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Feature Article:

Fantasy Rooms for Kids Under \$50  
by Kathleen Wilson

Decorating kids' rooms on a budget can be challenging, to say the least. However, there are plenty of ways to create that dream domain for your little (or big) one without sacrificing the college fund.

My first suggestion when decorating for children is DON'T DO IT WITHOUT THEM. So many parents decorate for the way they envision the perfect room, only to have it backfire on them during the unveiling. Let your children become part of the process, and they will not only love the room they helped to create, they will learn some valuable life tools as a bonus.

The next step is to organize. Kids are much more likely to keep their rooms picked up if there is a little bit of order. Cardboard boxes covered with contact paper, fabric drawstring bags made from scrap fabric, and zipper-style bags (not with babies or toddlers) can all go a long way toward keeping things in their place. It's also not a bad idea to label drawers and storage areas for the little ones. It helps them to remember what goes where. If they are too young for reading, draw pictures.

To start the decorating process, the first thing to do is to come up with a theme. Even if it is just a color scheme (although with kids, it seldom is) it gives you a blueprint. Remember to ask for your children's ideas here. Give them your guidelines, and then let their imaginations flow. You can then narrow it down to two selections, and help them decide which is best. Some great themes for kids rooms include garden, jungle, space, cowboy, trucks and trains, fairies, teddies, favorite animal, letters and numbers, cityscape, farmyard. Okay, I could be here all day. You get the idea. Try to use your child's personality to direct you.

How to do this all on a budget? Apply your chosen theme, then try these ideas:

1. Paint. If you can't afford to or don't want to paint the whole room, add a colorful painted border, use foam stamps to stamp a theme design, or stencil around windows and doorways. Painted murals are the way to a fantasy room on a budget. They have a huge impact, and are much easier than you think! You can buy stencils or patterns online, or use a coloring book to copy designs onto the wall with pencil, then paint with craft paint. Think "kid" here; it doesn't have to be da Vinci!

2. Add depth to your wall design. This gives a fantasy feel to the room. To do this, use contact paper or craft foam cutouts. Paint a simple mural over the wall; then tack felt flowers in your "garden" or decoupage computer cutouts onto the wall. Cut out a fairy castle out of plywood (or cardboard, or foam core), paint, and create a headboard. Use ribbon and glue or tacks to create a chair rail. Glue hot wheels to the wall end to end all the way around the room -- use your imagination! Use chalkboard paint and a box of colored chalk to inspire the child's artistic side. Use magnetic paint and create "game boards" around the room. Pick up magnetic alphabets to play hangman, or glue magnetic strips to checkers to make game pieces. You get the idea.

3. If you can't afford to buy new bedding for the whole room, consider using sheets to make some pretty easy changes. Flat sheets can be purchased at discount stores for just a few dollars in several great colors, and can be used to easily create duvets for existing comforters, simple curtains, and custom pillowcases. If you don't sew, you can use iron-on fusible tape; purchase the heavy-duty variety. Leave one end open to insert the old comforter, then secure with Velcro, or sew ribbon to each side and tie closed. Forget paying \$20 a piece for pillow shams; they are easy to make for just \$1-2.

4. Add some personal touches. Make a simple throw pillow with the child's name on it in fabric marker. Create a sign for her to hang on her door, or simply pick up some dollar shop frames and let her hold family memories close to her heart.

Finally, remember that you are making memories for your kids, not the neighbors. Bedrooms should be very personal affairs, so let your children feel their hearts' desire in their special places, and not have to worry about what people will say if its not the Barbie or Hot Wheels room like the kid down the street. Enjoy yourself, and give them the fantasy room of their dreams with your heart, not your wallet.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kathleen Wilson is an author, national columnist, and editor of "The Budget Decorator" newsletter. For more free decorating ideas on a budget, visit her at

<http://www.TheBudgetDecorator.com>. Don't forget to sign up for her free email newsletter while you're there!

