his work remains as strong as ever, as seen with the recent publication of a new Catechism, reviewed below in KIT.

Altar boy picnics took on the aspect of rugged bush expeditions, delighting the hearts and souls and minds of Father's 'bush boys'. When finally Father Tierney left our parish, there was one all-important question in the mind of my then eight year old son: what if our next parish priest didn't know how to light a fire with one match? What a legacy for any priest to live up to!

Father's rapport with all his parishioners, whatever their age, was a source of great unity in the parish, and he was sorely missed. By the grace of God, our circumstances are such that we have again found ourselves spending the last five years in close society with Fr. Jim, who recently celebrated the fortieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, and he remains as ever for our whole family a treasured source of practical and abstract help in so many areas of our lives.

Sarah Fanning

The Great Catechism Quiz.

Tension was mounting. Five pairs of eyes followed my hand as it reached into the cup to grasp the last remaining piece of paper. I smoothed out the crumpled scrap and noting the number scrawled upon it, announced, “Question 5: Who is Man?” An easy question. Imogen breathed a sign of relief and the answer slipped off her tongue: “Man is a creature of God with a soul made in His image, intelligent, free and responsible, and a body procreated by parents.” With a triumphant look she shouted, “I won by one point!”

Another Great Catechism Quiz was over. Nothing remained but to distribute the prizes and schedule the date of the next quiz.

What is a Great Catechism Quiz? It is a catechism quiz based on Father James Tierney’s *Catholic Family Catechism in 50 Questions and Answers*, printed on a single sheet of paper, and the contestants are five of our children: Charlotte (6), Imogen (9,) Callum (12). Duncan (16) and Felicity (17).

Father Tierney is an expert writer of catechisms. He has written the well-known *Catholic Family Catechism, A Catechism About Catechisms* and even a *Catechism of Camping*. Many of you will be familiar with Father’s Bush Boy series of children’s books. The *Catechism of Camping* can be found in the appendix of each of these books. Children have a natural ability to memorise and love to quote. Some children recite favourite poems or lines from Shakespeare, others favourite scenes from movies or parts of a novel. Then there are the dedicated bush boys who know their camping catechism inside out and are able to recite word-for-word the 50 camping catechism questions and answers. After realising that children have the ability and motivation to learn 50 questions and answers on a topic, Father decided to apply the same idea to his popular *Catholic Family Catechism*. For many months, he worked on

reducing the 500 questions of the catechism to 50.

Condensing the catechism into just 50 questions was a mammoth task. Once the questions were finalised, there was much juggling with the wording of the answers: words added, eliminated or changed. Finally, Father had a draft copy ready and this is when our family (amongst others) became Father Tierney’s “guinea pigs”. We were given a copy of the *Catholic Family Catechism in 50 Questions and Answers* and asked to “try it out” on our children. With our feedback and recommendations from more knowledgeable people than us, Father continued to modify the Q and A’s until they reached their present form.

We have all enjoyed learning Father’s catechism. It was a bit frustrating in the early days. The children would learn an answer and then in the mail we would receive an updated version from Father. “Oh no!” everyone would exclaim. “We’ll need to learn that answer again. Father has changed it!” They greeted each letter from Father with suspicion! We were greatly relieved when Father sent the Q&A’s to the printers: no more changes were possible!

I am sure we all agree on the importance of catechisms and we all probably teach our children their catechism in one way or another. I like the following story which can be found at the back of Father Tierney’s newly published 128 page book, *Catholic Family Catechism Disciples’ Edition with 50 Questions and Answers*:

“Three friends of mine, (Anglican) clergymen, making a tour through Ireland, pedestrians for the day, took a boy of thirteen to be their guide. They amused themselves with putting questions to him on the subject of his religion; and one of them confessed to me on his return that that poor child had put them all to silence. How? Not,

of course, by any train of arguments, or refined theological disquisition, but merely by knowing and understanding the answers in his catechism.”

Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman

We have all observed how easy it is for a child to memorise, especially when his imagination is fired. If our children have just finished viewing a movie, even before the video is rewound, the story will be retold scene by scene, word for word. Realising that outside experiences are so easily absorbed into our children, we decided to surround them with movies, books, music and poetry worthy of being remembered. What we remember becomes part of us. In the same way the truths of our faith can become part of our children through the memorisation of a catechism. We all know the thrill of being able to give the right answer at the right time. So many times I have thought to myself, “I should have said....It’s too late now”. Our children will never be at a loss for words if questioned about their faith, if they have memorised and understand their 50 catechism Q&A’s.

How do you go about learning the Q&A’s? Even though everyone will have their own ideas, I shall share what we are doing in our family. We aim to learn one new Q&A per week. I type the week’s Q&A in large print on an A 4 page and everyone has his own copy. Each child can add illustrations to the page, they learn the answer and then file the page in a folder. The week’s current question can be posted on the fridge door for frequent checking. Every couple of weeks or so, I announce we will be having a Great Catechism Quiz. During the preceding days, catechism questions can be found propped up on the kitchen bench as they are reviewed during the washing of dishes, or can be found on the lap of someone watching television. There is much honour in becoming catechism champion and all the children work hard to increase their chances of becoming the Great Catechism Quiz Champion. Of course, the other motivation is the prizes! (You can’t have a quiz without

prizes!) Prizes are only small but the contestants appreciate them. The winner will get a chocolate bar and the runners-up receive the consolation Freddo frogs. On the day of the quiz, if we have learnt 35 questions, I will write the numbers 1 to 35 on small pieces of paper and place the pieces in a cup. Each contestant is asked a question in turn, the question number being decided by random selection from the cup. If an answer is correct, a point is awarded. Incorrectly answered questions can be offered for bonus points. We haven’t yet worked out a satisfying method of awarding these extra points. We have tried offering the question to the next person around the circle or asking everyone to write their answer down, giving each child an equal chance of claiming an extra point.

As time goes on, the children are getting more and more proficient with their answers and the contest is a closely fought battle. One question can be the difference between winning and losing. I have noticed how the older ones do not like to be beaten by their younger sisters and they are always motivated to work hard, reviewing questions before the next quiz. Even though the children can get competitive, I have also noticed how generous they can be: winning is not everything. As our last quiz was drawing to a close, everyone had an equal number of points except for one child who was lagging behind by three points. Not having enough questions for another round, I was just about to ask everyone to write down the answers to the final three questions, giving everyone equal chance of gaining three more points. However, one of the children said, “If you give those questions to Frodo (name changed to avoid embarrassment!), he’ll have a chance to catch up”. All agreed and Frodo faced the remaining questions. All his siblings urged Frodo on, willing him to recite the correct answer. They were delighted when he was successful. Of course, there was no winner and the prize was unclaimed but no one seemed to care.

Father Tierney worded each answer carefully so that it could be chanted. We have learnt each answer by reciting it as if it is poetry, but just recently we have tried chanting the answers. Not knowing much about chanting, Father gave us some hints and now we are enjoying a new dimension to learning our catechism. Father hopes to put a recording of our chanting of his Q&A's on the Cardinal Newman website so other families can download it and join in.

This brings me to the Cardinal Newman website which can be found at www.cardinalnewman.com.au. Here, you can obtain a copy of the *Catholic Family Catechism in 50 Q&A's* as a double-sided single page hand-out. Visit the website to find out more about Father Tierney and his work, the Bush Boy series, and other publications. You can even download a copy of the latest *Keeping in Touch* or Father's *Catechetical News*.

Father Tierney has published his 50 Q&A's as the *Catholic Family Catechism Disciples' Edition with 50 Questions and Answers*. Father has devoted a double page spread to each of the questions adding relevant Bible passages, liturgical texts, key doctrinal ideas, prayers and beautiful illustrations. The book is available from Cardinal Newman Faith Resources (02 9637 9406) for \$5 a copy. Each child will benefit from his own copy. And for those who "want more": coming soon: a Catechists' Edition with detailed lesson plans and summary diagrams for teaching the Disciples Edition.

Please support Father Tierney's valuable work by placing your order now. While you are awaiting your books, download the 50 Q&A's from the website and get memorising. Soon you'll be hosting your own Great Catechism Quiz!

