



# Raising Up

# DREAMERS

Find and Grow Your Child's  
God-Given Talents

**Shelia Erwin**

Foreword by The Erwin Brothers  
Directors of the film *I Can Only Imagine*

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

In *Raising Up Dreamers*, Shelia gives us an incredible guide and set of tools to help develop our children into all God has designed them to be. Through her own experience raising her sons, my friends and business partners Andy and Jon Erwin, Shelia shares the wisdom she has gained in various seasons of parenting to show us that our goal as parents should be to help our children know Jesus and make Him known. As a father of three sons, I recognize the responsibility my wife and I have in doing this. Through *Raising Up Dreamers*, we now have more tools to help raise our children to fulfill God's destiny for each of their lives. If you're a parent or hope to be one someday, this book is a treasure trove of wisdom and will be sure to benefit anyone who reads it!

KEVIN DOWNES, co-CEO of Kingdom Story Company; producer, actor, director, and writer

I believe some people are born with a creative spark, but I also believe it has to be fanned into a flame. I have watched Andy and Jon Erwin as their spark became a roaring fire touching the lives of millions. *Raising Up Dreamers* provides much-needed parental insights and practical tips for raising up your dreamers.

MIKE CALHOUN, pastor of ministry training, The Summit Church, Raleigh, NC

I have worked closely with Andrew and Jon Erwin over the past ten years, so much so that I'm often referred to as the "third Erwin brother." As we've made films and built a business together, I've constantly been impressed at the example of Andy and Jon, their brother bond, the way they work as a team, their respect for each other, and how they seek to resolve conflicts. This is, no doubt, a direct result of the intentional parenting style of Hank and Shelia Erwin. In *Raising Up Dreamers*, Shelia writes about the ways she cultivated these skills in her sons while teaching them to love the Lord and encouraging them to always dream bigger.

JOSHUA WALSH, president, Kingdom Story Company/Erwin Brothers Entertainment

I *love* this book! This is truly a book that every mother and father needs to read. This book will help the reader raise godly men and women into their calling. We as parents have the ability to help shape our children to walk in their God-given purpose, helping them to keep their eyes focused on Christ while living passionate, creative lives for Jesus!

SHARI RIGBY, actress, *October Baby*, *Overcomer*; speaker; author of *Beautifully Flawed*; director and founder of “The Women in My World”

I wish this book had been available to me when I was raising my children! It’s written so you can read it straight through, or as a situational reference guide to help your children navigate challenging situations. *Raising Up Dreamers* is a true gift for all parents!

ANN BARROWS, widow of Cliff Barrows, Billy Graham’s longtime musical director

This is an outstanding book about parenting, about how to help our children discover the dreams God has for them, and about what we can do as parents to help them realize those dreams. But more than that, it’s a book about life. We can recommend it to you without reservation. Read and be blessed!

BRYAN FISCHER, author of *The Boy to Man Book*; former chaplain of the Idaho State Senate; host of *Focal Point* on the American Family Radio talk network

*Raising Up Dreamers* is an incredible resource, filled with biblical wisdom for raising your kids to be all that God has purposed and planned for them to be. I’ve heard it said that parenting doesn’t come with a manual—well, it does now. So wherever you are in the journey of raising your kids, you’ll be encouraged to finish well.

KEITH LOY, senior pastor, Celebrate Community Church, Sioux Falls, SD, and  
KAY LOY, homeschool mom

Like fresh manna from heaven, *Raising Up Dreamers* is an amazing and insightful guide that every parent and grandparent will want in their family's toolbox! We were riveted by the parenting experiences Shelia transparently revealed, both the good and the challenging. Her sound wisdom and advice are laid out in such a way that it's simple and easy to follow. These tips and tools are the "proverbs of parenting," whether you're in the valley and feeling overwhelmed or on the mountaintop enjoying a smooth season. It's truly refreshing to finally have a book that offers practical teachings and detailed advice with a rock-solid foundation! We believe *Raising Up Dreamers* will empower and motivate parents to inspire their children to be all they can be, as surely as God has created them.