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~ Feedback from the Last Issue ~

Re: Random Acts of Kindness

"I also have an act of kindness that I'd like to describe. A few days ago as I was driving home from a guitar lesson my Mazda van died as I stopped at a stop sign. A man who had just pulled out of a driveway behind me helped to boost my battery to no avail. Then he checked all the fuses and various other things he could think of, and then phoned his son who is a mechanic and works for Mazda! He then lent me his cell phone so I could phone my husband, and drove me home. As he dropped me off at my house, he asked me if there was anything else he could do for me. Wow! He'd already done so much! And then later in the day the tow truck came to pick me up at my house to take me to my van and then towed the van to our mechanic. He then drove me back home. Two Good Samaritans in one day! So even though I was feeling frazzled over the temporary loss of our van, these two men really made my day." ~ Lesley

Re: Being Frugal with Your Time

"I was saddened to see the letter from the subscriber who felt that 'redeeming the time' meant not 'wasting' it by sitting around at break and lunch times 'chit-chatting' and talking about 'nothing important.' Though of course, all working moms need to run errands during breaks, it has been through that fellowship at lunchtime that I've often heard of painful life situations needing prayer and also have had the opportunity to talk about the Lord in my life. God forbid I just become a taskmaster and forget about the most important thing in my Savior's eyes -- his children." ~ Margie

Re: Being Frugal with Your Time

"Here is a link that I think you will find of interest: <http://www.cindysporch.net/pages/kitcheninv.shtml> The website is called Cindy's Porch. She has several free printouts that I think are excellent tools that aid in the frugal quest." ~ Carol

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Readers' Poll Question:  
Lighting a Fire Under Yourself

I have a confession to make. One of the tasks I dread the most is changing out clothes at the beginning of each new season. For some reason, the thought of boxing up all of last season's stuff and dragging boxes of the new season's stuff down out of the attic is overwhelming. Consequently, I am usually the last one wearing sweaters in April and shorts in October. I simply put it off as long as I can!

In the last issue of the newsletter, we wanted to know your tips and tricks for lighting a fire under yourself. We asked, "What strategies do you use to find the motivation to do something you'd rather avoid?" Here are some of the answers we received:

"Sometimes I think, 'What if Mom was still alive and was able to stop in for a visit?' If it were true, I'd want her to visit my clean home, with freshly made coffee and a treat. I'd want my chores all caught up so I'd have plenty of time to visit with her without being preoccupied. Whether good or not, this works for me and encourages me on my day off to have a clean pleasant home for my husband to come home to. It also keeps me moving on days I work so I am motivated to get things done and not just veg out." ~ Char

"I made myself a book of things that motivated me in the past, and I read through it to get ideas on how to motivate myself now. The pilgrims who came to this country had a rule that whoever would not work should not eat. That always sobers me up in a hurry when I get hungry!" ~ Diane

"I tell myself that I'll work on it for only 5 or 10 minutes and then stop. Whether it's cleaning or organizing or working out, I use this technique. After 5-10 minutes I know that I'm off the hook but I keep going anyway because I'm all warmed up by then and know that I can stop at anytime." ~ Suzie

"I find motivation for tasks I'd rather avoid by sharing them with my prayer partner. We pray together every Monday morning by phone. I know that if I ask her to pray for me to have the discipline to get something done, she will not only pray but the following week she will ask how it went. Knowing that she is going to check back with me motivates me to make some progress!" ~ Stephanie

Thanks to everyone who responded. If you'd like to read more of the responses our readers sent in, visit:

<http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/fire.htm>  
<A HREF=" <http://www.countingthecost.com/poll/fire.htm> ">  
"Lighting a Fire Under Yourself" page </A>

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Our Newest Readers' Poll Question:  
Yard Sale Strategies

It's that time of year again. All over the country, people are dragging out all those forgotten items from their attics and closets. They're making signs and placing ads. They're cleaning, pricing, making change. It's one of my favorite times of the year: yard sale season!

In our newest Readers' Poll Question, we want to hear your tips and tricks for successful yardsaling -- either as a buyer or a seller. We ask, "What strategies do you use to get the most out of your day of yard sale shopping or selling?"

