

Karen Andreola's

Pocketful of Pinecones

Nature Study with the Gentle Art of Learning™



A Story for Mother Culture®

A Teacher's Guide to Nature Study Wrapped in a Heartwarming Story...

Karen Andreola, renowned interpreter of the Charlotte Mason method of education, has written a unique sort of book in the homeschool world. *Pocketful of Pinecones* is a teacher's guide to nature study cleverly disguised as a heartwarming story written in the form of a mother's diary.

Woven into the story are

- More than 100 examples of what to look for on a naturewalk
- Latin names for the living things observed by the characters
- Study questions
- Nature poems and verses

Other features include

- A supplement containing selected quotations by Miss Charlotte Mason
- An annotated list of books with a nature theme – both fiction and non-fiction.

Yet *Pocketful of Pinecones* is a story about Carol. Carol is on her feet a lot – industriously caring for her family. In her diary Carol pours out her secret worries, hopes, joys, and disappointments. She also writes of the naturewalks she enjoys with her children. Her goal is to safeguard their sense of wonder. Together they observe God's marvelous creation and the children record their finds in their Nature Notebooks. Carol reads *Home Education* by Miss Charlotte Mason and attempts to put the advice into practice. Designed to be a "pick-me-up," each chapter is short enough to minister to a mother who has only snatches of time in which to nourish her soul.



Karen was editor of *Parents' Review* magazine from 1991 to 1996. She is a sought after speaker and shares her "gentle art of learning™" at major state conferences and ladies' teas.

After ten years of research and experiment Karen wrote *A Charlotte Mason Companion* – She and her family live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



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Pocketful of Pinecones

*Nature Study with
the Gentle Art of Learning™*

A Story for Mother Culture®



Charlotte Mason
Research & Supply Company

Pocketful of Pinecones; Nature Study with the Gentle Art of Learning
A Story for Mother Culture
by Karen Andreola

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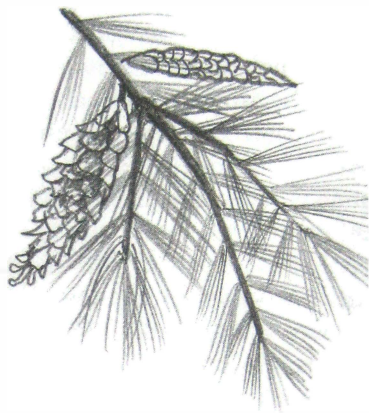
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Introduction



“How do you do nature study with your children?” curious mothers ask me.

“We go on naturewalks,” I answer. “The children draw what we find and sometimes we read about it when we get home. Their drawings and observations are kept in a Nature Notebook.” Unable to go into more detail than this at a crowded homeschool conference, I point out that I have some chapters on how to do nature study in my book, *A Charlotte Mason Companion — Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning*.

The pages of *Pocketful of Pinecones* go further. They are meant to give the reader a larger look at a lifestyle of learning. Although the story is fiction, the experiences are based on my own. Since 1988 I have been doing nature study with my children in accordance with Charlotte

Mason's advice in *Home Education*. All of my children have created their own Nature Notebooks at one time or another and, I am happy to say, have retained a wonder and reverence for nature. *Pocketful of Pinecones* is written as the diary of a fictional homeschooling mother named Carol. Shall I admit that in many ways Carol is like myself? (Notice the similarity in the names.) Carol lives in New England during the Depression years of 1935-36. She starts her diary in September when homeschool lessons begin. The autumn section of the book is more didactic than later sections: the autumn section explains, step by step, how to construct a Nature Notebook and suggests ways to overcome certain obstacles that may arise. Gradually the chapters become less "teach-y" and by Christmas, as more of a story unfolds, you will be caught up in the drama of Carol and her family.

I like old books. Perhaps this is why I've given my book the voice and appearance of one. The message, however, has relevance for today's homeschooling mother. The illustrations were carefully researched and freely adapted from a style typical of the nineteen-thirties. Some pictures were based on specific works by George M. Sutton and George O. Richards. My thanks go to illustrator Robert. E. Jones for his faithful renderings.



You may have heard people in education talk about "hands-on" learning. What can be more hands-on than nature study? It is wonderful to have a bookish education if the books are living books, books written by authors who have a particular fondness for their subject — books other than dry textbooks. In a bookish education, nature study provides an opportunity for hands-on discovery learning. What is discovered is remembered. What is listened to, touched, smelled, watched, and (in some instances) tasted is better understood. Young children become keen observers. They develop the patient power of attention and observation when they use their five senses as amateur naturalists. Nature facts crammed from a textbook for a science test are more likely forgotten. *Pocketful of Pinecones* provides you with many examples of discovery learning — examples for each season. They are merely examples, however, meant to start you on your own adventure with nature.