DAVID SCHMIDT, aviation director and pilot for Samaritan's Purse, and  
NATALIE SCHMIDT, homeschool mom, women's Bible study teacher, and  
certified crisis intervention chaplain

*Raising Up Dreamers* teaches parents how to pour God's Word into the hearts of their children and then inspire them to pursue the dreams He gives them. Lorie and I have been friends with Hank and Shelia Erwin for over twenty years. They have graciously poured into us the tips and tools discussed in this book as we have been raising our four guys. The principles are sound and engage the heart of the child—they don't just focus on behavior. I recommend that *all* dads and moms read this book.

JOHN KIRKLAND, former president of North Carolinians for Home Education

*Raising Up Dreamers* is a very easy read that gives practical application to the deep truths of Scripture. This is a great tool to help parents teach and train in righteousness and encourage their children to pursue their God-given dreams.

LORIE KIRKLAND, mom of four grown homeschooled dreamers

As a mother, Shelia knew that a connection with God was a gift that wouldn't limit the size of Andy and Jon's dreams. I trust that reading this book will inspire all of us to make a difference in our lives by listening to God's whispers and to "raise up dreamers" too.

EDIE HAND, international speaker, author, filmmaker; voice of "Women of True Grit" on *Our American Stories*; and mom who raised a dreamer

What a timeless book, filled with nuggets of gold and godly advice for all parents, as well as grandparents. *Raising Up Dreamers* is for those who truly want to focus on raising godly children for their generation who always dream their God-given dreams.

PATSY RILEY, former First Lady of the 52nd governor of Alabama (Bob Riley)

This book is a biography, a gospel story, a Bible study, and a parenting manual all in one. When I think of the Erwin Brothers, I think of accomplished professionals making a difference for God in the marketplace of cinema, but the book explains every step in getting to the place where God took their talent and training and made it a force for His message of the gospel.

TOM PHILLIPS, pastor, New Heights Baptist Church, Ringgold, GA

*Raising Up Dreamers*



*Raising Up*  
**DREAMERS**

Find and Grow Your Child's  
God-Given Talents

**Shelia Erwin**



Tyndale House Publishers  
Carol Stream, Illinois



*Raising Up Dreamers: Find and Grow Your Child's God-Given Talents*

© 2020 Shelia Erwin. All rights reserved.

A Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

*Focus on the Family* and the accompanying logo and design are federally registered trademarks of Focus on the Family, 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

*TYNDALE* and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise marked, are from the Amplified® Bible [paraphrase], Classic Edition, copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)). Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified® Bible [paraphrase], copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)). Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are taken from *The Holy Bible*, American Standard Version. Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2001 by CrosswayBibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)). Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from *The Living Bible* [paraphrase], copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Kim Reid

The use of material from or references to various websites does not imply endorsement of those sites in their entirety. Availability of websites and pages is subject to change without notice.

The author is represented by the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-1-58997-999-4

Printed in the United States of America

26 25 24 23 22 21 20  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*There are so many people who have truly invested in my walk with the Lord, and to all of you I am grateful! But there is only one person to whom I can dedicate this book, and that is Mrs. Joyce Yancey. Since September 1972 she has invested her life into my life, as my “spiritual mom and mentor.” So much of who I am comes from our relationship.*

*My friends started to call me “Echo,” because when I opened my mouth, so much of what Joyce was teaching came out of me. Watching her walk with the Lord through some very hard times grew my faith and trust in the Lord. Much of what is in this book came from this relationship.*

*With a heart filled with gratitude, I dedicate this book to you, dear sweet Joyce. It has been a pleasure to be your “echo.” Thank you for seeing that twenty-three-year-old young woman’s heart and for being such a big part of who I am today. Thank you for your passion for Scripture and your love for the living Word of God (Jesus).*



# CONTENTS

Foreword xiii

Introduction: Dreams Do Come True xix

## **PART ONE: TIPS**

- TIP 1:** Raise the Children God Has Given You 3
- TIP 2:** Teach Them about Their Uniqueness 7
- TIP 3:** Bring Them to Jesus 11
- TIP 4:** You Are the Right Mom 15
- TIP 5:** You Can Do Hard Things 21
- TIP 6:** Whose Dream Is It? 25
- TIP 7:** They Are Lent to You 29
- TIP 8:** Discipline Your Children 35
- TIP 9:** God Enables You 49
- TIP 10:** Join in the Fun and Be Their Fan 57
- TIP 11:** Teach about Disappointment 63
- TIP 12:** Make Daily Deposits 69
- TIP 13:** Teach Them to Value Others 75