As a shopper, how do you find the best bargains or avoid those sales that aren't worth your time and trouble? As a seller, how do you make the greatest number of sales or avoid selling things so low that you're "giving away the store"? Jot down your tips and send them to us at:  
[editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Garage Sales](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Garage Sales)  
(<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Garage Sales>)  
We will feature as many answers as we can in the next issue and on our website.

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"Talk It Out" Question:  
Solutions for Greasy Stains

Is there any hope for clothes, upholstery, even walls that have encountered some sort of greasy stain? That was the question I asked in our last "Talk It Out" question:

"Has anyone found an effective solution for getting out greasy stains? I am interested in hearing about getting greasy spots out of clothes, but I also want to know if

anyone has had success in removing them from painted walls. Recently we've gotten several such stains around the house and I wonder if there is any way to remove them short of a fresh coat of paint. Any suggestions?"

I know I can always count on Counting the Cost readers to give great suggestions. Here are a few of the responses we received:

"Some heavy grease stains in clothing can be loosened by applying cooking oil, then spot treating before laundering. A paste of cornstarch and water applied to the wall and allowed to dry might soak up the stain. It should then brush off easily. Another approach would be to iron a paper towel over it to absorb the grease." ~ Anna Marie

"I once worked in a car dealership and when I got grease on my clothes, the parts department suggested spraying the spot with hairspray and then washing. It did remove the spot from my clothing. Another suggestion for grease is using shampoo -- it was meant to clean grease and grime out of your hair. This works great for the ring-around-the-collar in shirts. Perhaps the shampoo idea would work for the wall." ~ GG in Alberta

"The best solution I have for getting grease stains out is using a laundry product called De-Solv-It. I use this to remove cooking greases and other oils from clothing each wash day. The contact information for the manufacturer is Orange-Sol at 1-800-877-7771 or [www.orange-sol.com](http://www.orange-sol.com). The website lists distributors." ~ Sherrie

"I have found that good old Murphy's Oil Soap gets out grease, butter and even engine grease/oil. If there is a lot of grease, rub the Murphy's Oil Soap in and let it sit for a day. I have never had it ruin any clothing I have used it on. I use it on walls and cabinets too. Use it straight out of the bottle for the tough ones. Also, I used this formula for my baby clothes (20 years ago!). Fill your washer with hot water, 1 cup of bleach, 1 cup of detergent and 1 cup powdered automatic dish detergent. Add clothes, let it run 2 minutes, then shut off machine and let it sit overnight (or longer). In the morning, start your washing machine, let it finish its cycle (double rinse), and most of the stains should be gone. I used this often, especially helpful before passing along those baby clothes." ~ Mary C

"Spray the stain with WD-40; work it in. Then spray with your 'stain fighter'. The WD-40 acts to make the stain new and then you can treat it as such. Sometimes I have to wash the garment a couple of time to get the smell out but the stain is usually gone -- even on old set-in grease stains." ~ Michelle

Thanks to everyone who responded. We received many more answers than we had room to post here. If you'd like to

read more of the responses our readers sent in, visit:  
<http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/grease.htm>  
<A HREF=" <http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/grease.htm> ">  
"Solutions for Greasy Stains" page </A>

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Our Newest "Talk It Out" Question:  
Product-Peddling Parties

Have you ever felt pressured by friends or coworkers to attend one of those home-product-peddling parties? How do you deal with this pressure if you know you really don't want or need to spend money on the products being sold? These are the questions one anonymous reader recently submitted:

"I was recently invited to a Mary Kay party. Every single time I go to any type party like this, I feel pressure to buy. I am always told, 'Oh, you don't have to buy anything.' I have decided to just stay far away from them. I find that whether it's Mary Kay, Tupperware, or whatever it may be, the product is usually way overpriced and it is way too easy to feel like I ought to buy something. This does not sit well with my frugal lifestyle. I end up feeling taken advantage of by the whole thing. Am I the only one who feels this way, or do other frugal people feel the pressure from these type sales situations? And how can I politely decline these invitations?" ~ Anonymous