Sue Elvis

Maths and Mistakes - A Cautionary Tale

Last week I discovered I had made a mistake in kindergarten maths. Not the usual kind of mistake; I can (generally) add and subtract correctly at that level. The mistake I made was in being seduced by the deceitful promise of finding a better and easier way simply by ordering more books...!

We have some lovely books in our home. Many of them I rarely open, and am surprised again by the treasure within every time I do. But for lessons I tend to have a few tried-and-true that get used year after year – the old Ladybird readers, the 'Faith and Life' series, the Abeka Science series, 'Christ the King, Lord of History', the 'New Social Studies' – and among those are the *Golden Step Ahead* kindly to Year 3 Maths books from the supermarket, and the Year 4-onward 'Betty and Jim' maths books. I have used these latter for all my children (the eldest is now twenty) and they have served me well.

But ah! the demon of covetousness and the idle dream of the easy way out! A friend gave an enthusiastic recommendation of a series of Maths books she was using for her younger children; I examined the 'Miquon' books, and – yes, gentle reader – I succumbed, foolishly and where I ought to have known better, and bought a set.

Let me hastily point out that the Miquon series is truly excellent. I would recommend them heartily to anyone. I used them last week with my two youngest scholars, and they loved it. But in fact, what they really loved was the big chunk of time I spent with them, just them, as I familiarised myself with the series, rather than the books themselves. My old system would have served just as well in teaching.

Sarah Fanning

Feathers, Fur, Fins, and Something Else

You would think that living in a rented house (no pets allowed), I wouldn't have much to do with pets. I haven't had a cat or a dog but I have had plenty of other animals.

Pet one: It started with fish. I borrowed money off Felicity (I never paid her back) and bought a black bubble eye and called it Sauron. I thought keeping fish would be easy and fun. Several dead fish later, I changed my mind.

Pet two: I then turned to a new pet, an axolotl. (Using more borrowed money, never paid back), I then bought a tank and one big black axolotl. In case you have not seen one, an axolotl looks like a big fat lizard, about ten centimetres long, and with gills that look like little twigs of pine situated on either side of the head. The fantasy wore off pretty quick and was then turned to horror as one day I found the axolotl (which I called Jaws) sitting on top of the filter, head out of the water gasping for breath. Not long after that, I changed its name to Sweetheart and then to Bruce, but at the end of all the flipping and switching, I settled on Sweetheart. I then had a devious plan. I gave the axolotl to Duncan, ensuring that Sweetheart would be well fed without me paying and that all I had to do was watch and leave all the work to Duncan. Soon everyone wanted an axolotl, so me, Imogen and Felicity all bought new axolotls: Mozart, Folgrim and Gimpey. We all had so many that we had to buy two new tanks, the boys' animals in one and the girls' in another, and the spare one for the fish.

Pet three: Now, not long after we got Sweetheart, Felicity got a pair of finches. They were called Rosy and Sam (after the characters from Lord of the Rings). We hung them in the sunroom. They were trouble on wings from the moment we brought them home. As soon as we got their

box open to transfer them to the cage, they were out like



a shot and flew every which-way. It took us a whole half an hour to get the birds into the cage. They lived there happily finching away, chirping, and making a mess. All was fine until one day we found that Rosy had laid some eggs. We eagerly waited to see if the eggs would hatch. Alas, it was false hope. We looked in and found that out of the three eggs, there was only one, and a day or two later that disappeared too. We were happy until winter. That was when the deaths started. First, it was Rosy. She died of the cold, her poor little body frozen stiff. I had to bury her (I had now become an interspecies undertaker). Then the replacement bird, and then poor old Sam, all died of the cold.

Pet four: We now had one empty birdcage. Some months later, I was out visiting a friend who shall be nameless (Jimmy) and when I got back, I found that Imogen had bought a budgie, all with her money!!! She calls it Bobby and it lived in the finch cage. It is a lively and noisy bird. I have been trying to tame him, but he has other ideas though! I hope one day, to let him out of the cage so that he can fly around.

