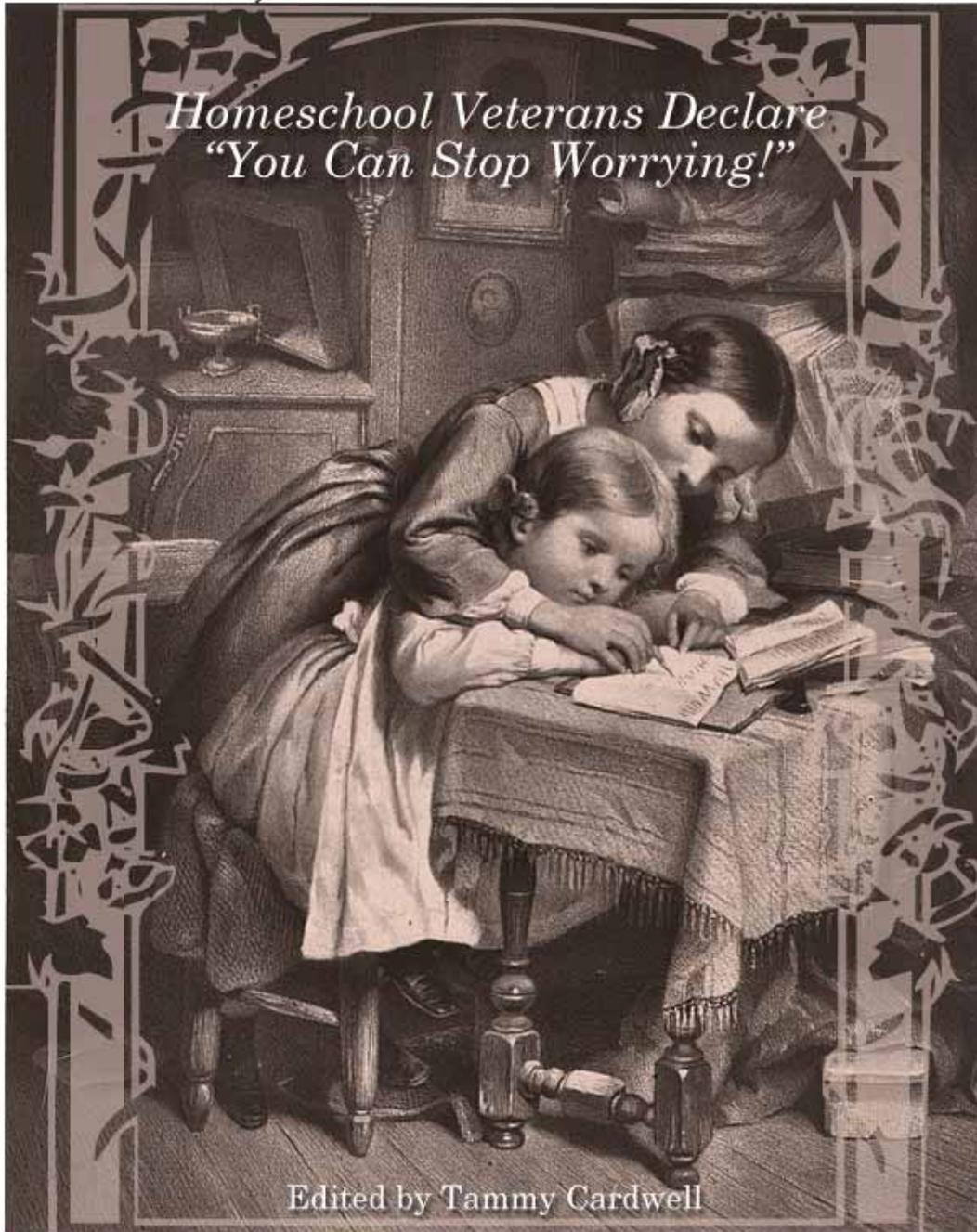


E-Book  
See, I Told Me So!

*Homeschool Veterans Declare  
"You Can Stop Worrying!"*



Edited by Tammy Cardwell

# See, I Told Me So!

Homeschool Veterans Declare  
“You Can Stop Worrying!”

Edited by Tammy Cardwell



C J Press \* Baytown, Texas

Published by C J Press  
PO Box 268  
Baytown, TX 77522  
[www.cjpress.net](http://www.cjpress.net)

Copyright © 2005 by C J Press  
All rights reserved. Published 2005, 2006  
Published in the United States of America

ISBN-13: 978-0-9754430-0-3  
ISBN-10: 0-9754430-0-3

Cover Art: *The Writing Lesson*, from a Woodburytype of the painting by  
Francois-Louis Lanfant de Metz (1814-1892)

# Dedication

We dedicate this book to all of the worried homeschoolers out there who so very much need the encouragement we've come to offer. We've been in your shoes, we know how you feel, and we know that you can make it!

# Contents

Foreword

Preface

One	It's a Wonderful Life! Lillian Jones with Ed Bassett & Ethan Jones Bassett	9
Two	Freedom—Homeschool Style Marilyn Rockett	16
Three	The Proof of the Pudding: Seeing Homeschooling Work Mary Kenyon	21
Four	Homeschool Worries from a Wheelchair Joy Marie Dunlap	24
Five	Babies Don't Keep Lisa Guidry	31
Six	A Tale of Two Sisters Yvonna Graham	38
Seven	Coaching Our Own Linda Linder	44
Eight	What about College? Karen Mohs	50
Nine	I Hated Homeschool Rachel Ramey	53
Ten	A Mom's Sentimental Journey Vicki Bentley	57
Eleven	Focusing on the Journey, Not the Destination Shelley Mullins	63
Twelve	Confessions of a Famous Homeschool Author Mary Griffith	67
Thirteen	Why Was I Surprised? Beverly Krueger	73

Fourteen	Educating Mom Barbara Frank	76
Fifteen	Why You're Homeschooling: The Kids Marsha Ransom	82
Sixteen	For His Glory Amy Flanagan	86
Seventeen	About My Homeschooled Graduate... Bette Bittner	91
Eighteen	See, I Told Me So! Tammy Cardwell	95
	Author Information	105
	Invitation to Submit	106

# Foreword

*All of the contributors to this book have agreed to allow what would have been the authors' royalties to be donated to Project Noah. The following is from Lisa Guidry, Project Noah's founder.*

When I was asked what I thought about a book written by homeschool moms for homeschool moms, I thought, "WOW! Great, send me a copy."

The next question was, "What would you think about the royalties going to Project Noah?"

"What? Really?"

Then I was asked to write the foreword for this book. Sure, no problem. Right? Wrong! I love to write, but what would I write about? What did I have to say? "Write about Project Noah," Tammy said, "and what this book means to you and the ministry."

So you are asking yourself, "What is Project Noah?" Well, let's go back to June of 2001. Life was good; we had just returned from a great camping trip to Garner State Park. The weather in Houston seemed a little damp. But hey, it was June and this is Texas; our weather is always hot and wet, or at least extremely humid. On Friday, June 8th, 2001, my husband and I loaded up our children to attend a special couples' fellowship at the church we were attending.

It had begun to rain that day. It hadn't seemed like much, but as we got closer to the side of town where our church was located, the situation grew frightening. Traffic was almost completely stopped and we decided to take some back roads to get to the church. The water was rising so fast that no matter which way we went it got deeper. I was praying hard, but our kids thought it was the greatest adventure to see all that water (if they had only realized...). We made it to the church and ended up spending the whole weekend ministering to several

thousand flood refugees from the local community. It was a great experience for our family to serve these wonderful, but devastated people.

On Monday we were back at our own home, which had hardly seen any rain at all. As I drove around that day, on our side of town, I thought about all the people who had been affected by the massive flooding that had devastated the city. I especially thought about the other homeschoolers, because we have a unique set of circumstances. You see, in Texas a homeschool is considered to be a private school, but we are not considered non-profit, as are most religious private schools. Consequently, when a natural disaster strikes, if we lose our curriculum we will not be reimbursed by FEMA. We are on our own.

Most homeschoolers do not itemize their homeschool materials. They do not include their books and supplies on the content lists of their homeowners' insurance policies. This is where the problem became very visible: Many homeschoolers lost their books as the flood waters of Tropical Storm Allison washed away not only furniture, flooring, walls, and clothing, but also science textbooks, readers, math books, notebooks, and the like. What made things even worse for untold numbers was that the regional homeschool conference had been held just the week before. Many had purchased their school curriculum for the next year and some of those families lost books they never even got to use.

So there I was, driving around the dry side of Houston, thinking that I had to do more. But what could I do? "Ok, Lord, what do you want me to do?" I suddenly pictured a lifeboat with Noah throwing out life preservers to people. I rushed home and began emailing people, telling everyone that we needed homeschool books—lots of them. I also put out the word that if anyone knew of a homeschool family that had been flooded they should let me know; we would find a way to get them some school books. (Now, at that time we also took in other stuff—food, clothes, furniture, etc.—but that ended a few months later. We then narrowed our focus to the need that no one else was meeting: homeschool books.) The books started pouring in. Enough curricula of all kinds came in that it filled up three storage units. God had brought another flood to Houston—a flood of love in the form of books, lots of books!

And so Project Noah was literally born out of the floodwaters of Tropical Storm Allison back in June of 2001.

My heart is to help families continue homeschooling in spite of disasters that would otherwise stop them. When you are spending all your time and money on replacing life's necessities, schoolbooks are not even on the list. You know your children will need them, but they need clothes, beds, and food first. So Project Noah tries to be there to ease that burden, to enable parents to focus on the primary needs of the family. Project Noah is set up to help Texas families in financial crises (e.g. death of a spouse, divorce, loss of income, natural disasters, severe family illness, etc.) by replacing curriculum in the hour of need.

Someday I believe I will see Project Noah chapters in other states besides Texas, but for now we are taking it slowly and steadily. This book is from homeschool moms sharing what they have learned so that those who come behind us may glean from our experiences. It is also

going to help Project Noah, enabling us to bless homeschool families in need. Enjoy it, buy several copies for friends, and pass them along to other homeschool moms who need all the encouragement they can get. Spread the word: Homeschooling is about family!

If you would like to help Project Noah assist other homeschool families, please contact us at [www.projectnoah.org](http://www.projectnoah.org). If you know of a family that is in need of help, go to our Web site and follow the instructions for requesting help.

Lisa Guidry  
Project Noah

# Preface

*See, I Told Me So!* is all about helping homeschoolers. First and foremost, our desire is to help every anxious homeschooler see that they really can stop worrying, that barring a few, rare instances, no matter how hard life gets or how inadequate parents may feel everything really will work out all right in the end.

The experiences shared in these pages run the gamut. You will meet parents with illness and disabilities and children with the same, families who combined home business and home education, families with only one child and families with many, families with seemingly perfect lives and families who confess to have made it through their homeschooling years by the grace of God. What you will see, in a nutshell, is that there is no one right way to homeschool and that if it could happen to you it has almost certainly already happened to someone else—and they survived. More, they learned from the experience and flourished.

You will see, in these pages, people who have looked back on their own homeschooling lives and said, “See, I told me so! I should have stopped worrying years ago!”

# 1

## It's a Wonderful Life!

Lillian Jones

With Ed Bassett & Ethan Jones Bassett

My son, Ethan, is twenty-two. Long ago, when he was seven, I thought about all the wonderful things we could be doing with our time if he didn't have to report to school. You wouldn't be reading this book if you didn't already know about the many kinds of frustrations that school can bring, so I'll skip that part of the story—and I'll tell you some of the things I started to dream of during that last school year, because those things all came true *and then some*.

I dreamed of our family having freedom to make our own choices. I dreamed of evenings free of useless homework and agonizing study for senseless tests. I dreamed of being able to go out into the world together to see and learn from fascinating historical places and museums. I dreamed of being able to read what we wanted to read when we wanted to read it—late at night, in the morning snuggled under a quilt, or while traveling. I thought about providing opportunities for Ethan to learn comfortably and joyfully in his own style and at his own pace. I longed for him to be able to have more time with his dad, whose job as an airline pilot kept him away a lot and often gave him days off when Ethan was in school.

My mind was exploding with possibilities, and it was clear that the world was about to open wide to a new way of life. I thought I could probably provide a much better education than a school could, but I was to find that I could do a lot more than I realized. More to the point, *my son* could do a lot more than I realized!

We should, and could, have pulled out of school right away, but didn't yet understand that there was no reason to wait for the end of the school year. We later realized that learning obviously doesn't need to come in organized, systematic chunks of time, but at that time we were still intimidated by the enormity of the undertaking. In the fall, we enrolled in a new home study program with a local public school. It was a friendly program with supportive staff, but it didn't take long to realize that we really didn't need a school to help us figure out how to help a child learn what he needs.

Schools, as we observed in both the public and private ones we experienced, are well intentioned, but tend to have ideas that I've since found to be limiting and unfortunate. They put far too much focus on "teaching" and trying to orchestrate the learning process while they have far too little respect for the child's natural ability to learn, his curiosity for all kinds of knowledge, his personal learning style, or his own internal knowledge of how he learns best. They're limited by the educational traditions they've inherited in which children are not seen as independently capable and naturally curious learners, but as empty vessels that need to be methodically coaxed, controlled, and filled with a predetermined body of facts. They're also trying to provide uniform education to roomfuls of children at the same time, and are therefore limited in what they can offer individuals.

Homeschoolers discover that there really isn't one neat package of information that our children need to learn or one neat way of learning it. There's a whole big wonderful world of possibilities, and the basic skills needed for learning can easily be mastered in a fraction of the time required in a school setting, especially when a child is able to learn on his own developmental schedule.

Soon after we started homeschooling, I found, to my great surprise, that my son was rapidly learning things *on his own* that I couldn't have dreamed of. I had thought I'd be a good teacher; what I hadn't realized was that he would be his own best teacher.

One day, for example, we started out on a long drive in the car and I handed him some little books I wanted him to read to me while I drove—*Little Bear* and *Frog and Toad* books. We hadn't been "working with reading" for a while, and I was getting anxious about it, so I thought we could make good use of the time on the road to "catch up." He was disappointed and said he'd planned on reading his *Nintendo Power Magazine* on the trip. I insisted that we needed to "work on" his reading. We went back and forth. Had my anxiety been registered on a meter, the needle would have been banging on the high end! We were "behind." I wondered what had ever made me think we were capable of homeschooling. Finally, he whined, "Well, can't I just read you my *Nintendo Power Magazine*?" Anxiety rising, and assuming he was just looking at the pictures, I called his bluff with, "Fine! You do that!" Well, he did. He opened the magazine and began to read long, relatively technical passages with multi-syllable words. He had taught himself to read beyond the *Little Bear* and *Frog and Toad* level because he wanted the information he could find in books that required more advanced reading. By the way, I've heard a number of other moms share almost identical stories.

And that's the way it works—our minds learn easily from our natural inner pursuit of knowledge. I saw that dynamic demonstrated repeatedly during the rest of our homeschooling years. About the time I'd start to wonder how best to provide ways for him to learn a subject, I'd turn around and find that he'd already learned it. I read to him a lot—wonderful books that we both loved—and provided lots of stimulation, interesting materials, and fascinating field trips. Rather than being a teacher and lesson planner, I was his facilitator.

I made my share of mistakes, and spent far too much on materials, as most of us do. Not only is this a waste of money, but the investment adds the stress of feeling that the child should use those things when they're so often not at all necessary for learning a subject. I urge anyone starting out to refrain from buying a packaged curriculum or a host of other materials. It takes very little to learn the basics, and the rest can be learned from interesting books, films, software, educational TV and videos, conversation, field trips, games, colorful Web sites with activity ideas, free printouts you can also find on the Internet, and eventually special interest clubs or classes. It's much more important to relax, enjoy your child, trust yourself and your child, and have fun exploring and learning together.