Good questions! Just recently I was invited to such a party but did not attend. I did not give the "inviter" a reason; I just didn't show up for the party. Later, I regretted it and thought I should have been honest by saying, "I really have more than enough kitchen gadgets, so I don't plan to attend." I'd love to hear how our readers have dealt with similar situations. Send your stories to us at:  
[editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Parties](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Parties)  
(<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Parties>) Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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Creative Frugality Explored:  
Great Kids' Rooms on a Budget

Is it possible to make your child feel like a prince or princess without spending a royal fortune on his or her room?

In our last Creative Frugality question, we asked for your ideas for decorating children's rooms and play areas inexpensively. We wanted to know, "What creatively frugal strategies do you use for creating great children's rooms on a budget?" Here are some of the answers we received:

"In the room for my younger daughters, we took fabric and used liquid starch to stick it to the wall. All we did was soak the fabric in the undiluted starch, wring it out, position it on the wall, and smooth it out. Using this method, you can apply and re-apply until you have everything lined up the way you want it to be. We did an entire wall this way with a fabric that matches the curtains and other fabric accents in the room, but you could also use the same technique with cutouts. We used thumb tacks to hold the tops in place until the fabric was dry. When it is time to change the décor, we'll just peel it off and start over. Since it isn't glued on, we won't need scrapers or chemicals to remove the fabric, and we may even be able to wash the material and reuse it." ~ Rose

"I decorated my daughters' room with a backyard theme. I painted the top half of the wall and ceiling sky blue, complete with clouds that I ragged onto the ceiling with watered-down white paint. The bottom half of the walls are painted a pretty green. (I added an inexpensive piece of chair rail to separate the two colors on the wall and make it look more finished, but it's not necessary.) I bought a length of picket fence at a home improvement store, painted it white and attached it along one wall. I tacked a clothesline on the wall above their beds where I hung some of their cute outgrown summer clothes with wooden clothes pins. Other accessories in the room include inexpensive wooden birdhouses I bought at the craft store (the kids can paint them), and a few cheap but nice watering cans and baskets in which I tucked stuffed rabbits or greenery. I always get compliments on their room. It's whimsical and fun, but simple to do and pretty as well." ~ Kelly

"I start by getting things organized, and then I work out a decorating plan for the space. Our local paper has a 'thrifty' section where we have found inexpensive (or free!) furniture. Bunk beds and captain's beds (with drawers underneath) help save space. My kids love making

forts out of their bunks. In my daughter's room, I used simple white curtains (sheets would work, too) and accented them with tiebacks to match her bedding. These took very little time to make. I have a seminar I offer on organizing for children, and a few tips on my website, too. I hope to make my seminar available on CD soon..." ~ Jennifer Swanson, Organizing and Productivity Consultant, [www.jenniferswanson.com](http://www.jenniferswanson.com)

Thanks to these readers for sharing their words of wisdom. If you'd like to read other responses to this questions or read responses to previous questions, visit: <A HREF="http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/creativefrugality.htm ">"Creative Frugality" page </A>

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Our Newest Creative Frugality Topic:  
Creatively Frugal Father's Day Gift Ideas

In case you've forgotten, Father's Day will be here in less than a month. To get your creative juices flowing, let's talk about great ways to make Dad feel great.

In our newest Creative Frugality question, we ask, "Share some of the most creatively frugal Father's Day gifts you've ever given, received (if you are a dad) or heard of."

Think about it and send your tips and tidbits to us at: [editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms](mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms) (<mailto:editor@countingthecost.com?subject=Rooms>). We'll feature as many responses as we can in the next issue and on the website.

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~ What to Expect Next Time ~

In addition to our Readers' Poll Question about yard sale strategies, guest contributor Debi Taylor-Hough shares some of her tips and tricks for making the most money at your after-spring-cleaning yard sale. Don't miss it!

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~ Counting the Cost Reader Classifieds ~

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