Although the emphasis of the story is on nature study, it also touches upon a range of other subjects. It also gives the reader a brief introduction to the writings of Miss Charlotte Mason (1842-1923). At the back of the book you will find a supplement containing selected quotations from Miss Mason's book, *Home Education*. The quotations are referenced in the story because they are ones that were influential to Carol. (Carol had a copy of *Home Education*.) I suggest that you wait until the end of each chapter to read them — or even until the end of the story.



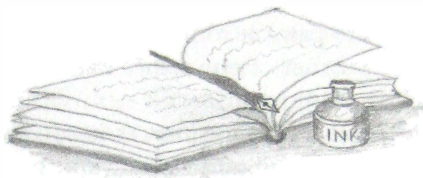
Last, but not least, *Pocketful of Pinecones* is essentially about the life of a mother who industriously cares for her family. Carol is on her feet a lot. She has worries, hopes, joys, and disappointments. She learns to trust the Lord in her circumstances. And she is very wise to participate in what I call Mother Culture®. To take part in Mother Culture® is to take a little time to keep growing. In as little as fifteen minutes a day, a mother can strengthen her spirit, expand her mind, exercise her creativity, or ponder ideas that will help her in her arduous task as homemaker/home teacher. I have designed this book to be useful for Mother Culture®, to be nourishing, and to be influential in keeping up a mother's enthusiasm. It is my prayer that she who reads it will be encouraged in her task while she gathers practical ideas for teaching her own precious children by way of the gentle art of learning.



Karen Andreola
July 2001



Carol Starts Something New



September 1935

Today I attempted something I've never done before. Homeschooling is an absolutely new experience for me. This morning Emily knocked on my bedroom door. Her golden hair was neatly brushed and she was wearing the new honey-colored dress I had made her. Then Donald shuffled in with a peculiar expression — his dark hair sticking out in all directions. He asked Emily where she was going so early this morning.

"Don't you know?" Emily asked, with purpose. "Today is the first day of school. Come on Don, get dressed."

"Okay," he answered reluctantly — probably partly because he didn't like being told what to do by his younger sister and partly because his attitude towards school has been one of utter dissatisfaction. With more wakefulness he added, "Hey, we don't have to go to school today, do we? You're teaching us this year, right Mom?"

Chapter
1

Autumn

~1~

Carol Starts Something New

I hope I can live up to his expectations.

After breakfast, Emily was clearing the table and Don was licking the jam spoon when I came back into the kitchen with two black and white composition books. They're just ordinary composition books, but my plans are that the children will turn them into something special. Both children looked at me inquisitively. Don reached out for one of them — but not wishing to get them sticky with jam, I told him and Emily to come into the parlor as soon as their chores were finished.

I had their little desks set up in the parlor so that I can teach them in my favorite room. It's now a more cheerful room since the landlord allowed us to paint it robin's egg blue. The sheer ruffled curtains brighten up this corner of our rather dark bungalow. It will be a lovely place to teach the children.

Michael was in a hurry, as usual. As we joined him at the door to say goodbye, I straightened his tie and handed him his briefcase. However much in a hurry he was, on the doorstep he turned round to whisper an encouraging word in my ear, tipped his hat, and was off. I watched him go, thinking to myself, "What a kind man he is, and handsome too, in his new suit — matching so well his brown hair and brown eyes." Then it struck me that with his recent haircut and the cleft in his chin he bears a resemblance to Cary Grant. Of course, he is even more handsome than Cary Grant! I am so thankful that he has a good position at a time when so many men are out of work.

I was sitting at my writing desk squinting at a schedule sheet when the children came into the parlor. I was thinking to myself that I could have the makings of a truly orderly sort of person — though I know it will take constant effort. I have decided to use this first week to "warm up" to lessons — to acquaint the children with their subjects a little at a time. I think this will make for a good beginning. Emily is starting second grade and Don, fourth.

For science we will study God's creation together. I know how much Don and Emily like to be outdoors; therefore, I think the advice from *Home Education* by Miss Charlotte Mason — to have students record their observations of the out-of-doors in a Nature Notebook — will be enjoyable for them.

"Children, I'm looking forward to teaching you myself this year.

Autumn

~2~

Carol Starts Something New

Come sit on the sofa with me and we'll talk about these books," I began. When I explained that they could keep a record of whatever bit of nature they found, drawing and writing a little something about what they observed, Emily was particularly keen on the idea. The set of colored pencils I gave her added to her anticipation. Don was silent.