It's great to have a few good books to refer to occasionally, books that help ease your mind when the inevitable anxieties arise. Some of my favorites are the ones by Linda Dobson, Rebecca Rupp, Donn and Jean Reed, David Albert, and the classic *The Unschooling Handbook*, by Mary Griffith. *Home Education Magazine* is a great resource to subscribe to; it's so nice to have a friendly reminder on your coffee table that you're not alone. There is no common agreement on "how to do it," and that's a good thing, because your family is like no other. Of course, great support also comes from getting involved in homeschooling support groups in your local area and on the state level; that's where my son found a very active social life.

I really think the best person to tell about a homeschooling experience is the homeschool grad himself, so I've posed some questions to Ethan—but first a few words from my husband, his dad.

## Ed Bassett

*I had more trepidation than my wife as we began homeschooling. I had come out of a very traditional schooling regime. I well remember my concern when Ethan was not obviously reading at a very early age. I would become worried each time I felt he was missing some aspect of his education, then relax as it became clear that he had indeed learned what was needed.*

*As I watched Ethan and his friends mature, one of the satisfactions was noticing how short the adolescent period seemed. They appeared to have long childhoods followed by a very short adolescence, and then moved smoothly to being adults. To my knowledge, none of them has had problems with drugs, alcohol, or the other traditional escapes of the early years. On several occasions, I have watched as they solved interpersonal problems as a group in a remarkably mature fashion. There also seems to be very little of the cliquish behavior I remember from my school years.*

*Homeschooling has worked very well for us and I now have absolutely no regrets about our choice.*

## Observations from Ethan

What did you find to be the greatest benefits and drawbacks of homeschooling?

*I enjoyed having so much time with my family, and time to pursue my own interests without the feeling of constant pressures that schools present. I think homeschooling is a much more relaxed and healthy environment.*

*I always had the freedom to follow my interests, so it gave me confidence in being able to accomplish whatever I needed to accomplish later in life. The freedom gave me the ability to learn easily whatever I need to learn—I never got burned out on the idea of learning.*

What, if anything, did you find most lacking? Do you think there were gaps in your education?

*I can't think of anything I found lacking in my experience—it's given me an appreciation of all the possibilities in life and in the world, and the confidence to go out and find them. I think homeschoolers can have some gaps in their education that might not be there if they went to school, and some might have no gaps at all—but most of my gaps in knowledge were not things that I consider very important. On the other hand, I think kids who go to school usually have bigger gaps than homeschoolers in terms of information that's important for living in the real world. In my opinion, homeschooling provides an education that is superior to school in almost every way.*

*My homeschool friends and I didn't think about learning—we just lived and learned. Friends in school thought of learning as a separate activity from life that was usually a burden or a chore—they thought of learning in the same way that people often think of work.*

*When I started junior college classes, because it was my first experience in a classroom since the first grade, I was expecting it to be a big challenge and something that would take a lot of getting used to. But I found it was actually effortless because I was interested in what was going on, and I thought of learning as something fun and interesting, whereas many of the other kids in class had a really hard time because they were just trying to get the grade to move on to whatever was next for them. They didn't think of what they were doing as gaining knowledge; they thought of it as just another hoop to jump through—that's how burned out they were by high school.*

What about socialization?

*Don't worry about that. I had many friends of all kinds. You tend to interact with a wide range of ages, which isn't something you get in school and is much more reflective of the real world—I think it prepares you better. You can get involved with other homeschoolers—in my area there was a large group and we did all sorts of activities together: sports days, science club, field trips, and lots of other activities. Outside of that, there are things like martial arts classes, scouts, community sports, drama classes, and neighborhood friends. I think these things tend to work themselves out.*

*It's harder for some people who are more geographically isolated, but I've known other families that were relatively isolated and they enjoyed homeschooling. If you are isolated, then it is important to do what you can to keep your kids engaged with fun and interesting activities, whatever that might mean in your situation.*

What are some of your favorite homeschool memories?

*I can't list my favorite homeschooling memories, because homeschooling the way we did it is broad enough that that's almost like asking, "What are some of your favorite memories from your life?" It wasn't a series of daily class times. It was constant. I went on several outdoor education adventures with other homeschoolers during my teen years, for instance, and we learned a great deal about ecology and the environment and even mathematics and other subjects. We learned from the trip leaders, but to a much larger extent from one another. We'd get into great conversations and discuss all sorts of topics that were important to various individuals on the trip.*

What have you and your friends been doing since you finished homeschooling?

*I have taken classes that interested me at the local junior college and I just finished spending a year in Chicago volunteering full-time at a soup kitchen through the AmeriCorps program. I'm going to be applying for colleges, so I'm studying for the SAT right now. I took some practice tests and found that I needed to do almost no work for the verbal section of the SAT, as it came quite intuitively. I always loved reading, and homeschooling provided time and freedom to pursue literature that interested me. Math is something I need to work on. I never concentrated on it when I was homeschooling, but you'd be surprised how much you can learn at my age in a few weeks compared to the years it would take in your early teens—and I now find that I'm really*

*enjoying it. That's partly because of age, but also because I care about it more now that it has some practical application.*

*My homeschooled friends are doing a wide variety of things:*

- *Some are in college and graduate school—at least one on full scholarship.*
- *Others haven't started college yet or don't intend to.*
- *A few are making a living as photographers.*
- *Two are enjoying working as lighting techs in theater.*
- *One has a technological degree, studied yoga in India, and is now at home operating his Web site and communications business.*
- *One graduate student has just returned from working on an archeological dig at Pompeii.*
- *And some are working in various other responsible jobs that they're enjoying while learning skills that interest them.*

*As for the ease of getting into college, I had one friend who had trouble getting into a highly competitive technical school of his choice (they wanted to see proof of good grades from outside the home), but he ended up in a college he was perfectly satisfied with. The rest of my friends have had no difficulties at all. Colleges don't tend to have a problem with admitting homeschooleds, but some want to see proof of good grades earned outside of home—and community college work can satisfy that need.*

*Ten or so homeschooled friends and I are in the beginning phase of creating a sort of task force, for lack of a better term, to help with causes important to all of us. We're creating résumés of all our skills, talents and connections, linking them all together to find our strengths as a group and then deciding what we can apply ourselves to most effectively. Due in part to our homeschooling backgrounds, we have all led wildly different lives and possess completely different skill sets.*

What is your best advice to someone contemplating homeschooling?

*My advice? Just relax and do it; it will be fine. It's understandable and in large part unavoidable that you'll be worried when you make such a big decision. No number of positive success stories will completely eliminate the fear that you may be making a mistake with your child's education, but give it time. Trust in your child and in yourself, and you will find that soon you're the one comforting new homeschoolers, telling them that yes, they made the right decision, and yes, their child will be just fine. Successful homeschooling is*

*something that's hard to describe unless you've seen it and seen its results, in part because it can take as many forms as there are families. It's not a difficult thing to accomplish. There's a huge community of people out there doing it right along with you and it's important to realize that you can find support in them.*

2006 Added note from Lillian: Ethan did well on the SAT he was studying for, received unsolicited scholarship offers, and is now enjoying studies at his first choice of colleges.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Lillian Jones was a longtime volunteer with the HomeSchool Association of California, [www.hsc.org](http://www.hsc.org). She also produces [www.BestHomeschooling.org](http://www.BestHomeschooling.org), her own noncommercial Website packed with helpful articles and resources for homeschoolers. She has been an active writer and contributor to a number of homeschooling books and resources and is now focusing on painting, art workshops, and traveling.*

*Ed Bassett is a retired airline pilot and is now enjoying the freedom to indulge in his passion for sailing and other interests.*

*Ethan Jones Bassett homeschooled from age seven. He enjoys reading and writing, movies and theater, working with computers, traveling, outdoor adventures, and spending time with a wide variety of friends. He is now looking into colleges and is interested in continuing the sort of social work he began in Chicago.*

*If I had it to do again, would I homeschool? Absolutely. Would I do it differently? Yes. I'd follow my heart and listen to my kids more, and I'd worry a lot less about being sure I covered all the material in the grade level curriculum. In fact, I wouldn't bother to read the curriculum.*

*A Tale of Two Sisters  
Yvonna Graham*

## 2

# Freedom—Homeschool Style

Marilyn Rockett

I'll never forget the morning my youngest son came running to me after his Sunday School class. He was red-eyed, and all of his big-boy resolve to hold back the tears collapsed as he searched my face for a response to his distraught pleas. "My teacher made me read and I couldn't! I didn't *want* to!"

Jeremy was about six years old at the time and very conscious of following in his three older brothers' footsteps. He didn't like to be defeated by anything, and even at this young age, he would work assiduously to master anything he thought he needed to do. At birth, he had arrived feet first in a breech delivery at home and had hit the ground running from there, trying valiantly to keep up with the big boys. However, while the other boys loved to be read to, Jeremy seemed to be sitting on an ant bed when he tried to sit still for our reading time. Even a short bedtime story from our favorite three-minute bedtime storybook was too long for him! He wasn't the least bit interested in learning to read for himself.

Now, in his Sunday School class, Jeremy faced an indomitable teacher who thought that all six-year-olds should be able to read well, and she had thrust a Bible in front of him, asking him to read a verse out loud to the class. Flustered and red-faced, he floundered around until the teacher took the Bible back and read the requested passage to the group herself, too late to save Jeremy from utter humiliation.

Following the crying incident and my motherly efforts to soothe my son's embarrassed feelings, the teacher sought me out to give me her version of the story. She knew when Jeremy hurried out at the end of class that I would be hearing *his* version, and she wanted to be sure that I heard hers. As she approached me, I could feel the tension.

"Marilyn, I wanted you to know that I was concerned about Jeremy during class today. He seemed upset when I asked him to read a Bible verse out loud. I often have the children read aloud, and I was surprised—I didn't know—that Jeremy can't read. My goodness, does he have a problem that I need to be aware of?"

Now this is the kind of situation when mother-bear instincts tend to take over. Not trusting what I might say, I did a rapid eye-search around the room for my husband. He was nowhere in sight, and I took a deep breath to try to calm my words before they came spewing out.

“No, he doesn’t have a *problem*,” I carefully articulated. “He just isn’t ready to read yet, so your custom of having the children read a verse will be difficult for him. Can all the other children in the class read?”

My last question exposed my inner thoughts and fears. Was Jeremy the only one of those six-year-olds who couldn’t read? Was I failing him as a mother and his teacher? What was I thinking? Could I really succeed at homeschooling without shortchanging my children and hindering them for their future? Jeremy was a smart boy, full of life, but did he have a problem I was too naïve to see? Was I too blinded by my parental prejudice? The last thing I wanted to do was to harm my children, but homeschooling seemed so right for us.

This wasn’t the first time, and would not be the last, that I battled homeschool fears and doubts. I had done my homework before we began to homeschool. I had read all *three* books that I could find on the subject, and one of those was about learning delay, especially in boys. I was confident that I knew my children better than any teacher could possibly know them; one former school teacher had not even known my son’s name when we went for a parent/teacher conference! I knew that I could give them the undivided attention that they would never receive in a classroom. But I wasn’t a school teacher and never had wanted to be one. Was it possible to homeschool my children without doubts? There was no precedent that I could look to for a guide and example. What was a mother to do?

The Sunday School teacher went on to tell me (not encouragingly) that she knew we were homeschooling and that maybe Jeremy needed extra help. Although her words didn’t voice it, her tone and body language communicated quite clearly that she thought I was out of my mind to be homeschooling and that poor Jeremy was the victim of my obviously inflated perception of myself as a teacher.

Oh, my! Those early days were challenging. If homeschooling parents weren’t considered totally insane, they were thought of as quite eccentric. Most people believed that our school system had served children well for many years, thank you very much. How did homeschoolers possibly think that they could improve the process? Then there was the old “keep your children in the public school system so that they can be salt and light” argument.

We listened to relatives, friends, and church leaders who all advised us to put the children back in school. We heard multiple reasons why we were doing our children a disservice in keeping them at home. We even had one relative offer to take the children and raise them if we didn’t like the educational system that they said had been the foundation of our republic for two centuries. The statement that brought the most amusement was that we could move to Russia if we didn’t like the good ol’ American educational system in which we had been raised. What fascinating irony to think of moving to a country that offered no choice in

educational options because we didn't like the predominant system in a country that prides itself on personal choice.

Now, twenty-four years later, our sons are grown and we are the grandparents of six grandchildren. I think back fondly, even wistfully, of our homeschool days. I'm blessed that all six (so far) of our grandchildren are being taught at home.

I remember my worries about finding good curriculum to use for my sons, and I smile at the seemingly countless options available now. When I see new material, I can't help but respond, "Oh, I wish we had had that when the boys were home." I hear of new homeschool organizations forming for extracurricular activities and think how nice it would have been to have that option available. We worked hard getting the boys involved in things that we felt could stretch and grow them in their development. I think of the nights that I cried to my husband that I just couldn't do it. Would we ever get past some particular hard spot or the gap between what the boys seemed to know and the new thing we were trying to learn? What about calculus?

The doubts seemed to come in waves—thoughts of being a failure in our endeavor alternated with times of triumph. What I didn't realize then is that those doubts and worries were normal, not so much because I was homeschooling, but more because I was a parent. Why did I question our decision to homeschool or think that I just couldn't do the job well enough? Ironically, I came to realize that it is homeschool's greatest asset that is also our greatest obstacle—our freedom.

Freedom can be rather frightening. We would rather have rules, regulations, and boundaries so that we feel safe. We would rather know exactly what to do, when to do it, and how we compare to others doing the same thing. We rely on external measurements because we want to do things "right," and institutional school (whether public or private) seems to have the formula perfected. Imitation feels secure. We like the idea of a system that someone else has figured out for us and that we think we can count on. Those of us who have dared to step out into unknown territory to homeschool are often afraid to be *too* different.

I realized that I had the freedom to choose. I had to learn to choose what was best for my family regardless of the "safest" choices. Why would I want to emulate a method full of busywork, confined schedules, junk educational materials, and a godless philosophy? Why would I want to choose less than the best for my children because of my fear?

Homeschooling proved to be the hardest "easy" thing I ever did. It was frightening at times when I was unsure that I was doing the right thing. It was full of unknowns, since I couldn't see down the corridor of time to glimpse how my sons would turn out. We were criticized more than we were encouraged. We were doing something that was different from anything we had ever associated with school and especially different from our preconceived idea of *education*. It was a huge leap of faith to keep on keeping on in our task.

Yet, that leap of faith is exactly what made my hard task “easy.” I had freedom to choose the best regardless of what others were doing, to live an amazing life of faith in the Lord who gave me the strength to run and who picked me up when I fell. In fact, it was only when I fully admitted that I had to trust Him to provide the wisdom, faith, strength, and courage I needed that the task became easier.

Through homeschooling, the Lord gently taught me how to live effectively the rest of my life. I learned to let go of my safe assumptions and open my eyes to my children, seeing them for who they are and who the Lord wanted them to become. Only He can give us eyes like that.

What if Jeremy had not learned to read? What if he had learning disabilities? Would we have been a failure in our homeschooling? Never! The Lord gave us that particular child with that particular bent for His particular purposes. We had to resist the temptation to buy into the lie that we must follow the norm because it was safe.