Pet five: Is a canary. It is Charlotte's and is one of the newest additions to our little zoo. We bought a new cage for Bobby as the finch cage was quite small and Charlotte got her canary to fill the empty cage. Charlotte calls her new canary Sunbeam, and it is her most coveted possession. Sunbeam is yellow and has mismatched legs, one, pink, and one black. Sophie thinks that it burned its leg. We had more fun getting the bird into its cage when it first arrived home. Imogen claimed that she was going to grab the bird out of its box and put it in its cage, so she opened the box and put her hand into the box that Sunbeam had come in. Sunbeam started to hop like mad, and Imogen ripped her hand out crying, "I'M FRIGHTENED!" She was so scared that when I asked for the

box, she practically threw it at me. That was when Sunbeam made his dash for freedom, shooting out of the box and flying up around the ceiling. After chasing Sunbeam around for a while, I was totally fed up and made a leap in the air, grabbing Sunbeam and popping him in the cage.

Pet six: For pet number six we have Mice. They have always fascinated me and long before I got one, I promised myself that one day I would have and keep one as my own. This is how I got my mouse: It was a rainy day in the holidays and Felicity had been out walking. She popped into Vinnies to escape from a shower and found a huge cage for sale. Thinking we could find another pet to put in it, she lugged it all the way from the shops. Anyway, it had a house and a wheel and was so tall that it had three levels, a bottom, middle and a top. I cried, "A mouse cage!" and then I beset upon Mum wheedling and whining until she could not resist. She went out and brought home some mice despite previously insisting that we had enough mice living in our house already. (Dad regularly does battle with the mousetraps).

Mice are a lot of fun. You can take them out of the cage and hold them. It is a lot of fun to have one on your head. When I first put them in the cage, I had to up end the box in the cage and out they both tumbled. But mine, (called Jerry), started to climb the wire sides of the cage up towards me as I struggled to get the top on. Mum brought home two mice (one for me and one for Sophie), then Felicity brought home two mice, one for herself and one for Duncan. So we now have Jerry, Mousie, Rincewind and Dibbler. Right from the word go, escape was all the thing for the mice. They instantly started to explore the cage, hatching a deadly plan. They waited until dark to pull off their escape. Nine o'clock at night Dad comes in and says, "Which side of the cage are these mice supposed to live on?" Jumping out of bed, I then rushed into the study, breaking the world record for five metre dashes. And sure enough, on the outside of the cage was Sophie's mouse,

Mousie. It is the smallest of all the mice. I rumbled them that time, but I was worried how long could I keep this up. One day there would be a time that I wouldn't be there to stop them getting out and Dad would get them with his mousetrap. They kept up the escapes, foiling all my plans to find out where they were escaping. All the worry eventually turned to stress and I found that I could not sleep at night. I eventually found a single cage bar that was stretched farther than the others. Closing it stopped the escapes for good. Two weeks later, I took Duncan's mouse Rincewind out of the cage, and put him on my arm. Since then all the mice have been a lot happier around me and they all love to be held and to run up my arm, so I think that mice are great.

Pet seven: This is Dad's pet. Dad does not like animals a rule, but this is just his pet. It has a steely nature, eats no food, does not have a cage, and does not move. All it does is sit and nod. Mum and me came by it in a garden centre. It's a dog made from steel and it has a neck made out of a spring. Dad called it K-9. It is the only pet that is custom made for Dad. That is our entire menagerie. Keeping pets is fun and what pet next.....who knows? (Do you think the lady from Century 21 will notice 4 axolotls, 11 fish, 2 birds and 4 mice when she visits next!!!)?

Callum Elvis

"The truth is, that it is quite an error to suppose that absence of definite convictions gives the mind freedom and agility. A man who believes something is ready and witty, because he has all his weapons about him. ... a man engaged against a brilliant duellist may fancy that the sword of his foe has turned to ten swords in his hand. But this is not because the man is really playing with ten swords, it is because he is aiming very straight with one." (G.K. Chesterton, taken from *Heretics*)

Is it a Bird? Is it a Plane? No, it's Superman, but is it Science?

There can be no superhero in the world quite as well-known as Superman, "The Man of Steel". He was the creation of Seigel and Shuster in the early days of comic book history.

In the beginning of his career, Superman, A.K.A. Clark Kent, was not intensely powerful, and his full range of abilities was the ability to jump one eighth of a mile and the ability to hold a car. But the public wanted a powerful hero and so the Man of Steel increased the range of his abilities by first picking up a bus. Then going on to move buildings. Until after a few decades, he was moving planets. Other powers were also added on. Superman's all famous flying ability. His laser blasting heat vision. His oxygen freezing breath. And others.

