

# Discovering Living Books: Jan Bloom's Journey to Building a Rich Library

## Episode 263

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

This month, we are doing a little series on literature because we believe in the power of books to shape us and create a love of learning in our kids and us. If you're a book lover or a wanna be book lover, welcome. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carol Joyside has been helping families homeschool now for several decades through her literature based approach to education. In this episode, Carol talks with her friend, Jan Bloom, about the joy of literature and how learning more about the authors who wrote our favorite books adds so much more richness to the experience of reading. Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:00:43]:

We are so thrilled today to have someone that we kinda considered a rock star. Her name is Jan Bloom, and she lives in the fair state of Minnesota. And Jan has written some books that I want all of you to know about and be able to access, and she's gonna tell us our story. So welcome, miss Jan.

Jan Bloom [00:01:06]:

Thank you. And actually, I am a Minnesotan, but I currently live in Suffolk, Virginia. So just near Virginia Beach. Oh, I didn't know that. That's marvelous. Well, that's a much lovelier climate, I'm assuming. Right? Oh oh, yes. It's it's much nicer.

Jan Bloom [00:01:21]:

Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:22]:

Oh, oh, that's so fun. Well, Jan, tell me how our paths crossed because I love you but I'm not sure when we first got acquainted. Tell me a little bit about that.

Jan Bloom [00:01:35]:

So I just did a little brief recap on a piece of paper so I would say things that I think are important. We heard about homeschooling in 1982 and decided that that's what we wanted to do and went to a Labrie seminar back when Francis Schaeffer was still alive and, met Ronald McCauley, Susan Schaeffer McCauley's husband. And then we went to a Raymond Moore seminar in the Twin Cities, and then we started going to Mache when that started in Minnesota. And so you were a speaker at Mache in those early years, and I would go and I'm not sure if I ever went to one of your workshops because I know you came to the Twin Cities, and I think I did. But that was a really long time ago, and I can't remember. So but I would carry around your lists, and they really helped inform me at the beginning. And they were so important for me to get to know books, just reading what other people had done, Honey for a Child's Heart and then Books Children Love Yeah. And Susan Schaeffer McCauley's book, For the Children's Sake.

Jan Bloom [00:02:50]:

So they were the books that started me, knowing books. I didn't I did not know books. I did not grow up in a book rich family. I've I've decided in looking back that my mom, who was two months premature, her incubator was a shoe box on top of their wood burning stove. I think she had reading issues and so she didn't enjoy reading and so we weren't encouraged really to read and we didn't, do much with books and so learning about books was a pretty new thing for me when I decided to start homeschooling.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:32]:

Yeah. So what what turned the tide? What were your first experiences with loving books?

Jan Bloom [00:03:40]:

I think, honey, for a child's heart, it it's so hard to try to explain everything. Growing up in a conservative Christian home, at some point in my teenage years, one of the youth speakers said that you should only read the Bible, books about the Bible, and books about Christians and missionaries, and that fiction is, at best, a well told lie. So starting in my teen years, I didn't read fiction because, I was afraid of it. I wanted to live a life for the Lord and, you know, if fiction was a lie, I ought not be indulging in that. So reading Honey for a Child's Heart when I had my first daughter, it it just blew up my world, because of the things she said and just the freedom that it gave me to consider fiction. I started out slowly. I started out with James Harriot because he was sort of not fiction, but sort of fiction. Mhmm.

Jan Bloom [00:04:49]:

And, then I just started, reading more and more and more and reading to, my kids. So JJ was born on Jenny's third birthday, and Jody is between the two. So in exactly three years, I had three kids, and that was a bit challenging. Yes. And And you have a JJ. I do. I saw that you had a JJ too. He's mine is a Jeffrey j.

Jan Bloom [00:05:18]:  
What is yours?

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:19]:  
Jonathan Jonah.

Jan Bloom [00:05:22]:  
Uh-huh. Yes. Yes. We can tell where people are at in JJ's life because if they call him JJ, we know it's someone from his past in his family. Uh-huh. And if they call him Bloom, we know it's someone from the Navy. And if they call him Jeff, we know that it's someone from the last, you know, few years of his life.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:42]:  
Yes. Yeah. Okay. That's sweet. Yeah. Well, so you started homeschooling and did what was the methodology that you used starting out?