Of course, Jeremy did learn to read eventually. In fact, at about nine years old he began to pick things up very quickly. At age fifteen he enrolled in the local community college to take courses for double credit—high school and college. By age sixteen, he had nineteen college credits and was accepted into Hillsdale College, a small private college with high entrance standards. He could have completed his college work in three years and earned his degree by age nineteen, but he received a full-tuition scholarship his fourth year and chose to stay to expand his education, graduating six weeks past his twenty-first birthday. He is now employed, in a good job, and has a solid start in the working world. More importantly, he loves the Lord and is walking with Him, asking God to direct him to his future mate.

Jeremy has a personal collection of 500 to 600 books, and I haven’t even relinquished some of my treasures to him yet. He loves to read and to discuss books and ideas. Ironically, he worked summers between college semesters in one of the hardest jobs a young person could do—selling *books* door to door for a national company that uses students on their summer break for their sales force. Only a diligent young person could work the long hours out of town for twelve weeks and not quit! Some of the top CEOs in the business world and several nationally recognized leaders worked for this same company in their college days. All in all, not bad for a boy who couldn’t sit still for a story and who cried when he was asked to read!

If you are a Christian, you are homeschooling because the Lord has planted the desire in your heart. You have the freedom to choose. You must find out how to choose, what is best for you to choose, and how to be free to do what you have discovered. It is the only “safe” way to homeschool.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Marilyn and her husband, Chesley, home educated three of their four sons for fifteen years from 1981 until Jeremy completed high school studies in 1996. Their sons are grown and two are married. The younger two sons completed all of their elementary and high school education at home and attended Hillsdale College. The Rocketts have six homeschooled grandchildren.*

*Marilyn is the former managing editor for Homeschooling Today® magazine and author of The Time Minder (an out-of-print home and school planner), The Time Minder File-a-Plan, and a contributing author to The Home School Manual by Ted Wade and others. She gives Minding Your Time Seminars and speaks at conventions, book fairs, homeschool meetings, Christian women's meetings, and retreats. She is also a licensed presenter for Passing the Baton seminars (Dr. Jeff Myers' seminars). Over the years she has contributed articles to several homeschool and family magazines, has been active in local homeschool support groups, been a board member of a state homeschool organization, edited a state homeschool newsletter, and was Maryland's state coordinator working with Home School Legal Defense Association's (HSLDA) Congressional Action Program (CAP) and the MinuteM.A.N. (Maryland Alert Network) program for legal alerts. She and her husband have been Parents' Board members of the Hillsdale College Parents' Association, and she was President of the Parents' Board for one year, elected by the parents on the board., and she and Chesley are now Associates of Hillsdale College. She is active in her church and community. Contact her at [marilyn@MarilynRockett.com](mailto:marilyn@MarilynRockett.com) or visit her website at [www.MarilynRockett.com](http://www.MarilynRockett.com) for more information.*

*Slowly, the light was dawning for me. They didn't need me in order to learn. In fact, they learned quickly when I stayed out of their way.*

*Educating Mom  
Barbara Frank*

# 3

## The Proof of the Pudding Seeing Homeschooling Work

Mary Kenyon

“The proof is in the pudding.” I’ve used that old saying many times to convey the success of homeschooling for my own family. The phrase dates back to at least 1615 when Cervantes published *Don Quixote* where the phrase is stated, “The proof of the pudding is the eating.” It means that the true value or quality of something can only be judged when it is put to use, or that results are what counts. While I had faced some mild opposition and concerns about socialization from family members and friends twelve years ago when I started homeschooling, I’d assumed that the ensuing years had proved that homeschooling could be a positive educational choice.

Our family has experienced none of the teenage angst my siblings considered inevitable in young people. I haven’t had to deal with any of the typical teen behavior involving drugs, alcohol, early sexual activity, or even minor infractions such as swearing. My children play together, even with younger siblings, and have easily gotten jobs when they were fifteen or sixteen years old. I’ve had one son, Dan, graduate and work for several years for a cleaning company, saving enough money to start his own business over a year ago. For years as a teenager my oldest daughter, Elizabeth, wrote a thriving newsletter for other teens throughout the U.S.; in her newsletter she discussed such subjects as courtship and dating while she was dreaming of someday having a family of her own and living in the country. Her closest friends were pen pals with similar interests and she eventually ended up marrying one of them. Elizabeth and Ben now live in the country just two miles from us and are expecting their second child. My seventeen-year-old son Michael and fifteen-year-old daughter Rachel both work at fast-food restaurants in town and avidly pursue their own interests of restoring an old Jeep and working with animals, respectively. My next youngest, Matthew, at eleven, would like nothing better than to become his older brother; and his three younger sisters, Emily (8), Katie (4), and Abby (1), take great pleasure in their sibling’s participation in their fantasy play.

My children like putting on impromptu shows at family gatherings and are generally happy, well-adjusted children. After all these years of homeschooling and then another sister joining the ranks of homeschooling with similar results in her own children I had thought my siblings would be very supportive of homeschooling as an educational alternative and familial lifestyle.

That is why, on one recent morning, I sat dumbfounded before my computer screen while reading comments on my family Web site. One older sister, whose opinion I greatly respect, had started a discussion about school, mentioning how miserable her school experiences had been, using such words as torture and hell to describe her torment. She followed that tirade with a comment that even if homeschooling had been an option, she wouldn't have wanted to be homeschooled because she thought homeschooling sheltered children too much and they had to face the "real world" someday.

Her daughter, now a mother of two young children herself, followed with a strong lambaste against homeschooling, saying she wanted "more" for her children, including good jobs with high pay. She also wanted them to be able to experience all the fun teenage stuff she had experienced as a teen, evidently partying with friends being on the top of her list.

I was stunned. All the old doubts I had when I began homeschooling assailed me once again. Family members who knew my children still questioned homeschooling? What exactly did my niece think I wanted for my children? That they fail dismally in the working world? Did my sister think my children were social misfits since they were usually at home instead of running around with friends?

My sister Jane, who also homeschools, responded well to the remarks about the "real world" in her ensuing comments, while I fumed and fretted, feeling more and more defensive. As my responses on the Web site became more distraught, both my niece and sister backed off, conceding that homeschooling "could work" if the children were very outgoing and social. Where did that leave me, with a fifteen-year-old daughter who loved animals much more than people and a seventeen-year-old son who avoided the telephone like the plague? If my pudding (my grown children and near-grown children) wasn't proof that homeschooling works, nothing I could say was going to convince them otherwise.

I faced my demons and doubts and then let the subject drop. I knew that no matter what anyone said I was going to continue our unschooled, relaxed way of living and learning. As homeschoolers, and especially as unschoolers, I long ago faced the reality that my children and I are part of a grand social experiment, with the results of our chosen lifestyle to be seen years in the future. No matter how confident I am in our choice to homeschool there will always be those who don't think what we are doing is a great idea. I'd just hoped that all my siblings, in seeing my children becoming creative and caring individuals, were supportive of homeschooling. It was a grave disappointment to find out that wasn't the case.

I wasn't always confident in my choice to homeschool. When I started down this path twelve years ago it was mostly in response to a particularly sensitive child starting

kindergarten and changing in a negative manner right before my eyes as he “adjusted” to school. I couldn’t pull him out fast enough, but at the same time my daughter Elizabeth chose homeschooling for herself. The benefits of getting to know a child who had already become peer dependent were tremendous and she and I became best friends in the process. While we started out with rigid schedules and assignments, as more children joined our family we found it frustrating to attempt to schedule learning, and gradually we embraced a more relaxed way. Now we live and learn together in an environment that encourages creativity, reading, and discovering passions and interests. I’ve experienced early readers (age five) and late readers (age ten), math-minded sons and a daughter who, until she ran a cash register, saw no reason to learn beyond the basics of math. My homeschooling experience has run the gamut of possibilities from children who loved workbooks to those who read so voraciously that their scores in history or science tests were above grade level without ever having touched a textbook in those subjects! While I don’t necessarily share these milestones with non-homeschooling parents, I feel confident that my children are learning and will become adults that can face the “real world” with confidence and competency.

I see my oldest son struggle to expand and diversify his small business and my daughter enjoy her growing family while indulging in her interests of reading and writing. I see my teens work hard at outside jobs and I am proud of all of their achievements. My younger children are never bored and I couldn’t stop them from learning if I tried. Their creativity is unleashed in the many projects they strew around the house. Books fill our shelves and spill over onto end tables and headboards.

Today, as I sit at my office desk to write, I can hear my children in the next room playing at a fantasy game that started six years ago, one involving some beanie babies and a lot of imagination; it has been ongoing and evolving until the fantasy family that one invented has become almost real to the others. The seventeen-year-old inventor begins the show and even the baby recognizes a “Cartwright Show” (the family’s name is Cartwright) when she hears the familiar voices my son uses to portray each character. Not quite old enough to sit and watch, she comes running and steps on the characters, then the characters cry out for mercy, much to the delight of the other siblings who are entranced by this performance. I can’t help but smile. Typical teens? Maybe not. But if the proof is in the pudding, then the eating here in our home is just fine.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Mary Kenyon and her husband David live and learn in rural Dyersville, Iowa with six of their eight children and way too many animals. Mary is a freelance writer and author of *Homeschooling from Scratch* (Gazelle, 1996). She has had over 125 articles published in magazines such as *Home Education Magazine*, *Backwoods Home*, *Back Home*, *Woman’s World*, and *The Writer*, among others. An essay of Mary’s appears in *Chicken Soup for the Mother’s Soul*.*

# 4

## Homeschool Worries from a Wheelchair

Joy Marie Dunlap

I have homeschooled five children, who are now all teens but one. My kids and I would never trade this experience for the world. All of our kids love (or loved) homeschooling; it has made our family so close! We now have one son in Bible School and another is a computer programmer. Our third has just graduated and the other two are still in homeschool and loving it.

When I first began homeschooling, my main worry was that someone might find out that we weren't doing everything the conventional schools do. I thought we had to be as much like them as possible. So I made my poor oldest son put in six school hours a day. He was already reading long before first grade, so it's not surprising that he finished a complete first grade course in two months. We ordered second grade. He finished that in two months also, so we ordered third grade. He finished that in a few months and started on fourth grade course work. He was still technically in the first grade!

I sat down and did a bit of calculation. At that rate, he would graduate from high school at eight years old. Well, not exactly, since you usually have to cover a lot more work in each progressing grade, but it was clear to me that: 1) He didn't need to go this fast, 2) we couldn't afford to pay for four curriculum sets per child per year, and 3) it made more sense to just enjoy schooling, since it was obvious that we could keep up without being just like the conventional schools. So I cut our hours back from six to five and then to four; this gave me more time to spend with our younger children. That's when we started to actually enjoy homeschooling. As I look back on our lives together as a family, I realize now that the enjoyment part was very important, and I never should have felt guilty about all the fun we had together. It is what has made our children love learning so much!

You would think my worries might end there. But no, I went on to the next set of worries. For one thing, I was homeschooling from a wheelchair, and I was afraid some authority would walk in and announce, "Homeschooling is one thing, but we can't allow

someone like *you* to homeschool. Your condition might affect the children.” I also worried that we might get in trouble for not going out on more field trips and other such excursions. We did not have a vehicle with a wheelchair lift, so I couldn’t go anywhere without my husband putting my wheelchair in the car and driving me there, and he was extremely busy with his work. So there wasn’t much in the way of field trips our first year, although any time he had to go somewhere, we managed to make it into quite a satisfactory field trip.

For PE I was concentrating on hand-to-eye coordination, mostly indoors because I couldn’t catch up with the children outside as I had a manual wheelchair and the pain in my shoulders didn’t make it easy to wheel myself very far at all. When I look back, I can see that we were doing just the right thing for that season in our lives, but at the time I was afraid that someone would march into our house and say, “This is not PE. You need to be doing sports.” Sometime in our second year, my husband lost his job. While he was home, he was looking for work, but he also took time off to take us places, like the park. That’s when our “Park PE” began in earnest. We all count this as a precious time in our lives. It was so bonding and is so beautiful to look back on. I’m glad we took lots of photos!

Now we live out in the countryside, and planting and caring for fruit trees and vegetable gardens takes up our outdoor time. I must tell everyone who is new to homeschooling or struggling in his or her homeschool: There is a *season* for *everything*! No matter what your circumstances, ask God to show you what this is the season for, and then don’t feel badly about anything. Make the most of that season in your life!

My husband finally ended up in business for himself, as a computer programmer, at home. This meant that our park days could continue and we could go on field trips often (though certainly not every week). We were studying our state history and were able to go on several different field trips that illustrated various periods of California history. In earlier days we could not have foreseen my husband staying home, hence the worry that we would never have a “legitimate” homeschool with field trips and outdoor times. You just never know.

During this period of time we began using the library regularly. It started out with the library summer reading program, where the kids could earn prizes for reading books. Very soon, they were checking out hundreds of books each time we went to the library. When the librarians saw us, they would run to get one of those big library book carts because they knew we were going to fill a whole table with the books we checked out. The library reading program caused our one somewhat slower reader to grow very rapidly in his reading skills. “Library Week” became a tradition in our homeschool. (It should more aptly have been called “Library Month,” because we could check out books for three weeks.) Any time we hit a lull in our homeschooling and were sick of our regular curriculum, I declared it “Library Week,” and we would all go to the library and pick out piles of books. I chose some to go with whatever we were studying at the time, and let the kids also check out whatever they wanted to read (going through the books myself first, to make sure nothing nasty had slipped in).

This solved my worries about not being able to finance our homeschool. It also made it so that our kids no longer finished many grades in one year, which helped our budget a lot. It gave me craft ideas and provided a way to listen to classical music when we could not afford music CDs. Again, life has its seasons. In time, we were able to purchase our own music CDs and by then, thanks to the library, we knew which composers we liked and didn't like, so we knew just what to buy and made every penny count.

Now we were taking long walks for PE, having field trips, doing unit studies, drawing and coloring for art, and we felt more like a "bona fide" homeschool. But there were other worries. Our kids did not have music lessons because we couldn't afford any. My husband and I had both taken piano lessons in high school, but neither of us felt competent to teach piano to our children, and these were musical children. So we did what we could, which was purchase several little \$40 keyboards and accompany family singing ourselves, letting our boys play their own keyboards by ear, and by watching us. To our surprise, they were playing the piano; the only things we had to work on were their fingering and timing. We found out later that we were actually doing something similar to one of the most effective methods of teaching a musical instrument in the world, the Jaffé Method.

Imagine our astonishment when an uncle who had previously seemed oblivious to our existence gave us a big keyboard. Could we have foreseen this? No, we only worried. The keyboard came with piano lessons on MIDI and our kids spent a lot of time drilling note reading and their timing. Still, they did not take off. Then, one day, my husband and I were listening to Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, and we were so moved we just had to get out the keyboard and play it by ear. We are passionate people. We are not highly disciplined people (at least not highly scheduled or organized), but thankfully passion can sometimes make all the difference. Our oldest son saw how excited we were about playing classical music, not just listening to it, and that seed of desire was planted in his heart.

But even after we did the same thing with Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* and other pieces, he did not believe (he told us later) that he could play well as a child. He thought it was something that only adults could do. Then a friend his age came to his birthday party, the one where we gave him his own keyboard and book of easy piano classics. When he opened those presents, she played them on his new keyboard and the last obstacle fell away. He began studying piano on his own, making rapid progress until he could play pieces many pages long (eight pages and up). Then he began composing. He also started praying for a flute, something that was totally out of reach for us. But, as usual, the future didn't hold only what we thought it would hold. My husband had a fantastic year in 1999, because the Y2K problem got him all the work he could handle, and the flute was laid in a gold bag under the Christmas tree that December.