## **PART TWO: FOUNDATIONS**

- FOUNDATION 1:** Watch and Learn 85
- FOUNDATION 2:** “Any Old Bush Will Do” 89
- FOUNDATION 3:** Recognize “But God” Moments 93

## **PART THREE: ESSENTIALS**

- ESSENTIAL 1:** Embrace Your Faith 103

- ESSENTIAL 2:** Make Jesus Your Standard 107
- ESSENTIAL 3:** Follow the Supreme Authority 111
- ESSENTIAL 4:** Live Holy 115
- ESSENTIAL 5:** Fight the Dream Killers 127
- ESSENTIAL 6:** Find Power for Living 141
- ESSENTIAL 7:** Don't Do It Alone 153

#### **PART FOUR: TOOLS**

- TOOL 1:** Submit to Authority 157
- TOOL 2:** Dare Them to Be a Daniel 161
- TOOL 3:** Cultivate Good Attitudes 167
- TOOL 4:** Keep a Clean Heart 171
- TOOL 5:** Deal with Conflict 173
- TOOL 6:** Learn to Love 179
- TOOL 7:** Learn to Pray 183
- TOOL 8:** Be Armed for Battle 201
- TOOL 9:** Life Is a Great Adventure 213
- TOOL 10:** Give God Your Yes 217

Acknowledgments 227

Notes 229

## FOREWORD

**I REMEMBER WAKING UP** one morning as a seven-year-old kid and my mom excitedly calling me into the garage. We didn't have a lot of money in those days for the big *Star Wars* play sets that I would scour the Toys "R" Us catalogs for.

My grandmother would enter the Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes every year and promise me that if she won, she would give me a hundred bucks to go on my shopping spree to help me finish telling my own story of the Rebel Alliance. But the sweepstakes never panned out as I hoped, much to my disappointment.

So my mom decided to take matters into her own hands. That morning I walked into our garage and onto the set of the most wonderful piece of maternal storytelling I have ever seen or heard of. The culmination of weeks of hard work was truly amazing. Shelia Erwin became a mom legend that day.

She had taken two sawhorses and two very large pieces of plywood, and on them had started re-creating every world from the films I loved so much. With Styrofoam, she had carved out the ice planet Hoth. With moss and roots, she had created Yoda's swamp,

and with twigs and branches, she had meticulously re-created the Ewok village. I was stunned. I ran straight to my room and grabbed every action figure I had and set about finishing the story I'd daydreamed about for so long. In the weeks that followed, Jon, Mom, and I worked to finish this wonderful creation.

I think what my mom did that I appreciate to this day was this: She didn't just buy me another toy—she went far beyond that to engage with my imagination. For me, that was one of the first seeds of storytelling that was planted in my development. In that, I found my life's calling as a storyteller.

I'm grateful for parents who encouraged that kind of dreaming, who realized that serving God could be out of the box and creative. The Christian life was always framed for us as “the great adventure.” I didn't realize it as a kid, but now, as an adult with children of my own, I see how many things my mom intentionally fostered in our lives that allowed us to find our purpose. I think she recognized the differences in each of her kids and allowed Jon and me to find our unique callings as creatives and as people.

I'm thrilled she's able to tell her side of the story now. My hope is that the words she writes in this book will encourage moms and help them realize the tremendous impact they can have on their children to dream big. I hope this book will motivate moms to inspire their kids to use their God-given talents in ways they never thought possible. *Raising Up Dreamers* isn't about making more filmmakers—it's about raising children in a home where it's safe for them to give their imaginations over to God and see what He will create through one little life.

*Andrew Erwin*

**“DREAM BOLD. DREAM BIG.** Dream the impossible.” This statement echoed through the halls of the Erwin family household. This statement drove my brother, Andy, and me to chase after what others would deem unrealistic and illogical. This statement would catalyze the ambition needed to pull off the number one independent movie of 2018.

That’s probably not what the first-grade teacher thought when she suspected I had ADHD and talked to my mom about it. They decided to put me back in kindergarten, and I stayed at that school through first grade. But Mom saw that my needs were not being met in a traditional classroom with its many distractions. My mother, an artistic, determined dreamer, didn’t see me the way that school did. Where others saw a hyperactive eight-year-old, she instead saw burning creativity. She knew I needed to learn in my own way. Her instinct? She took me home to school and never looked back.