Jan Bloom [00:05:54]:  
Well, we had gone to a Raymond Moore seminar that first year in 1982 and so his book, *School Can Wait*, basically was about, I mean, we did Charlotte, you know, Charlotte Mason ideas were there from Ronald McCauley's talk that turned into Susan's book, but it was *School Can Wait*. So it was just doing a lot of reading and a lot of activities and,

Carole Joy Seid [00:06:21]:  
Working?

Jan Bloom [00:06:23]:  
Yeah. We just, you know, teaching them to cook and things like that. Yeah. I didn't I didn't do much with workbooks or things like that. They we ended up homeschooling them all through high school, which was very surprising. I didn't expect that. I mean, because here in Raven Moore, you know, we were gonna do it for a few years and then, you know, merge into school, and we just kept doing it. And, so our oldest daughter is, actually, right now, she's training to be a homeopath, and that's pretty cool.

Jan Bloom [00:07:01]:

She did English as a second language for a number of years. And then our middle daughter did this and did that and did this and did that, and I don't think she ever finished college, but, she's a scrum master, which I I I don't know. She took training, got a certification to be a scrum master. And then JJ, our son, was in the Navy for fifteen years. He was in IT. So he's our he set me up with my headphones, and he helped me he helped me get all this set up. So we live we live with our son. He was injured in an accident, so he has traumatic brain injury.

Jan Bloom [00:07:43]:

And we moved here to live with him and just help him live life.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:47]:

Oh, that's beautiful. I didn't know that. Well, you created two books that and maybe you've even created more. But the two books I have in my hand in which you so kindly, I think, gave me was Who Should We Then Read and volume two of Who Should We Then Read, a busy reader's concise guide to the best authors of living books. I was speaking somewhere and you had been in that community for a reason and and you had left these books for me as a gift, and I just love them. So tell me how your love affair with buying books and owning books and traveling around and finding these great books came about and how you determine what books people should should read to their children.

Jan Bloom [00:08:39]:

Well, as I said, you know, we were starting with Ray with Raymond Moore's ideas and so we would go to the library and we each would have a a box with handles and so the librarians loved us and hated us because we were good for circulation figures, but they had all those books that they had to put away. And one day, we went to the library and there was a sign that said Book Sale Room B. And so we went into this. And if I had known then what I know now, I would be independently wealthy. But I didn't. And so, you know, these tables of books, they were 25¢ each, and it was like, books. And and so we just started buying books, and then we started finding duplicate copies of books we had enjoyed. Yeah.

Jan Bloom [00:09:29]:

And then I started selling them at support groups in the Twin Cities. Yeah. And so It was really interesting. So I was looking at the first the booklet that I did. Oh, what did I do with it? I don't know. I thought I brought it. Oh, so this this is the first book. This is a booklet that I did, and this was the very first thing.

Jan Bloom [00:09:54]:

And I was reading the introduction, and I thought, oh, I forgot that. Oh my goodness. It was just really fun. This was this was 1998. Yeah. And, this is how it started. So three friends and I, two of us were in Minnesota, two were in Mississippi. We knew each other, and we're all buying and selling books.

Jan Bloom [00:10:18]:

And we decided that we should get together and make a pamphlet to give to our customers because we had learned all this stuff, and we wanted to share that information. And so we tried working on it, but, you know, two homeschooling moms in Mississippi and two in Minnesota, we didn't get very far. So I took it on because I was the furthest along in homeschooling. My kids were the oldest.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:48]:

Yeah.

Jan Bloom [00:10:48]:

And and then it totally changed from what we were going to do to what, I ended up doing. And, and then I just kept on adding authors and finally I thought I need to stop. This is ridiculous. And so the first book has a 57 authors.

Carole Joy Seid [00:11:07]:

Yes.