This last week, Josh composed his first complete orchestral suite, after having studied orchestration from library books while still in high school and joining an Internet music forum. Josh began teaching his brother and sister piano once he reached an advanced level. Jennaya is now learning to play the violin and our youngest, Jonathan, is learning to play the

accordion at age eleven. Two years ago, we created our own family music CD. Josh wrote and recorded most of the music harmonies and my husband wrote the rest. We also used our keyboard to record multiple harmonies in different voices for the CD. People love it! Our second son, Justin, did the recording on the computer and Josh did all the mixing himself. My husband, the kids, and I did the singing and our daughter Jennaya and son Justin designed the CD label and insert. We are now working on a hymn CD and plan to follow that up with a Messianic music CD.

I have found it really amazing how far kids will go if you just introduce the basics and give them goals to reach as well as materials to use in reaching them. I taught our kids very simple drawing techniques from preschool. Jennaya showed special aptitude in drawing, so I taught her everything I knew. I had been considered talented in art in my school years, but Jennaya was passing me up by age eleven. After I took her as far as I could go, I bought her drawing books. When I was in high school, you got the art they chose for you, and the only training available to me was painting still life. I wanted to learn to draw people really well, but that was not offered in the high school I went to and by college I had other plans. I missed out, but because Jennaya was allowed to move in the direction she wanted to go in art in our homeschool, she reached talented adult level in her drawing by age thirteen. Many of her drawings resemble photographs, and people are blown away when they find out that she developed all her drawing skills in our homeschool.

This pattern has repeated itself over and over again. When we were going through our fourth-grade A Beka science textbook, I only knew how to identify about six different birds, but I didn't let that stand in my way. Our boys loved the chapter on birds and wanted to know more, so I bought some inexpensive bird field guides. The kids took these on our park walks, making them a combined PE and science class. One year, in high school, our boys identified 250 different bird species in our area.

Don't underestimate your children's growth potential from year to year. They will take off in some courses when you least expect it (while being average in others—no one is gifted in absolutely everything). When our boys were little, I got my first writing check from *The Teaching Home* magazine and spent the money on some clothing and a little flower garden. Our boys say that it was as I planted those flowers that their love for gardening had its birth. Afterward, they began sticking sticks in the ground everywhere. Yes, this is less than impressive, but wait.

Next, we tried planting a vegetable garden. Our green thumb produced one Swiss chard and a lot of weeds. We tried again, and failed again, though not as badly; at least our cucumbers were good and big and sweet. But I could not garden in a wheelchair with both upper and lower body pain, and my husband could not keep up with both the vegetable garden and his work. So we told our boys that we would be covering the vegetable patch with grass. Our oldest son's answer? "Let me try. I am willing to do all the digging myself." Not one to do anything halfway, Josh checked out mountains of library books on organic gardening, and was way beyond us by age ten. Unlike our vegetable garden, his was a success.

From there, he went on to plant and use herbs and to write a column about it in our magazine. He studied the use of herbs in crafts, cooking, and home remedies. Our other boys followed in his steps. Now they are in the midst of planting a half acre of fruit trees, planned for year-round harvest, after spending hundreds of hours on the Internet, researching to get the right trees for our area and needs, for the right price.

One of my worries was our third son, who started out not being able to relate to school textbooks or workbooks. Unlike our other four kids, Judah was kinesthetic and had difficulty concentrating. He was bright in math, multiplying two-digit numbers in his head at age four, but he was slow in language arts and found both following written directions and making inferences difficult. I learned that I could not buy him just any curriculum, and it did not work to simply hand our older boys' textbooks down to him. In the public school system, a child like this would be labeled "learning disabled," and left behind. I worried that if he were tested it would not look like he was learning, though I knew he was. This worry lasted for many years, as I worked very hard every day to teach him in ways that made sense to him. I leaned heavily on library books, as he related to books with lots of pictures.

I eventually decided to build his other school skills around his areas of interest. Thus began a whole series of unit studies, which his two younger siblings, Jennaya and Jonathan were allowed to take part in. We filled our homeschool with a wide variety of activities and curriculum, including report forms to help in writing reports, videos, picture books, field trips, and worksheets that I chose carefully with his interests in mind. This made school fun, so that Judah didn't mind us having to work hard every day on language arts, drilling him in spelling and reading comprehension, his most difficult subject areas. When we began the series of unit studies, Judah did not enjoy school—he was the only one who didn't—but by the end of several years of unit studies and supplemental drill work, Judah enjoyed learning so much that he began studying on his own.

The best thing about homeschooling is that kids are more likely to learn to love learning. This is our fourteenth year of homeschooling and we have two graduates who are living successful and fruitful lives. Our oldest boys still learn constantly on their own, using the Internet to research anything they want to do but lack knowledge in. There isn't really a line between their homeschooling and life after graduation, because they never stopped learning; they still love to learn. Both graduates have been involved with creation science debates, often defending the creation position alone. They also debate many other topics in multiple Internet forums, both Christian and secular.

Our school-age kids are busy researching all kinds of topics in different school subjects. They love learning and go about it with real gusto. All of our children are now published writers. Our daughter began her own novel at age twelve, and is now finishing up the 350-plus pages. She started her own magazine for homeschooled Christian girls at age thirteen. In each issue she shares chapters of her novel about two adolescent girls in Nazi-occupied Poland as well as recipes, advanced drawing lessons, crafts, quilt patch patterns, recipes, spiritual articles

and more. This is a mother-daughter project in that I contribute to it, but as editor the initiative, editing, design, and final decisions are all hers.

Our sons work together to put out a magazine for homeschooled Christian boys, with their own set of features that include an animal mystery poem, animals you may not know, nature identification, manners for boys, a boys' craft, organic gardening, devotional articles, and lots of stories. Each of our boys contributes something every issue, and they do most of the planning and creating themselves.

So, what about socialization? We've always felt that parents should make their own socialization decisions based on what God shows them, both in His Word and in His still, small voice. In other words, do what *you* feel comfortable with, and *don't* do what you don't feel comfortable with. It takes courage to do this, but our experience shows that it is definitely the right thing to do. We did not put ourselves under anyone else's obligation or guilt trips. We provided a wide variety of non-traditional avenues of socialization instead. At one point, we did give in to the concept of neighbor kids basically owning our children, coming over every single day to demand that our kids be allowed to play with them all afternoon and evening. Fun? Yes, but during that period of time our kids completely lost interest in their schooling, dropped all their hobbies, stopped doing their chores, started to disregard us as parents, and began to abuse their siblings (especially our one socially slow child) in ways they had never done before. The damage lasted for years and years after that family moved away.

I lived in fear that someone would get us into deep, hot water over our non-traditional socialization, one of enjoying people of all different ages and persuasions, but not allowing anyone else to command our schedule and family life. A highly creative family like ours needs time to create, which groups rarely allow for in their demanding schedules, so we resisted the pressure, but it was a worry. We knew that our kids would eventually turn out just fine, and we knew that they were very happy, but could we prove that to anyone else? Again, we worried needlessly. Complete strangers started coming up to us in the most unexpected places—in a parking lot, on the street, at a fair, at the park, in places of business—saying to us, “I know you don't know me and I hope you don't mind me coming up to you like this, but I just had to tell you that there is something so special about your family. Your kids are so happy and they seem to really love each other. Even though I am a stranger, I just had to tell you.”

We had worried needlessly about socialization; as our kids reached their teen years we began to let go, to allow them to interact publicly with other people in various social situations. From a distance, we watched them start conversations with people they had never met. We heard, from people we didn't know well, how much they loved talking with our children. We learned more about their conversations as the latter shared with us about these relationships and social encounters. Our kids have been able to interact comfortably with Christians and non-Christians alike, with people of all different religious persuasions and ethnic backgrounds, and with people of all ages, showing deep respect for others while still holding strongly to their own beliefs without apology. They have been able to share Christ

with people who would never come near a Christian church, without turning them off. In short, they proved our worries unfounded.

They love interacting with all kinds of people, and frequent many different forums. They love to debate, but don't feel easily threatened, and are never abusive or rude or disrespectful toward anyone. They also don't lose their cool even when others are rude or abusive toward them. They have a social grace that I wish I could have learned myself, in all those "proper" avenues of socialization that only served to crush my confidence and tear me down. They have a self-confidence that I could never come close to in my own life. They have much more than I ever had, or dreamed of having, and I am glad for them; I rejoice that they can be so much more because of our homeschool than I could ever be myself.

When I look back over the years and all my worries, I feel so thankful that God helped us hang in there in spite of them, because the results in our children's lives have been beautiful. In addition, we are all quite close, enjoying each other's company so much that I would not trade the life we chose for the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Joy Marie Dunlap wrote for The Teaching Home magazine for ten years before launching Family Discipleship Magazine, for which she is a writer and editor. She and her family are the creators of LightHome Ministries, which also puts out Hidden Treasure, a magazine for homeschooled Christian boys, Roses, a magazine for homeschooled Christian girls, and God is Love, a magazine for preschool children in homeschooling families.*

*Joy Marie has also created homeschool curriculum and recorded a Christmas CD with her family. You can write to them at 27695 Blue Diamond Lane, Romoland, CA 92585, or visit their Web site at [www.LightHome.net](http://www.LightHome.net). An order form for all LightHome products is available on the Web site, along with family photos, free sample pages to download, and a free archive of Family Discipleship articles for you to read. Joy Marie enjoys music, writing, and spending time with her family and pets in a country house on one acre next to a beautiful grassy field with snow-capped mountains beyond. She has five children, two of whom are still homeschooling.*

# 5

## Babies Don't Keep

Lisa Guidry

All my life I had looked forward to having children, reading stories to them and playing with them. I wanted to get to know them and I wanted them to see and experience life through my eyes. I didn't want them to be cynical and judgmental, prejudiced and legalistic.

I have always enjoyed having my children around me—sometimes it can be a little exhausting, but they are such wonderful people! For a time, while I was a single mother of two, circumstances dictated that I could not be a SAHM (stay at home mom). Having them in private school was okay for a season, but that season ended when I remarried (a wonderful man) in the fall of 1987. When my husband and I chose to homeschool it seemed natural and I appreciated the awesome opportunity to bring them back home to me. All the things that I had missed, those few years separated from them while I worked and they attended school, all those wonderful times would be available to me once again.

So to prepare to be THE Homeschool Mom I read all the appropriate books—*The Big Book of Home Learning*, *The Way Home*, *All The Way Home*, *The Christian Homeschool* and the A Beka Catalog. I was ready, I was armed with information...I was dangerous! (Scary isn't it?)

So began a walk that was exciting, lonely, frustrating, humbling and God-ordained. If I had known the path ahead of me (most of which would be my choosing—for isn't life all about choices?) I would have very sweetly looked at my husband and said, "Okay, You do this first, and then I'll see if it is a good thing." But I didn't, because my very nature is "Jump first! Ask questions later!" This is a dangerous nature, on the surface, but when you are trying to be sensitive to the voice of God it is a good thing.

At the time our family embarked on the good ship *HMS Homeschooling*, we knew very few people who were homeschooling, either because they just didn't or because the fact that you were homeschooling was something you didn't broadcast too loudly.

My children were excited and so was I. In order to maintain an *atmosphere* of school, we bought uniforms and had a school schedule that very closely resembled the private school

that they had just come out of. Up by 6 a.m., exercise (PE), beds made, dressed for school, breakfast and the “ding ding!” it was time for school! Everything seemed to be going well, but about halfway to three quarters of the way through that first year I realized that the schedule that I needed to keep up with from the umbrella school we were a part of was quickly disintegrating. So I pushed the children harder to complete all of the assignments and tasks, only to have them fuss and argue, and go even slower. The school day was no longer three to four hours; it was six to ten hours. We weren’t having fun anymore and the kids were beginning to not like me very well. Anger and rebellion were rearing their ugly little heads in my home! But dense me, I didn’t get it. So I just plowed on like a farmer with two horses that I have to drag behind the plow instead of them pulling it. We finished the year and, as I said, “dense me,” ordered another round of “umbrella school.” You would think I had learned my lesson—but sometimes I am a little bit slow (that sound you hear is my sweetie husband, snickering and snorting at this statement—so just ignore him).

Several years went by with things still not quite right, but I wasn’t sure where the problem was. Not only were there discipline problems, they were beginning to get really serious—some that we would not learn of until the two oldest were thirteen and fourteen years old. By now we had two in school and four little guys and gals. Bekah (child #3) had begun her journey on the homeschool path, but Mom was getting wiser, or at least listening to God a little better. We had changed curriculum for the two older ones and were trying the old fashioned stuff, using the McGuffey Readers and Ray’s Arithmetic. It was doing ok, just not my cup of tea. Bekah was using Christ-Centered Curriculum (we would use that program for the next five or six children exclusively) and we eventually switched to Alpha Omega for the two older ones, with a dose of Saxon Math. We eventually discovered co-op classes that were offered by our homeschool support group. Of the children who have participated in the various subjects offered through PREP (Providing Resources in Education with Parents), the results have been nothing short of outstanding. What a relief!

There were still relationship issues, but I felt pressured to perform. I was torn between image (What would the “perfect” homeschoolers think and what would the non-homeschoolers think?) and my relationship with my children. This would eventually come to a climax when our second child, a boy, turned thirteen.

Parenting Lesson #1: You must have a good foundational relationship with your children (or anyone else for that matter); correction and discipline can only be as strong as the relationship. If that correction/discipline is the stronger of the two, there is a high probability of severely damaging (and possibly destroying) that relationship. I had no one to tell me to focus on just being a mom. I didn’t know that this teacher thing would come naturally by the very nature of curious children (This is something that I would eventually learn). I thought that an educated child had to be forced and cajoled into existence. My pushing and prodding, my strictness (and my desire to please/impress others) to force my children to learn what I thought would be exciting, was in reality only driving them away from me and the joy and closeness of our family. Although deep down they knew that I

loved them, our relationship had a weak foundation. This was actually more evident in their relationship with my husband (their step-dad), for although they loved him, out of ignorance he began to focus on the discipline side of parenting instead of first developing a relationship with them. Consequently, when he corrected or disciplined them the relationship foundation was not strong enough to weather these small storms; they seemed more like Category 5 hurricanes. Not good. This was also true to some extent with their relationship with me. Our relationship was a good deal stronger, but it was taking a beating because of the homeschool pressure to perform to some unwritten standard that seemed to be hovering over most homeschool moms in general and me in particular.

Today I meet so many moms who want to homeschool their children right out of the crib—this is very scary to me. Are we so influenced by society’s push for the genius child and the “homeschool hype” that we are trying to create geniuses instead of just enjoying our children and helping them discover their paths on this earth? All children are intelligent—it is our (adults—not just the parents) perception of what constitutes acceptable intelligence that is the problem. Book learning is not the “be all and end all” to an educated child. The imagination must be used, activated, stretched—then and only then will you see great things from our children. Yes, books are good, but they are not primary; they are secondary. A child who is confident and secure in himself has a higher degree of true success than a child who feels lonely, unsure of himself, and unloved. To be accepted and loved unconditionally (love the child no matter what, hate the actions that are not right—and be able to convey that difference to him), to be allowed to explore and create and think and discuss and probe—those are the things that help a child prepare for that big world of grown-up-hood.