As the years went by, Superman got more and more powerful, until he became like a great god-like being. The stories got harder to plot as the mighty hero got ever mightier, and it appeared as though no-one could defeat the Man of Steel. The adventures began to have to rely on magic which didn't need to be logical, or on an evil device designed to take away Superman's powers. Finally, when the mid 1980s came around, the storywriters had had enough. They removed much of the hero's power and began to concentrate more on his character, thus taking away much of the super and adding in more of the man.

But where did Superman get his powers? In the beginning, there were no explanations to how Clark Kent became Superman, but as his comics became increasingly popular his writer offered forth a reason for his amazing abilities. He was, claimed the writer, a member of a race more advanced than ours and from a planet of more gravity than earth. The planet was called Krypton and Superman was the last member of the race of Kryptons that had lived there. Years ago, when the Man of Steel was young he was the only Krypton to escape when the planet blew up. He was sent flying through space to earth in a small rocket that his father had just managed to procure for him.

A nice story, but is it possible for such a race to exist? Back in the days of the hero's creation it was commonly believed that there were races of strange beings somewhere out among the stars. One day, it was thought, one of these alien races will come and make contact with us.

As the decades rolled on, the aliens refused to make contact. Instead there was observed these mystical disc-like objects flying through the sky. The flying-saucer phenomena had started.

Instantly, it was assumed that the aliens had decided to get close and personal with earth before they sent their message. The moment of contact could not be far away! But the saucers remained silent and refused to enlighten the world about any civilization that they might have come from. It didn't take long however, for an explanation to arise in the public's mind. They claimed that the silent saucers had made contact with some members of the human race but the governments had found out first and hushed it all up. In those Russian-spy and secret agent hysteria days, it was not hard for the common man to believe in such a tale.

Eventually of course, real science had to step in and find out about the alien races, which were supposedly out there. A new science organization was formed, the Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence, otherwise known as the SETI. Finding that the flying saucers did not respond to radio transmissions sent to them, the SETI broadened its search and started to send messages to the stars in the hope of receiving an answer. But the search was a long one and even now, the SETI has not finished ringing up all the stars in a hope to contact the elusive alien races.

How many races could be living with us in this galaxy? Two scientists once decided to work it out mathematically by taking the average number of planets, the life time of different types of stars, the right conditions for life, the "habitable zone" around the sun, and many other factors that the scientists said were necessary for the existence of life. They then put the figures together and after a few waves of the mathematical wand and a couple of divide and multiply signs, they had the amount of races in the galaxy. The results which can be taken from this equation vary depending on how you do the sums but it apparently says that there are at least 100 different civilisations in the Milky Way galaxy.

But before you jump up and run off looking for all these alien races, it probably is a good idea to say that there have been some critics of this way of calculating the alien population. The critics claim that the method relies too much on the presumption

that all the star systems are more or less the same as our own solar system, and only one major mispresumption is needed to set the whole theory into chaos. I might add that as the maths makes use of the theory of evolution it cannot be relied upon to give a correct answer.

From a religious point of view, the question of life on other planets is possible. The author of this article, personally asked the advice of a philosophy teacher, to which he replied that there *could* be another race in the universe which possessed an intellectual soul. The teacher said he personally doubted the idea but it could be true, and on the whole it sounded rather fun!

So where is Krypton? Well, according to the comics, Krypton is three billion light-years from earth. It is unlikely that the writer knew it but the Milky Way galaxy is only one billion years across from one side to the other. So, in order to be sufficiently far away from earth, Krypton would have to be in another separate galaxy. We shall pass over the question of how Superman's father was able to send a rocket ship that far or even for that matter how he knew earth was there. Let's just keep with the idea that the Kryptons were a very advanced race. It has been suggested with recent studies into the nature of habitable planets, that the real reason that the Man of Steel was sent to earth, was not that the world needed a hero, but rather that it was the only other planet he could survive on.