Jan Bloom [00:11:08]:

And then one of the gals, Mary Fredericks, who is one of the original four, she couldn't go to a book sale in Arkansas and she called and asked if we wanted to go to Arkansas. And it's like, Arkansas? Where is that? And so Gary and I decided that we would go to Arkansas, and I'd always just done the book sales in the Twin Cities by myself.

Rachel Winchester [00:11:34]:

Yeah.

Jan Bloom [00:11:34]:

And so Gary and I packed up we had a Plymouth Voyager, and we packed it up with boxes of books so that as we went down the freeway, you know, the back end was kinda dragging and the front end was hardly touching. And we got to Arkansas, we set up this little booth with boxes of books and and it was really fun and it's like, oh, this is really fun going other places. And then the next year, we added more And then Gary quit his job so that we could travel.

Rachel Winchester [00:12:07]:  
Wow.

Jan Bloom [00:12:07]:  
And so we've been book missionaries for twenty five years.

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:12]:  
And is your personal library award winning? Like, do I need to come and live in your house and read all your books?

Jan Bloom [00:12:20]:  
Well, I counted my bookcases and, okay. So I'm in my office right now and these bookcases are Yeah. This is different. Yeah. So I have I have 47 bookcases in my house that have our books in them. I mean, they're they're, like, a foot and a half wide and six feet tall. So, yeah, I have a lot of them, but I'm not a librarian. So, I mean, they're our homeschool librarians, and they have, like, a complete collection of landmarks and We Were There as its signatures.

Jan Bloom [00:12:56]:  
And I don't. I have really great books. I don't have books that people would come in and, you know, use in their homeschooling. Mhmm. I'm playing I'm playing about that because I don't think there's a homeschool library in our neck of the woods. Mhmm. And the libraries here have a five year rule. So if a book is more than five years old, it gets it gets tossed.

Jan Bloom [00:13:21]:  
No. And so it's either five or 10. Some are five, some are 10. Come on. So we have a great used bookstore with the library, but, really, the only time I find landmarks is when a person donates them because they're not in the libraries anymore. Gary and I are Getting old. Gary and I are old. We're not getting old.

Jan Bloom [00:13:44]:  
We are old. And, so it's just a challenge to keep doing what we're doing. We pull a triple axle trailer filled with 45 bookcases, filled with books. And so when we get to conventions, we have to offload all the cases and then set them up and hook them all together. Yeah. And then at the end, you know, we have to pack them all up back in the trailer again. You know, it's it's really hard work what we do with bookcases and the books. Yeah.

Jan Bloom [00:14:15]:

I mean, you know how heavy books are. So so that's why we're just trying to figure out

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:22]:

The next step.

Jan Bloom [00:14:23]:

Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:23]:

Yeah. What what we're what we're gonna do. Let's let's talk about these two books that you did write. So who should we then read, both volume one and two? So one, as you said, has a 40 authors. The other has two let's see. A 55 more authors. Yes. Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:44]:

And, Jan, I cannot tell you what a resource this is. So describe what each one is. So I'm just opening my book randomly. Okay. Here's Eleanor Farjeon, and you rate rank her as a top author. She gets a smiley face and an exclamation point. The little book room is her best known book and my one of my very most beloved books. But what I love about what you do is you list everything the person has written, whether they've written fiction, biographies, nonfiction, autobiographies, or adult fiction.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:17]:

But what I really love is that you give us a biography of the author. So in this case, Eleanor Farjeon, called Nell or Nellie, was born in England. Her father in New Zealand, was a reporter during the gold rush, and he met an actor. Few years later, this actor and his daughter visited Fargine in England. Margaret, the daughter, married Fargine, the writer, and together, they produced four enormously talented children. Eleanor was the third child, the first and only daughter among four boys. And then it talks about, Eleanor's father had 8,000 volumes in his own personal library. And every Sunday, he presented a book to them.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:01]:

He read out loud to his children, and Eleanor started writing when she was six. And then you list some of the different things. She didn't marry. She had no children. She won the new the Carnegie medal in 1955 for the amazing book, The Little Book Room. You talk about her spiritual life and, of course, her poem that she wrote, morning is broken, which was recorded by Cat Stevens. So, like, that's more than anybody probably in America knows about Eleanor Farjeon, and you've done this for a hundred well, 300 plus authors that you've done this research and this homework for those of us

who love books. And so when we read a book, we can say to a child, now this is written by Eleanor Estes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:51]:

This is this person wrote this. This person wrote that, and this is a story of their life, and these are some other books. I didn't know they also wrote that. Yes. They did. So do you see the resources you have put into layman's hands who don't know one book from another, who could walk into any bookstore, any public library, and begin accessing the research you've done to make them feel like they know what books are worth reading out loud, what books are worth purchasing and owning and saving and saving for our grandchildren. You have done us a huge service, and this is your life's work, isn't it? Well, I

Jan Bloom [00:17:33]:

yeah. And now I don't know how I ever did it. So

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:36]:

I didn't either.

Jan Bloom [00:17:38]:

It's amazing. Did. Well, in the front of the book so under each author's name in the index, it lists the, sources that I use for each author. So each author, I used at least three sources. And so then I just would merge together, you know, what I was reading from different things. Yeah. And, it was really it was really interesting. It was really, yeah, it was just fun to do and fun to learn about them, and I enjoyed getting to know them.

Jan Bloom [00:18:10]:

So my favorite story, I think, is Earl Schenk Myers, who did a lot of history and biography. Yeah. And in his biography, he was born with cerebral palsy back in the teens and twenties. And, when his parents took him to sign him up for school in New York City, the principal said that they should institutionalize him. And they said, well, no. He can think. He just can't walk. He can't use a pen.

Jan Bloom [00:18:39]:

So he carried around a manual typewriter. And and he graduated high school. He went to Rutgers University. He married. He became an editor at a publishing house, and he wrote these wonderful books. So every time I see an Earl Shank Meyer book, oh, you know, my heart just I just think of this little boy. Yeah. You know, pulling a typewriter so he could take notes because his hands didn't work.



Jan Bloom [00:19:08]:

And Oh. So I think just learning about the authors Yes. It it or like Eleanor Farjeen and and, you know, it's just, oh, and when I hear morning is broken, I think, oh, he didn't write that, she didn't.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:21]:

That's right.

Jan Bloom [00:19:22]:

And it's just been fun to get to know these authors, who they were, what what what caused what created them, their ideas, and, it was really fun. And Yes. I really enjoyed getting to know them.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:38]:

Yes. I love it because, you know, these are authors that I love, love, love, like their family members, and then you give me more information than I've known, like the story of Alice dog leash or, like, each one of these, James Doherty's story and how he didn't start illustrating, until 1938. And, actually, the first book that he wrote and illustrated was the first book that my son, JJ, ever read out loud. He it was the first book he ever read, and that is Andy and the Lion based on Androcles and the Lion. And, like, these people are part of our lives, and then you've given me more insights into them and their their theology, their worldview, their family, their childhoods. I mean, you have created treasures, Jan, and I'm really grateful for these books. That's so cool.

Jan Bloom [00:20:37]:

I'm I'm I'm so glad that I left them for you. Thank you,

Carole Joy Seid [00:20:41]:

honey. I am too. And I can't remember what state I was in when I got there, and somebody said, do you know who Jan Bloom is? I said, yes. And they said, well, she left these books for you, and she wrote you a note that you helped her so much, and she wanted oh, it says here. It was in 02/2006. Thanks, Carol, for the great beginning in my own life of books. I sat under you at my years ago, Jan Bloom. So I don't know where we were at the time in January 2006 that these books were waiting for me when I got there to speak, and I just held them to my bosom and have loved them ever since Jan.

Jan Bloom [00:21:19]:

I'm so glad.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:20]:

If you're interested in getting Jan's books, check out her website at [booksbloom.com](http://booksbloom.com). You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. If you like what you heard in this episode, please leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, or share this episode with a friend. It means so much when you help us spread the message of Homeschool Made Simple with others. Thanks for joining us this week on the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. Remember, Jesus' commandments are not burdensome. What he calls you to do, he will enable you to do. Blessings.