Ok, back to the main trail. You have seen what our homeschool life was like during the first years and I have discussed some of my insights regarding relationships. But there are some details that most moms do not think about, or even consider. (“Oh, my child would not do that—we homeschool.”) Meet the Guidry family: We homeschool, go to church (actively), vote in every election, are active in the community, and are friends with everyone. Perfect, right? Wrong! There is no perfect family on this earth. In our family we have dealt with some dark issues in the midst of homeschooling. (I guess you could say that I was in a school of my own) My son Josh (from my first marriage) loved his new dad more than anything, but he also wanted his biological dad to love him—unconditionally—and to want him. (There is a distinction here that is of vital importance to every child ever born!) Josh had a few friends in the neighborhood—boys who attended public school. They were really nice, polite young boys—a little more free than I would allow, but I was not their mom. At this time, Josh was about eight or nine years old. Skip forward a few years: We have moved and Josh is having a lot of anger problems—extreme outbursts—struggling some with school, but not much. His artwork is becoming very dark. He seems to be drawing away from certain aspects of our lives: church, family functions and things that involve “good” people (his term at the time). To this day, I can only explain what happened next as an intervention by God.

How many of you would even think that your homeschooled child could be doing something wrong? Ok, you're on the side of reality. Now, what about drinking (alcohol)? Drugs? There are some children who seem determined to fit in to the world—they have such an innate desire to be accepted that they will do what others are doing even though they know it is wrong. Such was our case. Josh had been acting weird—sleeping a lot, very moody, really hungry and then hardly hungry; grades were so-so, but could have been much, much better. At this point, we decided to put him in public school. (We needed the break—desperately—and we thought that the change would be good) Wrong move—right move. Our son was hanging out with what looked like a group of nice, well-dressed junior high boys. But in actual fact it was the middle-class, suburban version of a gang. We discovered that he was doing drugs (actually he had been smoking stuff since he was around eight or nine years old). This was hard to accept, but this was life and we were in Real Life Class now. Although homeschooling with the other children continued, we were adding extracurricular subjects—subjects that I had never even considered would be a part of our homeschooling syllabus: Drug Awareness, How to Choose Friends Wisely, Anger Management, and Tough Love in Action.

The summer between his eighth and ninth-grade years, our son went to live with his biological dad. Although I missed him terribly, I was very relieved. Now I could focus on the other children (sixteen, nine, seven, five, three, and one) or so I thought. I actually would be homeschooling and also be completely involved in my son's school, which was in another school district about twenty-five minutes from our home. It was a long four years, trying to be mom to the errant child, while not letting the others suffer in any way.

Relationship. What is homeschooling about? Is it about having school at home—where we do everything like the public, government schools do? Or are we about building strong families comprised of members who love and respect each other, where all grow to their awesome potential through a unique support system that is theirs for life? Is homeschooling about training our children in more than academics—training them in relationship skills and life skills, in developing core values within them? During the teen years a child can be so vulnerable, and yet more resilient, than at any other time in their life.

I love rabbit trails, but I must stay focused! During this time with Josh, life continued in our home. Our oldest daughter, Rachel, was now attending junior college as a dual-credit student. This is a great idea that, although it may not be a track for everyone, was perfect for us (except she didn't drive when we started this and the college was forty-five minutes one way). It gave us the opportunity to let her try her wings, but still be under our protection—the counselor at the junior college told us later that she wished more parents of college-age children were like us. Rachel learned many life lessons that have stood her in good stead ever since. She is definitely her own person and she will speak her mind. She is not easily swayed and is adamant about her principles.

Having structure and consistency is one of the main foundations of homeschooling—and I was really having a hard time finding either in our home. Outsiders would just gush about

how organized I was (they should live in my house—they would eat their words) and how efficient I was (“last-minute-Lisa” was my title for a long time). But we survived—and so can you. It is not always the best way, but there are times when survive is all you can do. I should never have stressed as much as I did. I would later pay a very big price for all my stressing, and I have since learned some great things about life.

- 1) Don't sweat the small stuff, or in my case, even the big stuff. Everything will work out; just be sure to change the baby's diaper, take out the trash so the house doesn't stink, and keep lots of peanut butter, jelly, and bread on hand.
- 2) Do a goal check—ask yourself the great “Zig Ziglar” question: Does this get me closer to or further from my goal?
- 3) Always, always, always tell your children that you love them—every day, several times a day—and that no matter what they do, their actions will not change the fact that you love them. Period!
- 4) Life has a funny way of working out just fine in spite of our hurrying, scurrying, and fretting.

Today I have two children attending college. (Yay! Two down and only eight to go!) Both are attending college in Florida. (See? They survived just fine and your kids will too!) Our daughter is the world traveler and is on her way to being a marine mammalogist and our son, at twenty-two years of age, is attending college for the first time and loving it. He is an awesome photographer (like his paternal grandmother) and videographer. Bekah, who is sixteen, is learning how to drive, is a great chef, and writes absolutely wonderful short stories. Abbie is fourteen and after many struggles with learning how to read (she finally learned around age nine), is excelling in subjects I would never have dreamed of (Latin and logic); she is a great athlete and has a heart for serving God. John is thirteen and if you have ever listened to the Focus on the Family *Odyssey* radio series you will have met John Avery Whitaker. Well, we have nicknamed our John. He is *John Allen Avery Whitaker Guidry* because he is always inventing or creating something. He has a knack for fixing things (this came after he had developed his knack for taking everything apart). Stephen, at ten, has a wonderful smile and is a very giving person—he could sell you almost anything and you would pay twice the going price and feel like you had made a great deal and a great friend. Hannah is eight and is a joy. She loves to read and do any subject you give her. She has a memory that won't quit (which comes in handy for her dad, who needs a little help every now and then). Michael is six and is “all boy” and then some, but he has a smile that just melts you. He loves everyone, but he is as mischievous as Dennis the Menace. Zoe Grace is four (pronounced “fo”) and is our sunshine. She is extremely sensitive by nature, but as tough as any boy I have known. The last blessing is Liberty Rose. She is two-and-a-half and

an honest-to-goodness, living, breathing miracle. She walks and talks like a royal princess and is the most loving, good-natured child anyone could ask for.

You have met all of us and we are normal—just like you are normal. Just because you homeschool, have one, two or twenty children, don't think that there is anything abnormal about you or your family. You are normal because this is who your family is. You all fit together and it works. Sometimes it is a little rough and at other times it is smoooooth sailin'. For my family and me? We have learned so much these past fifteen years. Homeschooling is not about how early my child learned to read, which math curriculum is "The One," how many activities they are involved in, or how high their test scores are. Homeschooling is about my getting to be with my children while they are growing up, teaching and sharing the good and the bad with them, drying their tears when they hurt and jumping for joy when they accomplish something great. It's about being a family and building a lifelong relationship with them. The most awesome thing a parent can experience is when you are at the worst point, your relationship is strained between you and your spouse or your child, and they can still say "I love you" to your face, and you know that it comes from the heart. The issue may not be resolved, but the relationship will stay intact because the foundation has been set. That, my friend, is what homeschooling is about. I didn't know this fifteen years ago, or ten years ago, but I finally caught on and I am not letting go.

Nearly twenty-four years ago, when my oldest was born, I received a poem.

*Babies Don't Keep*

*Oh, cleaning and scrubbing will wait till tomorrow,*

*But children grow up, as I've learned to my sorrow.*

*So quiet down, cobwebs. Dust, go to sleep.*

*I'm rocking my baby. Babies don't keep.*

By Ruth Hulburt Hamilton

(Poem Excerpt – First appeared, *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1958)

I have learned that time does not stop and each moment that I spend with my child is the best investment that I can make in the future. You see, my return on this investment of time and love will be seen in their lives and the lives of their children and their children's children. Academics are important, but relationships rate so much higher. A math lesson is not worth sacrificing your child over. Put the books away and go for a walk, or curl up and watch their favorite movie with them while eating chocolate chip cookies.

Homeschooling—I wish someone had told me then what it has taken me almost fifteen years to learn: Relationships last a lifetime; academics are fleeting. Develop a lifestyle of learning, a love of learning, and they will learn for a lifetime. Now go enjoy your kids—they grow so fast.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Lisa Guidry and her husband Ron have been homeschooling for fifteen years. They live just outside Houston, Texas with their tribe. They have six girls and four boys, ages three to twenty-four. Two of their children have already graduated and are attending college in Florida. Lisa is the founder and director of Project Noah, a homeschool organization that was founded in 2001. Project Noah's goal is to help homeschooling families who are in crisis. You can learn more about Project Noah by going to their Web site [www.projectnoah.org](http://www.projectnoah.org).*

*Professors told not only Jon, but also our girls in their college days, that they actually preferred homeschooled students in their classrooms. "Homeschoolers know who they are and what they stand for," these professors said. "They know how to study and are actually on campus to learn, unlike so many of our students these days."*

*What about College?*

*Karen Mohs*

# 6

## A Tale of Two Sisters

### Yvonna Graham

Alta was a happy baby. She ate well, slept well, and we took her with us anywhere and everywhere. She didn't cry without a good reason. We became rather smug about parenting. It seemed pretty easy.

As a toddler, Alta displayed some unusual characteristics. She was exceptionally well muscled and sturdy. Her large motor skills were quite advanced for her age. She could roller skate and bicycle by age four. She also started piano lessons at four. I thought she was too young, but it turned out she loved the lessons and did well. We were so happy to find a teacher, Linda Centers, who taught in creative ways, such as using giant keyboards on the floor for dancing the notes. Alta did not have a hand preference. This would be a problem later with writing, but for piano it was an advantage. As a toddler, she organized her toys by size or color and lined them up in her drawers! This unnatural neatness did not carry into her adolescent years, however.

When Alta entered kindergarten, she had a wonderful teacher, Mrs. Abston. This marvelous lady made kindergarten a magical place to be, with lots of hands-on and movement games. She didn't seem to be bothered by Alta's large, illegible letters or her tendency to write mirror images of the letters and numbers, proceeding from right to left. She focused instead on Alta's strong verbal skills and excellent memory. The teacher did notice a tendency Alta had to repeat stories out of sequence, adding a great many of her own embellishments. However, she did not feel the sequencing problem was "serious," but was probably due to her extremely active imagination.

Unfortunately, when Alta went to first grade, she had a teacher who "had a lot of headaches and didn't really like first graders." (Her own words!) She especially didn't like Alta. Trouble multiplied. Other children often hit her or took her backpack or books. She hated school and came home crying every day. Instead of displaying her formerly sunny disposition, she became withdrawn and irritable. She spent a lot of time curled up under the table, crying.

I volunteered to help in her classroom, so I could see what was happening, but the teacher did not like parents in the classroom, and would not allow me to come. I talked to the principal about the playground and bus problem, but he told me that "dealing with parents is not part of my job." I contacted the school counselor, who informed me that Alta was being referred to special education by the first grade teacher.

I was eager to have testing done, but found they were not going to test her. They were just planning to put her into a class for severely emotionally disturbed children. When I said that this was not appropriate for her, the counselor told me that a big part of Alta's problem was that I was an overprotective mother, and that my home was "too quiet" so that Alta was not used to enough noise. He based this on the fact that we did not watch television. I failed to see how a house full of neighborhood children and musical instruments could be considered too quiet. The counselor also told me that if I would back off and let the professionals handle my daughter she would be fine. He seemed to feel that hating school, crying constantly, and being beat up were part of a normal school day.

We had Alta privately tested. The tests clearly showed that she was dysgraphic, a learning disability that makes writing very difficult. Based on this, I asked that Alta be allowed to use a keyboard to do her writing. I was told that the only keyboard available in an elementary school was an hour's drive away and that if I wanted her to be in that classroom I would have to transport her myself, morning and afternoon. Since I had a younger child in kindergarten, this was not only impractical, but also impossible. Besides, I figured it would be a lot cheaper and easier to buy a computer and keep her home. Then she wouldn't have to share the keyboard with twenty-five other children.

After five terrible weeks in first grade, we decided to homeschool her. She had been badly beaten again and was terrified of going back to school. We couldn't afford private school, and I frankly didn't think Alta was emotionally ready to go back to school. She needed time to get over the horrible things that had happened to her. So I called my sister, who was already homeschooling, and asked for help. She sent me books on homeschooling and catalogs of curriculum, and graciously did not say anything at all about the fact that I had previously told her that I would never homeschool *my* children, that I wanted them to be socialized. I figured Alta had endured about all the socialization she could stand already.

Homeschooling was the best decision we ever made for Alta. We had a wonderful time together. We read classic children's literature, went on innumerable field trips, practiced math with everything from food and rocks to Popsicle sticks and pizzas. Writing even one letter of the alphabet was extremely slow and hard, but at least Alta wasn't held back in other areas because of it. We discovered that she loved music, drama, art and cooking, so that's what we did most.

I thought for the first two years that Alta was not going to learn to read. We did two different phonics curriculums with absolutely no impact on her understanding of the written word. But we spent untold hours reading to her, curled up on the couch together. How we enjoyed those times!

One day, Alta picked up a Berenstain Bears book, *The Spooky Old Tree*, and read it all the way through! I thought she had just memorized it, since she has excellent rote memory. But before long, she picked up a 300-page children's novel, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and started reading it! She has never quit reading since. She still doesn't use phonics, but she reads about thirty books a week. She reads like a speed reader; her eyes tracking down the middle of the page, absorbing whole phrases and even paragraphs in a kind of gestalt. I was concerned about comprehension, but testing has proven that her comprehension is over ninety-five percent.

Math was a *big* hassle when we got to a point where she needed to start writing it down to do problems. She worked math equations in her head, quickly, but when it got too complex to do in her head, the writing really got in the way. I became very upset about it, but thankfully my husband was wise enough to see that we just needed to back off for a while and avoid making her hate math. We didn't do math for a year, and then she seemed able to handle a bit more writing. It was still laborious and she was very prone to reversals and sequence errors, which are even more serious in math than in English, because they produce the wrong answer.

At about age eleven and puberty, Alta experienced a sudden leap forward in her ability to write. It was as if all the practicing she had done was somehow stored up in her brain somewhere. Finally, it made the trip down her arm to her fingers and she started writing. Until then, signing her name was a major ordeal. I remember taking her to the bank to open a checking account with money she had earned baby-sitting. She was ten years old. She could not sign her name on the card. We had to take the card home and have me write her name lightly so she could painstakingly trace it. But now, quite suddenly, she was able to write whole sentences. She developed an unusual, but legible, script that she still uses. She writes slowly and can't listen and write at the same time, because it takes too much concentration to write, but at least she can now write her own thank-you notes or fill in short answers on questionnaires.

One of the best things that happened to Alta was meeting Adair Peterson. Even though Adair was sixty years old, and Alta was only twelve, they have so much in common it was uncanny. They both are very smart and also have a learning difference. They both love art (Adair is a professional artist) and they both have asthma and very wide feet. They also both have a tendency toward depression. Both of them get depressed and sick if they do not have protein in their diet each day or if they eat sugar or aspartame. Mostly they *think* alike. Adair welcomed Alta into her studio, and let her experiment with all kinds of art media including paint, clay, and glass. Alta blossomed there. The combination of art and Adair was just what she needed to figure out who she was and where she wanted to go. That year she excelled in vocal music with a private teacher. She wrote her notes backwards, but she sure could sing!

Alta chose to continue homeschooling through high school, but she did take drama, voice, and ceramics at the local public high school. She did well in a curriculum of heavy reading based on the Great Books of Western Civilization and progressed through Algebra II.

She then took the SAT and since she could answer by filling in bubbles (no writing involved) she scored quite high. Fort Lewis College offered her a full-tuition scholarship. She's a senior music major there and will graduate in two months. Watching her perform at her senior recital was one of the proudest moments of my life. The college allows her to type all of her work, so she is no longer disabled by her "disability." Her GPA is 3.99. Alta thinks she'll try to get into graduate school in music composition and aim at a professorship somewhere down the road.