So now we've questioned the possibility of a man from Krypron, but we still don't know how or if his powers could work. As mentioned above, Superman's powers were due to being born on a planet that had a greater gravity than earth. This would mean that now that he was on earth the Man of Steel would be able to lift objects of more mass than on his home planet. It would also explain his ability to "jump one eighth of a mile".

Unfortunately, science has seen some fatal flaws in this idea. An average athlete is able to lift his own body weight. Now supposing Clark Kent to be 100 kg, to lift 10 000 kg he would have to weigh 10 000 kg on Krypton, which in turn would mean that Krypton would have to be 100 times larger than earth. And have you seen the size of the things that Superman moves around on earth? By scientific reasoning, to remain in an upright position on their home planet, the Kryptons would have to be made of matter stronger than any known. Additionally, Superman would be unable to escape from the doomed world in a rocket, as no craft would be able to break away from such gravity. A final but not too important complaint is the fact that a planet of

Krypton's size and proportion would totally disrupt the entire big bang theory. (Good idea, why not?)

The explanation for the Man of Steel's powers was beginning to look somewhat unlikely after science had thoroughly taken it apart, so once again the writer had to sharpen his pencil and try another concept for Superman's superness. This time, the comics claimed, the hero's powers were caused by the light coming down to our planet from the sun. This provided a new origin for Clark Kent's powers, plus inadvertently inspiring some of Superman's enemies to turn off the sun until they could finish him off. But then of course, the powers of science and mathematics always have to come along and spoil a good story. The scientists claimed that light is the same whatever sun it comes from, and there is little difference between the rays from a white dwarf star and rays from a red giant. Except of course a heavy suntan from the latter.

So, Superman cannot exist in the way that the comics have portrayed him, but who knows if a race of beings may still live somewhere in the universe, who by some as yet unknown method, possess powers like the Man of Steel. Such a race of aliens may be trying, even as you read this, to contact us. The truth may never be known until the SETI might at last dial up the right star, or if one of the flying saucers might break its vow of silence. Until then, we can only wait.

If you have enjoyed this piece of writing and are a lover of superheroes and science, you might enjoy reading *The Science of Superheroes* by Lois Gresh and Robert Weinberg.

Duncan Elvis

A Special Gift (St. Francis de Sales)

The everlasting God has in His wisdom foreseen from eternity the cross that He now presents to you as a gift from His inmost Heart. This cross He now sends you He has considered with His all-knowing eyes, understood with His Divine mind, tested with His wise justice, warmed with loving arms and weighed with His own hands to see that it be not one inch too large and not once ounce too heavy for you. He has blessed it with His holy Name, anointed it with His grace, perfumed it with His consolation, taken one last glance at you and your courage, and then sent it to you from heaven, a special greeting from God to you, an alms of the all-merciful love of God.

The Italian Job

This edition of KIT has been somewhat given over to reflections on heroes, so I would like to share with you my thoughts on another. His name is Andy Elvis and on the first weekend in August he performed culinary heroics at the Bearleys' place. His audience was a privileged group of more than 20 homeschooling parents who were invited to sample Andy's version of the '*Italian Job*'. This was to be a special evening out together for the homeschooling mums and dads, a group not used to being out together without all the little encumbrances. The night was a fundraiser to help cover the costs of the religious at the upcoming September camp, and, as such, it was a great success. Andy and Felicity's time was given generously and freely, and I am sure I will fail to convey adequately to you in this short article, just how delicious the food was.

The meal consisted of three courses, prepared entirely by Andy, and served by Andy and his able and charming daughter Felicity. (They didn't even let us help with the washing up – Mr Brown had to be physically restrained from getting near the sink at this point). The menu (for those conversant with Italian) was

Minestrone di riso

Pолента al forno

Gnocchi di patate

Spaghetti alla puttanesca

Green Salad

Tiramisu and/or Tortini

The night slipped by amazingly quickly. This was due, no doubt, to the novelty of the situation, where the homeschooling parents found themselves deprived of the presence of all their wonderful little children and forced to make conversation, something that homeschooling mothers can find particularly difficult.

The other reason that the night was so enjoyable and that the time went by so quickly, was that the food was so delicious, beautifully presented and delightfully served.