When I wrote out a title page on a sheet of paper for them to copy into their Nature Notebooks, Emily sprang to her little desk. She began copying the words with her neatest handwriting. Don got up slowly, sighed, and after plopping his book on his desk, sank into his chair. At first I was mystified about this reaction; then it occurred to me that he must be embarrassed about his drawing ability. Then I remembered him telling me some months ago that some of the other students at school had relentlessly made fun of his drawing. No wonder he wasn't so keen on the idea of Nature Notebooks. I was proud of him, though, because he picked up his pencil and began writing his title page, anyway.

I glanced at Emily and saw that she was absorbed in her task in her slow, steady way, and gave her a "Good work!" To Don I gave an "It's coming along nicely," with a hand of encouragement on his shoulder. After these few words and the announcement that I'd be right back, I slipped away to the cellar to put some clothes in the automatic washer. When I returned five minutes later Emily was still at her desk, arranging her colored pencils in the order of the color wheel. Don was gone. I popped my head out of the kitchen door to see if I could spot him. Unsuccessful at this I walked into the backyard. I still couldn't see him anywhere! But when I called, he came out of hiding, relating to me that a group of children had been walking to school, and when they saw him he crawled under the back hedge. He decided to show me what he called his "secret hideout" — a small hollow sheltered by two forsythia bushes. Here I discovered the missing front door mat, which he must have been using to sit on. But before I could get out a "What's the idea, taking the door mat?" he called my attention to what he really wanted to show me.

It was the largest spider web we had ever seen. In the center was the fat hairy arachnid waiting for its prey. "Maybe a spider is something I can draw for my Nature Notebook," he said hopefully. I was thankful for the presence of the spider in Don's hideout, but I really didn't want the children outside during school hours. Nosey neighbors surround us. I

Carol Starts Something New

told him that we ought to go back into the parlor and that he could draw the spider later in the afternoon.

When we got settled inside again, I introduced the children to their new arithmetic books. The first page of Don's book was quite easy for him — a good refresher for the memory. Emily, however, needed much help with her page. Therefore I took out our set of dominoes. This gave Emily practice at adding sets of numbers at a glance. I picked out the dominoes with lower number combinations. When she becomes proficient at these I'll introduce the higher combinations. While we were reviewing our arithmetic facts dark clouds blotted out the morning sunshine. Soon there was a soft shower of rain. The finger climbing motions of the old rhyme "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" were performed by Emily as she asked about Don's spider. Don frowned. I don't think she meant to tease him. It was just the association of rain and spider that gave her the idea of the song. Don resented such a reference yet admitted to me that it *could* be washed away. How was he to draw it then?

"Don't worry Don, your spider isn't in a water spout," Emily said plainly, trying to ease his mind.

Countenances were softened when we gathered on the sofa and I read aloud from the first chapter of *Bambi*. I chose this story because of its rich description of nature and plentiful array of new vocabulary.^A They were riveted. I am happy I chose a story that they both seem to like so much, one that I have to admit I'm enjoying too.



By lunchtime I'd managed to put the washed laundry through the wringer and hang it up in the basement to dry — it was still wet outside. My brother had driven into town on Saturday and dropped off a half bushel of tomatoes, so after lunch I announced that I would be busy canning. Don pleaded, "May we go outside and check on the spider? It has stopped raining."

I nodded a yes, my mind on the work I had ahead of me. Then I remembered the clipboards I had purchased for their nature drawing. They were still in my shopping bag. Pulling them out, I showed the children how to clip on a sheet or two of paper from their drawing pads.

Autumn

Carol Starts Something New

Next, a pencil was tied onto each clipboard and then they ran out the kitchen door, the clipboards clutched in their hands. In less than a minute they were back to report happily that the spider was still there and would I come see it again. Although I needed to get started with the canning I followed them. I knew it would be better to join in for the sake of allowing my lively children to share their sense of wonder.

How beautiful it was! Sunlight reflected off the tiny rain droplets that were strung along the web like beads. Even Emily, who normally shudders at spiders, thought it looked beautiful. I left them to their drawing (Emily remarking that she would only draw the web) and came inside to do my chore.

Just now Michael and the children are sitting comfortably in the parlor listening to their usual evening radio show while I write. It's been a good many years since I've kept a diary. I think I shall like keeping one again. And it will be a good place to record some of our new experiences with Nature Study. As the radio show draws to a close I will also close my diary with this: I think we had a fine first day of homeschool.



Don's garden spider – *Zygiella atrica*



Would you and your children welcome the idea of starting a Nature Notebook?