I remember a school official promising us that if we trusted the school with Alta's education, they could guarantee that when she graduated from high school she would be able to get a job wiping tables at a restaurant. I'm glad we were "forced" into homeschooling her. I hate to think what might have happened to her if I'd let the professionals handle it.

Alta's younger sister, Jen, was cut from a different mold. The same elementary school that beat Alta down so quickly was an opportunity for Jen to blossom into a bully. She bribed older students into teaching her street fighting skills and proceeded to bloody the faces of several schoolmates who attempted to steal her lunch or harass her. She was still in kindergarten. Perhaps I could have predicted this since she spent the first two years of life screaming. We no longer felt a bit smug about our parenting skills!

Once again it seemed that socialization had gone awry. Homeschooling was going great with Alta, so we opted to take Jen out of school also. At home, she learned to control her fiery temper over time. Part of our curriculum was conflict resolution. I once heard eight-year-old Jen warn a visiting friend, "Whatever you do, don't fight or yell in the house. If you do, Mom will make us sit in a circle and talk about it!"

So Jen began her own voyage of knowledge, and it looked nothing at all like Alta's. Jen was mesmerized by all things mathematical and mechanical. She quickly grew restless if the material she was working on moved too slowly or didn't answer her questions. By age twelve, she took charge of her own curriculum and planned what she wanted to learn. She consistently chose a harder course of study than I would have given her.

I was concerned that Alta and Jen might become rivals since they are close in age (eighteen months apart) and so were often working on the same level of material. But what actually happened is that they found many complementary skills and learned cooperation. One of their favorite sayings was, "Together we're a genius."

Of course, there were stormy times. Probably history has never seen sisters that always got along peacefully. But these sisters developed creative ways to resolve their conflicts. For instance, they argued in Shakespearean English.

*Oh sister, hast thou cleaned thy loathsome floor?  
Thy socks are gross with smells that I abhor.*

The best thing we did for Jen was get out of her way. When we moved to a new town, Jen chose to attend public school for eighth grade in order to meet friends and experience a new setting. She was disappointed with the experience since the classes seemed to her to be mostly

spent in checking off homework and telling students to sit down and shut up. She found she had little in common with the other girls she met. She reported that they wanted to talk about boys and fingernail polish. She wanted to talk about books, science, and philosophy.

Jen started her homeschool high school curriculum while she was still attending eighth grade at the public school. She worked on it in the evenings because she had decided to finish high school early. She picked up the pace as soon as eighth grade was over and finished at age fifteen. She wanted to go away to college, but we felt she was too young. Thankfully, we lived in a college town and she was able to go to college while still living at home. A year later, at sixteen, she received a scholarship to New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology and started there as a freshman in electrical engineering and computer science.

Jen had never had much interest in boys and never wanted to date, so we were just the tiniest bit surprised that she accepted the attentions of a wonderful young man and fellow student, Max. They were married, soon after she turned eighteen, in a beautiful little church across the street from the campus. Max is a delightful addition to our family.

Jen will graduate with a degree in computer science in two months. On the same day, in fact, that Alta will graduate. She has a job offer in a laboratory, doing exactly what she likes to do best, which is to design databases, whatever that means.

Every family has a different story. Every child has different needs, passions, and talents.

Looking back over those wonderful years of homeschooling, much of which did not happen at home, there are a few nuggets of possible wisdom I can pull out to offer to the next generation of homeschoolers. I wish we had done more community service and theatre, and less hard-core academics. Jen tells me she feels that she's now catching up in the area of making herself heard in a group, such as a graduate-level class. I'm glad I relaxed somewhere along the way and let the girls follow their hearts—Jen into mathematics and Alta into music. If I had it to do again, would I homeschool? Absolutely. Would I do it differently? Yes. I'd follow my heart and listen to my kids more, and I'd worry a lot less about being sure I covered all the material in the grade-level curriculum. In fact, I wouldn't bother to read the curriculum.

There were compelling reasons to homeschool. I wanted my children to grow up happy; confident in who they are, able to meet whatever challenges come their way. I wanted them to be able to attend college if they chose, or have the independence to find another path if that was their preference. They both chose college and got the scholarships they wanted. I'll be so proud I can hardly stand it when they both graduate from their respective schools this December. But that is nothing compared to the deep satisfaction of knowing that they both know who they are and what they like to do. And when they run into something we didn't cover in homeschooling, which happens all the time, they know exactly how to get the information they need.

See, I knew this would work out. Now, if we ever have grandchildren, we'll be ready. We've got experience.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Yvonna Graham (BA Psych, MA Spec. Ed.) is married to her high school sweetheart, Bob. They had a ridiculously good time raising two daughters and traveling around seeing things. Now that the kids have grown up, they take their bicycles instead. Yvonna loves teaching kids cool stuff, which is why she invented Mumbling Marmot Tutoring after her homeschooling days were over. She has also written a book that she hopes to publish someday. Many Voices, Many Choices: Choosing the Best Education for Your Child is a handbook for parents. Based on two years of research, it compares and contrasts the six educational options open to parents in the US, including, of course, home education.*

*We did no school from early March, when Josh was born, to the following fall, because we were in survival mode. Yet the achievement tests Sarah and Peter took in June showed each had gone up two grade levels since the previous year. Hmmm...*

*Educating Mom  
Barbara Frank*

# 7

## Coaching Our Own

Linda Linder

My husband and I ran a family business, a gymnastics club, for about twelve of our homeschooling years. Though some of our friends joked about our qualifications for the nearest mental health facility based on this non-conformist decision, we found our lives enriched by the blending of school, work, home and faith. Because the bulk of our business was conducted during after-school hours, we were able to homeschool before—and sometimes during—gym and our children could be coached daily by their dad, as well as help with public demonstrations, mail-outs and gym maintenance. Our children were also able to travel with us on out-of-town trips for competitions, eventually becoming state and regional champions. They even became entrepreneurs in their own right.

My husband was the first of several brothers (also gymnasts) to marry, and he still had a year of gymnastics eligibility during our senior year in college as newlyweds. During that year, a large church asked us to teach an after-school class in tumbling for their children's program. Since I had married into the sport, having enjoyed only a few instructive semesters with his collegiate coach, I would take registrations or payments and speak with parents or corral straying young participants while Gary would begin the warm-ups and then teach. We made a great team in this endeavor, and the extra cash came in handy since we were on a dual-collegiate budget. After graduation, three babies, and a few years in the lucrative but dangerously demanding oilfield, we were trying to decide on a line of work when a friend from church recommended starting a local gymnastics class. She had seen Gary gather kids together after services to teach them handstands or back flips in the churchyard and didn't see why he wouldn't be able to rent the community clubhouse for a weekly class as the dance teacher did. A God-given tug had been working on my heart for some months, so I designed a small ad for the local paper. A pastor friend, who sold carpet on the side, let us borrow enough pieces to create a small, portable, gymnastics floor at the community club, and we had forty enrollees for four classes on the first day. The rest, as they say, is history.

Our children, at this time, were three precious girls, ages four, three and one. Anticipating kindergarten, we had just begun to check out the local public school, which seemed overcrowded, noisy, and condescending. A couple of committee meetings proved that starting a private school within our local church's walls would be too daunting a task. We had all the natural academic ambitions most parents do, but were reluctant to hand our children over to perfect strangers during their most formative years and during the best hours of their day. Again, the God-given tug created a longing within me for some alternative answer, but time was running out. It was during this bittersweet heartache that a dear friend handed us the early homeschool classic, *Teach Your Own*, by the late John Holt. I devoured its hundreds of pages on the futility of formal school reform, which Holt described as lasting only until funding ran out, and its chronicle of the surprising success of parents of all backgrounds who were shouldering the full educational responsibility for their children. He logically asked, "Why not teach your own?" Holt explained the blessing of avoiding the myriad obstacles in starting one's own private school by educating within one's home. The idea was that parents would act as guides and mentors of their own children according to the dictates of their conscience and educational experience, trusting that their children's inquisitive natures and instincts would inspire learning. Included in this epiphany were dozens of letters from parents describing to Holt their deep satisfaction in taking this plunge.

Some months later we discovered Raymond and Dorothy Moore's well-documented *School Can Wait*, which compiled results from 8,000 early-childhood development studies, providing ample proofs for the benefits of delaying early formal studies in favor of concentrating on real-world experiences, language, literature and character development. This information confirmed our intuition that we must be careful not to push academically, but be prepared when our children's interests blossomed through the natural course of daily living and learning as a family. Although our first daughter had an uncanny memory and excellent verbal skills—by twenty months old she could repeat the scientific names of our *Zoo Book* animals and had the *Ten Commandments* and *Psalms 23* memorized with very few cues—we wanted to preserve her enthusiasm. We decided to stick with intensive phonics as our mainstay (a subject my husband realized he had missed while helping our own children learn) during the kindergarten and first-grade years, adding subjects and great books as needed. Our first homeschooling conference with the Moores came a couple of years later; here we found that we were not lone rangers, but were on the forefront of a great, swelling movement toward strengthening the home.

The oft-quoted proverb "a wise man builds his barn before his house" provided the impetus to invest most of our profit back into the business, and to build our own home on land we shared with Gary's younger brother, in the midst of homeschooling. Building a house on a cash basis, especially while living in it, requires patience and constantly focusing on the long-term benefits; this proved very educational. In the early years, we

would teach four days a week, and then gym mats would be unloaded from our little trailer onto our unfinished living room floor while Dad worked on the house and we finished our weekly schooling. It was rather rustic living, but we were so glad just to be in our own place again after months of staying with wonderful relatives. It was fun watching our daughters celebrate every step of the way. “Yeah! Dad bought insulation!” Interestingly enough, we were reading the favorite pioneer series by Laura Ingalls Wilder at the time. I remember one particularly difficult Central Texas winter when the temperature was in single digits for a solid week while we were reading Wilder’s book, *The Long, Hard Winter*. It felt as if we were there.

My husband’s leadership and vision in eliminating the burden of a mortgage proved instrumental in assuring that we would be able to continue homeschooling as more children entered our family. Too, the gymnastics business grew steadily and we were able to obtain a full-time location after the 1984 Olympics, when Mary Lou Retton and Bela Karolyi captured all our hearts by winning America’s first “perfect ten” gold medal in women’s gymnastics.

I will admit that, when we realized we were expecting our fourth child, I was somewhat apprehensive about adding a baby to the already challenging mix of business and homeschooling. My older children were coming along in their studies and music, as well as their church activities, though we had a couple of slow readers after the first child. That was the beauty of homeschooling, I believed: *Learning* was the constant and *time* was the variable. We permitted each child to learn at his or her own pace.

An educational diagnostician suggested we adjust our phonics lessons somewhat, but indicated we were on track. We usually tackled math first for daily studies, and as the girls started to compete in gymnastics, learning all the values for gymnastics skills in tenths accelerated their comprehension of fractions and decimals. A homeschool gymnastics class formed as other locals entered their home-educated children into competition and our families made fast friends. I was often seen in the office holding a baby, answering the phone, and taking payments for gym students—all at the same time. We began adding coaches, mostly college students, and our management skills were honed as our family and list of staff grew.

One particular advantage of being self-employed is that one can create an atmosphere that is most conducive to one’s value system. Gary and I were able to work together in the constant presence of our children, utilizing each other’s strengths, doubling our joy and cutting our trials in half as time progressed, with a family-friendly atmosphere of fun and excellence. Many customers said they left gyms that were much bigger and better equipped because of our atmosphere and our emphasis on solid gymnastics fundamentals.

As both the business and our family grew, we added mats and equipment for the gym alongside play pens, student desks, and sofas in the office. Two more children took their first steps in the safe confines of padded floors. Even our business card included a picture

of our four daughters, all in splits, to denote our “family first” gym club approach. We had now grown to five hundred students in three locations. A good number of our students were able to obtain scholarships, and some competed nationally. Two of our daughters were state champions at their peak—one in bars, and one in the all-around—while our oldest was offered a full-ride NCAA Division II gymnastics scholarship to the university of her choice, and was named an All-American Scholar for national recognition in academics as well as athletics. When we realized she was not only graduating from her private university *summa cum laude*, but first in her class, we were humbled to see what God had done. We’d often wished we had more time and money for enrichments. After seeing her straight-A GPA, her dad lamented about such. “Baby, you’re making us look good, even though we always wished we could have done more for you.” “You know, Dad,” she replied. “I think it’s the work ethic. You go to class; you turn in your homework. It’s not that hard.” We have often laughed as the girls told us how incredulous they were when their peers asked them to cut class. “Do you know how much college costs?” they would retort.

As parents who believe in faithful, servant-leadership, we strongly encouraged our older girls to have two years of college or a trade, as they must be prepared to provide economic support for themselves or to supplement the family income in case of a breadwinner’s absence or family illness. All our children were anxious to work and had resumes of odd jobs they had done for our family business as well as work done for others on occasion. They were often complimented on their dependability, congeniality, and attitude while working for other companies. As married adults, our three oldest have started and managed their own prestigious family businesses: a piano studio, a photography business and an upscale hair-care salon. Our fourth daughter transferred back to our hometown recently, “because she didn’t like her three younger brothers growing up without her,” and enrolled in a paralegal program at our local junior college. Her oldest brother, after three years of weekly tutoring in programming, physics and calculus with a retired nuclear physicist, will graduate this spring, and has an academic scholarship awaiting him. The middle brother is finishing seventh grade and the youngest, our seventh, is in second. Both are in a classical homeschool co-op that meets weekly for Art, Science, Latin, and Creative Writing, with lunch for moms and play in the park. We sold the gym years ago, but are still self-employed, so the boys can work with Dad on a few construction projects a year, and they are attending martial arts classes taught by a friend and fellow homeschooling father. They say they may someday teach Kung Fu as a side business themselves.

Perhaps modern man can take credit for compartmentalizing school, work, home and faith into professional organizations that must conform to the constraints of societal or governmental standards, but when we look down the halls of faith-based Western history, we most often find a symphonic blending that strengthened homes and nations and inspired millions. Lest you assume our family’s experience is an anomaly, let me assure

you that it has been common among thousands of homeschool families due to design or necessity. My husband was the first of several in his family to marry and then homeschool their children, all of their own volition I might add, and they have all followed suit in involving their children in their own families' businesses, allowing moms and kids to keep close to hearth, home and homeschooling buddies.

Our families live on adjacent property and often carpool to special events or supplemental tutoring sessions. One can count along the highway frontage their businesses: dog training and boarding kennels, used auto sales, dental office property and portable building sales. I must also assure you that these are average kids, with average talents and trials, but they do tend toward a joyful, productive mentality, rather than a consumer mind-set. Interestingly, their moms are from widely differing backgrounds, but they all possess certain traits that are hard to find in our self-indulgent culture: courage, humility, hope, selflessness, self-mastery and a great sense of humor. This is the type of character that business reporter/columnist Ann Crittenden remarks on in *Working Mother*, September 2004, saying that such extraordinary character can influence our world.

Now, bear in mind, we have had a few fall-apart days, times that felt like we were trying to race through knee-deep mud and times when priorities overlapped and stuck together or the cash had too many places to go. Though I suffered self-doubts during these times, I was able to point to brighter moments and keep my angst in check. Some days provided reassuring snapshots like Kodak moments of sunlight and peace: when a struggling adolescent lit up with comprehension; when the kids' studies hummed along in concert; when progress in art, music or athletics was duly celebrated; when siblings were caught up late reading classics to the younger brother or sis who simply could not wait; or when a teen pointed out fallacies in a popular movie. While I do have a few regrets in business and home education decisions, over the long haul the blending of our lives has been quite fulfilling. Neither venture is a solution to all problems, and not taking oneself too seriously is an especially good idea when blending education and careers.