My mom’s choice to homeschool me changed the trajectory of my life. For the first time, I wasn’t berated for what I didn’t have. Instead, we celebrated who I was. ADHD was no longer a hindrance but the key to a creative mind. My mother encouraged me to follow my innovative instincts and formed our lessons around them. Her school operated in a different way from the classic way of learning. Each day started off with thirty minutes of prayer. Granted, I could barely close my eyes for thirty seconds, but I learned the importance of prayer at an early age. My mother was not only a teacher of math, science, history, and the like. She was a teacher of faith.

Our family’s life was always steeped in faith. Shades Mountain Independent Church, where my parents were heavily involved, was like a second home to me. This place became



the foundation for everything I knew about God, and it was my mom who first led me to Christ. I'll never forget that day in our ugly, beat-up station wagon when she listened to my questions and walked me through salvation. From that day on, my parents never failed to strengthen my belief in God, as well as my belief in myself.

My parents' philosophy on life is that God has given each of us talents for a divine purpose larger than ourselves. They instilled this in us from the moment we could walk. Dreams were not something far off in the distance; dreams were our destiny. God has a plan, so why not chase your passions? Our parents were unwavering supporters of my brother and me as we pursued film. They used money they didn't have to buy us our first camera, drove us to our first jobs, helped us get a loan for equipment—the list of their support is endless. They believed in us wholeheartedly, especially in our moments of doubt.

The path to success demands failure, and my mom and dad gave us the opportunity to fail. We never would have learned anything without the room to make mistakes. They also let us go into the world of entertainment without sheltering us from the chaos. Their goal for us was to be capable adults rather than good children, and they allowed experiences that showed us how to stand firm in our faith and identity. They let God use us where He wanted to, despite the evil that sometimes surrounds the entertainment industry. If they hadn't done that, there's no way Andy and I would be able to be an influencing voice of faith in film.

To those of you reading this book, I want to encourage you to adopt the same radical belief in your children that my parents had in us. The Lord has gifted your children, and they have

## FOREWORD

a unique destiny. You can help draw those gifts out of them. Relentlessly frustrating kids often have insane, astronomically sized dreams, and they're just waiting for someone to believe in who they are.

As I've started my own parenting journey, I've taken so much joy in trying to nurture my kids' biggest dreams. Every kid wants to do big things, and life has a way of stifling that. It's our job as parents to remind them that God can take something that seems truly impossible and bring it to fruition. And this book can show you what that looks like. Dream bold. Dream big. Dream the impossible.

*Jon Erwin*



## INTRODUCTION

### *Dreams Do Come True*

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21, KJV)*

**IT WAS 8:00 A.M.** on April 30, 2014, and my husband, Hank, and I were standing with our arms around each other looking out our hotel window at Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

As we gazed out our window at the street in front of the theater below, we giggled like two children on Christmas morning.

"This is really cool!" I said.

It was one of those "worth it" moments for us as parents. You see, later that night we would be stepping over the footprints of some of Hollywood's elite as we walked the red carpet with our sons and their wives for the world premiere of their movie *Moms' Night Out*.

Hank quickly got dressed and headed down to the theater to meet up with our sons, Andy and Jon. Together, they watched

while the huge movie poster was lifted forty feet in the air to the top of the theater's entrance and the wide red carpet rolled out.

As I watched the activity below my window and saw them all having fun taking pictures with their cell phones and posting on Facebook, I began to reflect on the adventure that had brought us here, to this day.

Since we'd arrived in Los Angeles, we'd been asked so many questions about our sons. I was asked what I thought when Andy, then sixteen, and Jon, then twelve, announced, "We think God wants us to make movies someday."

I think one word would describe how I felt that day—*delight*. From that first day on, I truly believed that God had called my sons to create movies, and that somehow, He would make it happen. And I also believed that He had called me, as a mom, to be an important part of that process. You see, I've lived most of my life with a man (my husband) who believed, "Dream big, dream amazing, dream impossible, because life with Jesus is a great adventure." God has used Hank to teach me to live my great adventure and pass that on to our sons.

In this day and age, we moms are told that what we do is not important. We start to feel like failures; we feel weary and worn-out, frustrated and unfulfilled, guilty and shamed, jaded and exasperated, inadequate and incapable—just bad moms. At the same time, we're also told that we are not doing our part in contributing to society.