Andy is about to start offering his catering services to the general public, and I would heartily recommend them to you or to those you might know who might be thinking of a catered event at home or at work. The service Andy is looking to

offer is that he would provide the food, preparation and serving thereof at the home or designated location. I know (from happy experience) that his menu selection goes well beyond the Italian offering we enjoyed.

Andy can be contacted via the details listed on the front of this edition of KIT.

My only criticism (call me churlish) relates to the size of the servings. Any of you familiar with Michael Cain's driving adventures in the Minis in the film the '*The Italian Job*', would have found such driving feats impossible after Andy's '*Italian Job*'. Gaining entry to such a vehicle would have been next to impossible! The richness and size of the helping of Tiramasu heaped upon my plate by our chef would have made weaker men quail. Only a teenage boy could have done it justice.

Finally I would like to thank Andy and Felicity for their sterling efforts on the night. As a result of their true heroism and self-sacrifice we were able to raise a goodly sum towards the cost of the camp, to have a thoroughly enjoyable evening out together (a great re-charging of collective batteries) and the ability to enjoy a wonderful meal.

When's the '*Indian Job*' Andy?

*By a Secret (and long standing) Admirer of
Andy's Culinary Talents*



Cuisine Machine

Give yourself a break, try our mobile home catering for your special occasions, including-

➤ Romantic dinners for two

➤ Dinner Parties

➤ Birthday parties

Call Andy Elvis on 02 4871 3798 weekdays after 7.00pm or weekends to discuss your menu and pricing details

Red Stitch Embroidery

Do you like sewing? If so, red stitch is for you. I do red stitch embroidery and so does my six year old sister and also my mum. All from six to the grownups can do this and once you start you will want to do more. I have only done two embroideries but it is so much fun that I am doing my third pattern.

You can make your own patterns or find one in a pattern book. There are lots of pattern books of angels, flowers, people and animals. Red stitch is cheap and all you need is red thread, calico, an embroidery hoop and a needle and you are off.

Trace your pattern onto the calico using a pencil. Sew the pattern using simple stitches such as back stitch, French knots, satin stitch and lazy daisy stitch. Wash the finished embroidery in warm soapy water to remove the pencil marks. Dye the fabric in tea. Use one tea bag to each cup of water. Leave in the tea for half an hour. Remove fabric from the tea and dry it before ironing it.

You can put your picture in a frame or make a wall hanging or a cushion but whatever you do have fun. (You can put a layer of wadding under your picture before framing it). These embroideries make lovely presents for the whole family and all your friends as well.

Imogen Elvis

A Person Whom I Admire

I am writing about a priest acquaintance, a friend of mine. He is a priest of the Wollongong Diocese. He is a good friend of my family. He is also my sponsor for Confirmation. I have known him for several years. Father has many positive characteristics that I admire, including good-tasting cures for sickness. He is always jovial and tries to teach us what he calls interesting educational matters.

Father is a good priest to imitate. He knows a lot of things about the Catholic Faith. He has

completed lots of studies, including one in Rome. When he says Mass it is a most rewarding experience, as he is very reverent and never rushes Mass. His homilies are very informative. He is also a good person to go to confession to because he always has time for you and helps you with what is troubling you.

The cure Father has for sickness is well loved by all my family. When my little sister was sick recently with earache, he cured her with his medicine, large bars of Cadbury chocolate! She got better immediately! Even during Lent the cure will sometimes enter our house. If someone is seriously sick or feeling down, then an even better cure comes in the form of ice cream and nice cheese.

By Gregory Brealley

Pope John Paul II

My hero is not a hero of physical strength but of spiritual and mental strength. My hero is Pope John Paul II. He is the vicar of Christ, Successor of St Peter the first Pope. Pope John Paul is eighty - three, he has survived an assassination attempt fourteen years ago, he placed one of the bullets in the crown of Our Lady of Fatima statue in Fatima. He is now moved around in a mobile throne chair due to limitations of physical infirmity.

Here is a remarkable and very holy human being, whose trust and confidence in the Lord is inspiring. He is a living prayer of self sacrifice. This is a man drinking to the last drop of the Cup the Lord promised to his disciples, a man pouring out his life in service to the truths on which he has staked his life. This is a man walking the way of the cross in front of the whole world. This is not a pope from Poland, this is a Pope from Galilee.

By Blayn George