One rule of thumb to bear in mind, however, in avoiding the proverbial guys in white coats, is that a mom who chooses the school/work combination should never quit growing and learning—especially in her faith, her marriage, and her friendships. Networking with women who have strong marriages, common goals, and deepening faith gives me motivation and helps me maintain a proper perspective. It provides a balance of humor and rationality that benefits my encouraging husband and usually grateful children as well as me, thereby protecting and improving our world as a whole. Homeschooling, not unlike building your own business, is like white-water rafting; sometimes you find yourself dragging the boat by hand and sometimes things move so fast you must simply concentrate on surviving the day. At any rate, if God leads you in this direction, the combination of the two will create a spectacular adventure. As we used to cheer from the sidelines in gymnastics, “Go for it!”

\*\*\*\*\*

*Linda Linder is a native Texan who has been married twenty-nine years to her college sweetheart. She's the mother of seven children, ages seven to twenty-seven, three of whom are married and living in Texas with her two grandsons and a granddaughter. The spring of 2005, when she will graduate her fifth child, marks twenty-three years of homeschooling.*

*Linda is a Member/Instructor with the Brazos Classical Academy-Co-op and a deposition summarist (paralegal) for local attorneys on an as-needed basis. She has served as a Precinct Chair of Brazos Co., County Officer/Editor and State GOP Delegate, plans to complete her Masters in Christian education in the fall of 2005, and in her 'free' time offers her services as a speaker for the home education community.*

*Thus far, we have not produced children who will be rocket scientists, but we have produced children who have a work ethic and a heart to serve people. They are bright and independent thinkers who are not afraid to take chances and try anything they put their minds to.*

*Focusing on the Journey, Not the Destination*

*Shelley Mullins*

## 8

# What about College?

Karen Mohs

Our homeschooling adventure began with our oldest daughter, our second child, the summer after her fifth-grade year. The problems actually started a little more than a year earlier. An unexpected move yanked Donielle from the classroom of a teacher she adored. It was odd. Donielle had been a good student from the time she had entered kindergarten at Christian Liberty Academy in the Chicago suburbs. Until a month before the end of fourth grade in a California Bay Area Christian school, she excelled in her studies. In fact, she was usually her teacher's favorite.

Yet Donielle's teacher in her new Christian school labeled her as a troublemaker. She publicly accused Donielle of lying and humiliated her more than once in front of the classroom. We went to the principal immediately, demanding that Donielle be moved to a different classroom. Our request was denied. Only a few weeks remained in the school year. For the administration, it wasn't worth the hassle. (Interestingly, we later learned that the teacher was fired at the end of those few weeks.)

The principal promised us that Donielle would have a better teacher the following year. He kept his promise. The fifth-grade teacher seemed perfect for Donielle. She had a sweet personality and particularly loved art, as Donielle did. Unfortunately, the damage had been done. Peers of questionable character were drawn to our daughter while those of good character kept their distance. The downward spiral had begun. You can imagine the horror we felt when Donielle called from the principal's office the first time, confessing that she had lied to us about her homework.

The situation was critical. My husband had read two articles on homeschooling and suggested I pray about it. "Just for a year," he said, "until she gets back to normal." I was not a teacher. God knew that, too. There was no way, I decided, that He would want me to homeschool her. I did, however, pray about it with an open heart, mostly because my husband wanted me to and because I said I would.

To make a long story a little shorter, God changed my heart. He filled me with enthusiasm and enough confidence to begin. Our other two school-aged children begged me to homeschool them as well. Donielle's character improved within a few months. What started out to be "only one year" resulted in our son and three daughters being homeschooled through high school.

My biggest worry during those schooling-at-home years was college. I feared our children would be unprepared academically for the rigors of the university classroom, if they could even get accepted in the first place. I feared that the worldly influence of secular teachers and friends might negatively impact their spiritual walk. I feared they would drift apart from us during their college days, and that the close bond of friendship would be broken. Although I continually put my fears into God's hands, and trusted Him with the outcome, I found the worries would inevitably return.

## **So Much for My Worries about Academic Preparation**

When our son Jon was accepted into the honors humanities program at San Jose State University, confirmations that we had made the right decision began pouring in. Professors told not only Jon, but also our girls in their college days, that they actually preferred homeschooled students in their classrooms. "Homeschoolers know who they are and what they stand for," these professors said. "They know how to study and are actually on campus to learn, unlike so many of our students these days." Jon graduated *cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

Donielle pursued her interest in art, earning her bachelor's degree in graphic arts at Augustana College. She, too, graduated *cum laude*. Some have been encouraged by the article she wrote for Matt Duffy's *Hot House Transplants*. In it, she describes a stand she took on a moral issue in her art classes, and how God blessed her for it.

Randi Joy and Amy, our youngest two, graduated with Associate of Arts degrees in music from a local community college. During her application process, Randi opted to take a mathematics placement exam. She was given a brochure with sample questions beforehand, but as she worked through the problems, she noticed errors, which she reported to the mathematics department. They revised the brochure. Four years later, when Amy worked the problems on the new brochure, she found errors as well.

## **So Much for My Worries about a Decaying Bond of Friendship**

Our children are now married and have families of their own. Friends are often amazed at the close relationships we have with each one. Our girls and their families are at our home often, filling our days with the joy of their presence. Our son, who lives half

a continent away, can visit less often, but he keeps the ties strong through weekly chats over the Internet.

## **So Much for My Worries about Spiritual Life**

The strength of their personal walk with Jesus Christ has sustained all four of our children, not only through the barrage of secular thought they faced in the college classroom, but also as they have entered as adults into the secular world in which we all live. They each chose strong Christian spouses and all are active in their local churches in various areas of ministry including music, youth work, teaching children, drama, helping with the sound system, and serving on the deacon board. Yet it's the way they respond to the hard aspects of life, the sometimes-giant troubles that come their way, that reveals most clearly their living relationship with God.

The moral of the story? When it comes to worrying about your children's futures, why expend so much energy for nothing? Be confident. Do your best with integrity. You will be richly blessed in the end.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Not long after receiving her B.A. from the University of Hawaii in 1970, Karen Mohs made the most important decision she could ever make. In the spring of 1974, she committed her life to Jesus Christ and answered His gentle nudging to become a full-time mom.*

*In 1984, God nudged her again—this time into the exciting world of homeschooling. She counts it a joy to have been able to teach each of their children—Jon, Donielle, Randi Joy, and Amy—nurturing them in God's Word and developing a deep friendship with each one. All of their children have now graduated, bringing to a close sixteen wonderful, memory-filled years of homeschooling.*

*She's married to a wonderful husband and friend, Tim, who has been a support and an encouragement to her for thirty-nine years. When God opened the door to the founding of Greek 'n' Stuff and the publication of Hey, Andrew! Teach Me Some Greek!, Latin's Not So Tough!, and the Alone With God Bible Studies, Tim was by her side, urging her forward. God has truly blessed her life.*

## 9

# I Hated Homeschool

Rachel Ramey

I was homeschooled for middle school and high school and, in a few years, I plan to begin homeschooling my children. I have been married for four years to Michael, a pastor, and so far we have one daughter, two-year-old Ariel. This little creation constantly amazes us! As most parents do, we teach her every day—right now, she is learning to identify colors and to count. My story, as a homeschooled future homeschooler, surprises most of the homeschool moms I know, so I'm always asked a lot of questions. My answers to those questions have been an encouragement to them, and I offer them here in hopes that they will be an encouragement to you, as well.

Did you like homeschooling?

No. I had been planning all the things I was going to do when I got to middle school—yearbook staff, chorus, and so forth—and then Mom and Dad took me out of school and I didn't get to do *any* of it. (This was over ten years ago. Now most areas have co-ops offering these sorts of things. Mom had to *start* our support group, with another mom.) I was *constantly* doing schoolwork—or so I thought. Most of all, I did *not* want to be stuck at home all day with my mother and my little sisters.

My family did not have my heart; my friends did. Though I had a better-than-average relationship with my parents, I had been in government school for six years, spending more time with my friends than with my family. I had become peer-dependent, and I had learned that younger siblings were nothing more than a nuisance. Homeschooling—and all the family time that came with it—allowed my mom to change that.

Did you ever say that you would never homeschool your children?

Yes, yes, yes. As a young teen, I believed that homeschooling was simply a new form of torture. I made Mom's life so miserable that, had her intention been only to torment me, it would not have been worth it. I remember standing at the top of the stairs yelling, "I hate being stuck in this house! I hate homeschooling! I am *never* doing this to *my* children!" Today I am gladly eating those words. My husband and I would not consider any other method of schooling for Ariel. We want the opportunity to bind her heart to ours as she grows up. We want to teach her according to our worldview and not somebody else's. We want to give her the opportunity to learn what she, individually, needs to learn in order to best fill the role God has designed for her.

What kind of curriculum did you use?

Most kinds. Mom started out as most homeschoolers do, having "school at home." Actually, Mom started *very* structured, with a correspondence school that gave the assignments, did most of the grading, etc. This would not be my top choice, personally, but it can be a good place to start. After she got a little more comfortable, Mom began choosing our textbooks herself and giving her own assignments. Over the years, she became gradually more relaxed until we were doing unit studies when I was in high school.

What about college?

Getting into college was not a problem. I was accepted without any hassle by all three colleges I applied to (two private schools and a state school). One even offered me a fairly hefty academic scholarship. Acceptance at most schools will not be a problem as long as you have SAT or ACT scores (depending on the college), a diploma, and a transcript. As a general rule, no one checks to see if your diploma is accredited. Colleges requiring diplomas from *accredited* schools end up excluding more than just homeschoolers: most small private schools are not accredited and, where we live, the government high school is not even accredited! A transcript is not complicated, either. A transcript is simply a list of classes the student took in high school and the grades he achieved in each. Mom typed mine up on the computer. Some of my "extra" classes were marked only as pass or fail, rather than given letter grades. Mom also included our grading scale on my transcript because it was tough, and Mom knew my "hard Bs" were going to be measured against someone else's "easy As."

Ultimately, I opted not to attend college and I have not regretted that decision. Society tells us that everyone who graduates from high school must attend college. We're told that we're "throwing away" our skills and talents if

we don't obtain a degree to validate them, yet one wonderful attribute of homeschoolers is the ability to think outside the box! Perhaps you have heard K12 educators say we should "leave education up to the professionals," and, like me, you believe that isn't always necessary or desirable. The same is true for post-high school education. If your child is not a cookie-cutter learner in K12, why would he be a cookie-cutter learner after graduation? College fits some people's needs beautifully. (If you aspire to be a doctor, you need to attend medical school, which as a rule requires a pre-med degree from a university.) Some things are better taught by apprenticeship. Some may need no training at all. An entrepreneur doesn't need a business degree, although it could certainly be beneficial. If that entrepreneur needs business training, there are other ways he can get it as well. "Unofficial" learning is still learning.

For me, personally, college would not have been an asset, but a liability. I aspired "only" to be a wife and mother. I don't know of any colleges offering degrees in wifehood or mothering. The book knowledge I needed for my career I learned mostly in high school: Thanks to homeschooling! Anything more I need to learn, I can learn informally from older women. My husband didn't ask for a degree before he "hired" me to be his wife! If I had attended college for four years, I would be working to pay off college loans. I am thankful I can stay home and take care of my daughter instead.

What will you do differently with your children?

I will homeschool them from the very beginning, and I'll probably start with as much structure as Mom ended with.

What did your parents do with you that was good?

They persevered. Mom could have put me back in school, deciding that it was much too wearying to fight with me every day. She could have given in to the friends and family who insisted that she was too hard on us, that we weren't going to be "socialized" enough, and that one needs a teaching degree in order to teach effectively. If she had, I would never have learned the things about home and family—like knowledge of home birth and homeschooling my own children—that my homeschool education provided (*This* is the education that has served me best as a wife and mother.) If she had given up, she would never have drawn my heart back to herself; I would still have closer ties to my friends than to her. As it is, Mom's my best "girlfriend." When I need to talk, I call Mom. When I have a question, I call Mom. When I'm excited about something and want to share the news, I call Mom.

As one who hated being homeschooled, I offer this advice to you who are parents of the same: Don't give up. Do not "...grow weary while doing good, for in due season [you] shall reap if [you] do not lose heart." (Gal. 6:9, NKJV)

\*\*\*\*\*

*Rachel (Bentley) Ramey was homeschooled for six years before graduating in 1997. She and her husband Michael reside in Gloucester, VA where they are in the midst of starting a church. They have one daughter (so far!) who is now only two but will be officially homeschooled when she's a little older. You can find Rachel on the web at [www.homeworksbest.net](http://www.homeworksbest.net).*

*Her GPA is 3.99. Alta is thinking she'll try to get into graduate school in music composition and aim at a professorship somewhere down the road. I remember a school official promising us that if we trusted the school with Alta's education, they could guarantee that when she graduated from high school she would be able to get a job wiping tables at a restaurant. I'm glad we were "forced" into homeschooling her. I hate to think what might have happened to her if I'd let the professionals handle it.*

*A Tale of Two Sisters  
Yvonna Graham*

# 10

## A Mom's Sentimental Journey

Vicki Bentley

Some of you have read my articles on “Beginning the Homeschool Journey,” and you know I have often been geographically challenged during the trip, both figuratively and physically. As we come to the end (SIGH) of our homeschool “road,” I couldn’t resist one last “travel” analogy! Imagine this crooned by a misty-eyed veteran homeschool mom, maybe to the tune of a familiar oldies classic, with the help of a few volunteers from the audience doing the *ba ba da ba bums*, followed by *Things I've learned these past fifteen years—what I would do the same and what I would do differently*.

Seems a lifetime since our journey started—  
(I’ve taught seventeen kids at home)(*ba ba da ba bum*);  
This homeschool trip is not for the faint-hearted –  
I’ll tell you what I wish I’d known.

We started out (I had my reservations),  
Spent each dime we could afford (*ba ba da ba bum*);  
I feared we’d all be doing school till midnight,  
I couldn’t do it without the Lord.

Seven....

I tried to start each day by seven  
(I wanted to sleep in till eleven!);  
From *Learning Language Arts* to *Saxon Math*,  
It takes me back... (*ba ba da ba bum*)

Never thought my heart could be so yearny;  
It seemed they’d always be at home. (*ba ba da ba bum*),  
But now they’re grown, and starting their own journeys;  
Let me share what I wish I’d known.

Join me on this “sentimental” journey –  
Those God calls, He does equip... (*ba ba da ba bum*)  
I thank the Lord we’ve had this homeschool journey,  
It has surely been A TRIP.

We started homeschooling because of the academic needs of our four younger daughters. Two of them were in the “gifted and talented” programs at our local public school, feeling quite un-challenged. Another daughter, born with cerebral palsy, had been miraculously healed at the age of two, but was doing some catching up; we didn’t want her “labeled.” And we didn’t want our toddler to ever have to attend a public school.

So, not knowing ANYone else I could call who taught their kids at home (I had met one mom several years earlier, several states away), I ordered a pre-packaged curriculum from a correspondence school. During the time I awaited its arrival, we did the typical “waffle” thing: *We know this is what the Lord wants us to do. We’re doing the right thing.* Why on earth did we think I could do this? I’ll be “doing school” till 10:00 every night! What have we gotten ourselves into? *This is the right thing for our family. We can do this.* Oh, no! Is it too late to change our minds?