I've written this book to share my journey with you, my adventure of being the mom to two extremely creative men, and I want to encourage you in your journey. What you are doing—whether you're a mom working outside your home, a stay-at-home mom, or a homeschool mom—is important. Investing

## INTRODUCTION

your life in the lives of your children is always worthwhile. At the end of *Moms' Night Out*, Sean (played by actor Sean Astin) says, "What you do is important. . . . The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."<sup>1</sup> This quote is actually from a poem by William Ross Wallace in which he praises motherhood as the "preeminent force for change in the world."<sup>2</sup>

Two words that are so often found in Scripture have helped me with my adventure of raising up dreamers. The phrase "but God" shows us who God is and what He has done and will do for us. As we live and walk through this life, the "but God" moments in our walk are often a change of direction or a divine intervention. My life has been filled with many "but God" times that have truly led me to trust and have faith in Jesus Christ. My battle cry in the journey of raising up dreamers truly became "not I" (Mom) "but God" (Christ).

As moms, we can easily become discouraged as we wear many hats—especially those of us who have highly creative children. Through my stories of raising two successful filmmakers using biblical principles, which have given them the tools for the work God has called them to, I want to encourage you to cultivate your children's gifts and help them reach their dreams—no matter how impossible they may seem.



## **PART ONE**

# *Tips*

*Finding and growing your child's God-given talents might sound a bit overwhelming. Here are a few tips that the Lord has taught me along the way about raising children to follow His calling.*





## TIP 1:

# *Raise the Children God Has Given You*

**LET ME INTRODUCE YOU** to the two blessings that God has allowed me to co-parent.

I remember sitting in church and looking at my sons in an honest way. As I looked at Andy, my sweet-spirited firstborn, I saw tenderness, patience, kindness, and one who truly considers others. Yet he was a child given to self-pity and internalized anger, with unbelievable stubbornness and sneakiness. He had been a ten-month-old who, after being corrected for touching a plant, would crawl around to the back of that plant, hide, and wait until he thought no one was looking—and then touch the plant again. He had been a four-year-old who would stand stiff at the top of the stairs with his hands in fists, shaking with anger and saying, “I just want my own way!”

He was brilliant (I know all moms think that, but he really was). He started to talk at seven months, made sentences by one year, and was conversational by eighteen months. He started to read at two years old. By the age of three he could start with the letter *A* and recite a Bible verse for each letter of the alphabet.

He was a compliant child as well—at least until he turned four and we began to see his will.

As I looked at Jon, my happy, fun-loving secondborn, I saw a child who filled my life with laughter, who loved to perform for people, and thought *the more the merrier*. I saw a child who was creative, who could make something out of nothing. He was a child who would openly tell me, “No, I will not!” for hours on end. He wanted to be in control of everything and everyone around him. He was one who was given to outward anger, yet a child who was truly afraid of everything around him.

Jon was born prematurely by emergency C-section because of the loss of a heartbeat. We almost lost him that day. Jon came here full of laughter and confrontation. Even though it was obvious Jon also had a high IQ and a photographic memory, as a former educator, I quickly saw that there were areas in which he was struggling. After kindergarten, he was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

I share this because I’m not asking you to do something I haven’t already done. You see, I saw such wonderful traits unfolding in my sons’ temperaments, yet at the same time, I saw character issues that if left unbridled would one day rise up and destroy them. I had been taught that it was my job to work hard on taming the wild stallion that is such a part of all of us. Natural bents left to run free would destroy my sons and hurt others around them and even destroy future generations. But if those same traits were brought under the control of the Master’s hand, they could be useful and would be the making of wonderful thoroughbreds.

After an honest look at my sons, fear could have filled my

heart. Instead, I could hear Jesus speaking into it: “Shelia, bring the little children unto Me!” I began to learn that only Jesus could tame the inward man in my sons’ hearts. I also knew that He had called me to be their mom, and I was to be used in their lives by God to begin the work of transformation. He reminded me of what He had said in James 1:5: “If any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him ask of the giving God [Who gives] to everyone liberally and ungrudgingly, without reproaching or faultfinding, and it will be given him.” Wisdom would be freely given to me if I just asked. I prayed, “Here are my heart, my hands, my voice, and my mind. Please use me to parent my children, to bring them under your control, God.” In my journey of motherhood, I asked for wisdom, and God provided. He taught me how to nurture curiosity, creativity, and compassion. He will do the same for you if you ask.