When the box of materials arrived, I sat on the floor and cried.

That was fifteen years ago, and we have not regretted our decision. My last child will finish her formal home education this year; I look back over our journey with a bittersweet longing for the only identity I now know, and I ask myself: *If I had it to do all over again, what have I learned, fifteen years and seventeen kids later?*

#### (1) We all need a routine.

Kids need routine for security. We had a good schedule (I am a compulsive list-maker, and that was a help to me). Our routine included responsibilities, so the children would know they were needed as part of the family unit, part of a ministry team (during this time, we fostered over thirty of our almost fifty “borrowed” children, many of them formally homeschooled as part of our family). That routine included daily prayer and character training.

Putting our routine in writing made us accountable and was a reminder to those of us who tend to be a bit forgetful. Having it in writing also helped relieve mom of the duty of being The Bad Guy. And when I started to feel “out of control” of my life, it was usually because I had (a) slacked off in my devotional time, which was a result of (b) getting a little TOO relaxed in my routine.

Now, this routine was not set in stone. We tried to maintain some flexibility: I think Flexibility is every homeschool mom’s middle name! But we did rely on a realistic, basic starting point to keep life in perspective and give me some margin.

#### (2) I can do ANYthing for eight weeks!

When we first started, we worked with the same schedule as the local schools; it was all I knew. I eventually determined that working eight weeks on, one week off, for most of the year, with four weeks off at Christmas and in July, worked well for us. This gave me forty weeks of accountable study, which was four more than our

state required, so I had four weeks' leeway for days off, teacher sanity days, laundry catch-up, family trips, etc.

It is important to note that we were not enslaved by the calendar or the requirements of our state. I firmly believe that ALL our days were learning days, because we did our best to create a "learning lifestyle" environment. However, it was reassuring to me to know that we were above reproach, should the question ever arise from our local superintendent.

My first year, I thought I would be extra-organized, so I lesson-planned (I use the term loosely!) the *entire* year at the beginning. So what happened when the first child didn't grasp the math concept as quickly as we'd anticipated? Right—we "got behind" (or we thought we did—maybe you've been there, too?). So that threw the whole plan off.

This panic taught me to have an overall goal of what I wanted us to cover each year, but to divide that up and put it in writing only eight weeks at a time. After all, I can do ANYthing for eight weeks! At the end of the eight weeks, I would evaluate our progress, and during the week off I would plan for the next eight weeks.

One week off was long enough for the girls (and me!) to get a short break (or to catch up, if they'd lagged a bit). The one month off in December and in July gave them time for an extended break or project, but not enough time to forget what they'd learned or to get bored.

(3) It is not my job to teach them everything. It is my job to teach them **HOW TO LEARN**.

There were times when even my overachiever had to remind me that I was expecting too much! I learned that children will inevitably have some gaps in their education; I just had to be selective about what gaps I was willing to leave, understanding that their education would not end at the age of eighteen.

I did my best to teach them the skills they needed to think for themselves, to evaluate what they read and heard, to think through processes. I prayed for revelation of their learning styles and their giftings. I wanted them to learn about God's world from His perspective, to figure out how they fit into His plan for their lives, so they could minister to others in a way that would bring glory to Him.

(4) Textbooks aren't necessary in the early years.

If I could do kindergarten over again, I'd use something like *Five in a Row*, or I'd just cuddle my babies and do fun stuff, enjoying nature and words and music and stories together. I thought I had to cram all this in them. I didn't. (How many of us learned everything we know in the first eighteen years?) Where were Clay and Sally Clarkson when I started? *Educating the WholeHearted Child* would have been required

reading if it had been published. I now highly recommend Ruth Beechick's writings to my beginner homeschooling friends.

Pride says that our children need to be awesomely knowledgeable when they leave home. The Lord says they need to love Him and know Him and follow Him. Now, don't leave here thinking that Vicki says academics aren't important! Of course I advocate academic excellence, just not at the expense of relationships or character.

I would have tried to figure out their bents earlier. Back in the "olden days," before cookie-cutter assembly lines of dowel rods with feathers, arrows were made by whittling tree branches into some semblance of straightness, adding feathers here and weights there to compensate for the bent so that eight totally different arrows shot from the same distance at the same target could hit the same mark. We had eight totally different "arrows" in our quiver, and we needed to know which way they were each "bent" so we would know what adjustments to make, what needed to be whittled away, what weights needed to be added here and there to help them hit the mark of God's plan.

(5) Enjoy the kids.

The Greek model of education is all about knowledge; the Hebrew model is all about relationships. I was halfway into this homeschool journey when I realized I had no joy. The Lord directed me to Psalm 113:9 and showed me that making me a joyful mother of children ranked right up there with seating the poor with princes.

I purposed to not take life so personally, to laugh more, smile more, love my babies more, and cherish my family. I wanted them to remember their childhoods as joyful, contented times with a mom who treasured them, not think back woefully to the stressed mother of their youth.

(6) Just say "Yes."

We seem to have bought into the "Just say 'No'" mentality: No, you may not have dessert because you didn't eat your supper. No, you may not play with your friend because you didn't finish your chores.

I realized that I could turn each *No* into a *Yes* and flip the responsibility into a positive thing for my kids. Yes, you may have dessert as soon as you finish your healthy food. Yes, you may play with her as soon as you finish your morning jobs.

I was not The Bad Guy anymore. After all, I was giving them permission to do what they had asked (if it was truly an acceptable option); the responsibility was now in their laps. If they did not get dessert, whose choice had that been? And whose "fault" was it now if they didn't finish their chores and get to play? Aha! The concept of personal responsibility!

(7) Get up and go.

I wish I had taken them more places. Not necessarily more of the structured, guided “school field trips,” but the family experiences. We didn’t have the funds to do much, but the trips are what they tend to remember. I hope the younger ones didn’t feel “ripped off” because by the times the older ones were older, we didn’t “go” as much. These didn’t have to be big-ticket items, just the pack-a-picnic outings to the monuments or the museums or the potato chip factory.

(8) Provide opportunities to make wise choices, and to learn from the not-so-wise ones.

We gave them input into their course choices, their extracurricular activities, their chores, their spending, and more, as their maturity levels allowed. (This was gradual, of course.) Our goal was for them to have ownership of their circumstances, to realize that we all have choices, and we need to make them wisely. We let them bear the consequences of their actions. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink. (though you sure can salt his oats!)

(9) It’s not my job to change them. It’s my job to show them the way to live.

I needed to model a Christ-like attitude...and I often failed miserably! But they needed to see a woman who could admit her failings, humble herself to ask forgiveness, and do her best to rely on God and to honor her Lord and her family. I needed to stay on my knees and in the Word. I prayed along with Jesus (John 17) for my children, just as He did for His disciples.

When my daughters are twenty-five, nobody will remember their SAT scores, their GPAs, or even what their degrees are in (or if they have them). But they will know their character. They will know if my girls are dependable, compassionate, honest, diligent, trustworthy, and cheerful. My daughters would not learn those things because I nagged them to change, but because their parents endeavored to exemplify those Christ-like characteristics, and in their human failings, repented and tried again to live what they taught.

(10) This was just one season of my life.

Early on, it seemed that I would always have little children. At one point I had six kids under the age of nine, and at another point I had seven teenage girls. After all, the odds were pretty good: I had fifty of them!

If you are here: This really is just a season. There is, as we read in Ecclesiastes, a time and a season for everything. This season will pass. Enjoy it! Milk it for all it’s worth! Invest in your babies, and your toddlers, and your young people. Regardless of what you “were” in the previous season of your life, this is, in the words of the arachnid Charlotte, your “magnificent opus.” Shoot those arrows toward the mark,

doing your best to work with their bent, and trust God to help take out the wobble.  
We need not fret.

We all make lots of mistakes. We don't get to have these kids when we're older and wiser—we usually get them when we're still young and inexperienced—so we have to rely on God. Pray for the Lord to give you His vision for your family. Then trust Him to guide you day by day in the path that is right for *your* family.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Vicki Bentley, the mother of eight daughters, foster mom of over fifty since 1985, and grandma to fourteen wonderful grandbabies (so far) has homeschooled seventeen children over the last fourteen years, with the strong under-girding of her husband Jim. She leads a local homeschool support group of over 250 families, coordinates a mentoring program, gives bread-baking and whole-foods cooking classes, answers e-mail way too late at night, and acts silly with her children. In her spare time, she serves on the executive board and the state convention committee of Home Educators Association of Virginia, and counsels new and prospective homeschoolers. She has addressed the state convention, university teacher organizations, and many mothers' groups. Vicki is the author of a lesson plan book for homeschoolers, a family chore system, a mentoring program for support groups, and various articles. Vicki has a heart for moms, with practical wisdom and encouraging words. Vicki Bentley is also the mother of Rachel Ramey, the author of the previous chapter.*

# 11

## Focusing on the Journey Not the Destination

Shelley Mullins

Our homeschooling journey has been just that, a journey. We've gone through cross-country moves, births, deaths, and diagnosis of an incurable illness in me. What started out to be a one-semester trial has turned into more than just an educational choice, but rather a way of life. We have encountered many obstacles along the way that have tempted us to turn back, but through it all we've kept our minds on the journey, not the destination.

We have not always homeschooled our children. Their time in school was a pleasant one. I was room mom, served on the PTA, and helped out with everything I could. We loved the school experience. But a move from a very conservative state to a very liberal state caused us to reconsider our schooling choice. All the things that we had heard were happening in public schools, but hadn't believed, really were happening.

I wasn't exactly enthused about homeschooling my children. All the common arguments we hear against it...I'm sure I used them all. I didn't want my children to be cheated of a proper education and I didn't want them to be weird. But my husband urged me just to consider it and do some research. My oldest daughter begged me to do the same. So I went to the library, and the journey began.

That first semester I was gung-ho and felt prepared. Who wouldn't feel prepared after checking out and reading every single book written on the subject of homeschooling, and searching every Web site I could find about the topic? If nothing else, I was informed! Having moved and left behind a busy lifestyle where I served as the children's pastor at our church, the timing was perfect for me to pour myself into this new schooling experience.

We started out prepared to take it one semester at a time and if at any time I felt we weren't succeeding, they would go back to school. Each semester, I became more and more convinced that we were never going to take that option. The differences I saw in our children's character were enough to make me believe that we had made the right choice. I was

learning along with them and I discovered more about them than I ever knew when they were in school.

After looking at all the curriculum choices, I decided on a character-based unit study curriculum. It worked well for us and I loved seeing the focus on character training. Our girls developed a real love for learning and our family grew closer together. I had them take achievement tests each year, for their sake as well as mine. Things were going really great and we had found our groove, so to speak.

But, a few years into the journey, life threw us a curve ball when my mother developed lung cancer. She lived in another state, 900 miles away, and I was needed to help take care of her. We had no idea how long I would be away, or even what to expect. Being torn between caring for my terminally ill mother and caring for my five children was difficult, but my husband and I agreed that for this season my mother needed me, and that our children would learn how to handle the bumps in the road of life.

So I took our twelve- and one-year-old daughters to my mother's with me and my husband kept our fifteen-year-old daughter at home with him to care for her younger sisters, ages three and six. It was a very difficult time. Being apart was not easy on any of us, but through this experience our children learned something that books don't teach. They learned that family is important and sometimes our lives get disrupted.

Through the next three months, we tried to do school work and, for the most part, were diligent at keeping up. Our oldest daughter did her schoolwork independently and got a crash course in managing a home. She did the meal planning, laundry, and housework, and cared for her younger sisters. This was not the typical life of a fifteen-year-old girl, but she was willing and did what she needed to do. She learned something that a classroom could never have replicated. She learned about life.

After my mother died, we moved back to the area we had left three years earlier, to be closer to my father. We started back into our school routine and adapted to being together again. It took some time to adjust, but we found our groove once more. The girls were getting older and their interests were changing. I was schooling a preschooler and first, eighth, and eleventh graders in addition to keeping up with a toddler.

Shortly after that, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. A lot of medical problems that I had gone through, but ignored in the midst of all my busyness, began to make sense. Finding out I had an incurable illness was not something I had anticipated dealing with at the age of thirty-six. Another bump in the road.

My husband was very concerned about how I was going to take care of myself and homeschool our five children. The first few months after the diagnosis were difficult for all of us. Coming to terms with the uncertainty of the disease, I found myself wavering between my commitment to school my children and thoughts of putting them back in school. There were

days that no schooling took place, especially if I wasn't feeling well, at least no schooling in the formal sense.

We decided that continuing the homeschool journey was the best path for us because of the flexibility. Our children would have been in three different schools, which would have meant I would be involved and busy going to their various activities, meetings, parties, and more. Plus, I would have been taking care of a toddler at home, and some days I just couldn't do that alone. So, we opted to keep things just the way they were.

By this time, our daughters ranged in age from two to sixteen. We had started homeschooling with just two school-aged children and two pre-schoolers, but now we had four of them doing school and had added one who was now a toddler. Each year was different and we adapted. The two oldest were instrumental in helping manage the home during times when I was in a flare-up from MS. They managed to continue their schooling and even worked part-time jobs.

Our oldest daughter took classes at the community college during her senior year of high school. This gave her a taste of college and helped her step out on her own a bit. It was a wonderful experience for her and took some of the load away from me. During her junior and senior years of high school, she taught dance to students at our homeschool co-op. She is currently attending Youth With a Mission's Discipleship Training program and plans on doing full-time missions work when she finishes her training.

Our second daughter is currently a high school senior and taking classes at the community college. She plans to go into nursing when she graduates. We are allowing her to accelerate her schooling and graduate a year early from high school. She knows what she wants to do and has known for some time now, so we don't see the point in making her wait. Going through the experiences of being with me while I cared for my mother and seeing the things I've gone through physically have burned the desire in her heart to serve people through nursing.

Thus far, we have not produced children who will be rocket scientists, but we have produced children who have a work ethic and a heart to serve people. They are bright and independent thinkers who are not afraid to take chances and try anything they put their minds to.

The fact that I suffer from an unpredictable illness has made things difficult, but not impossible. Most of the time I am as normal as any other mom, if there is such a thing as a normal mom. In addition to homeschooling our daughters, I also serve as the children's pastor at our church. I am able to do almost all of my work from home, at my convenience, and my children enjoy being involved in what I do. For the most part, my younger children don't think of me as having an illness. They just see me as a mom who sometimes gets tired and needs a nap, or sometimes needs to take a break and just curl up with a good book or watch a movie with them.

In spite of the unpredictability of our lives, I do not regret choosing to homeschool our children. It is hard sometimes, and there have been times I've seen that yellow school bus driving by and longed to run out, chase it down, and put them on it. I've learned that it's okay to feel that way.

We will be homeschooling for several more years, as our youngest is five and just beginning the journey. Having successfully graduated one and being on the verge of graduating another in just a few months, we know that it can be done. We do not know what lies down the road for us. But, we know that if we keep our eyes on the journey, and don't get distracted by looking down the road towards the destination, we will be able to do it.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Shelley Mullins, after much encouragement from her husband, Jim, started on the homeschooling journey in 1998. She is the mom to five beautiful daughters, one of whom has already graduated, and one who will graduate this year. Shelley is active in her local homeschool support group and teaches junior high and high school drama classes. In addition to homeschooling her children, she is also the children's pastor at her church. If all goes well, she is anticipating completing the homeschool journey in the year 2016.*

*Soon after we started homeschooling, I found, to my great surprise, that my son was rapidly learning things on his own that I couldn't have dreamed of. I had thought I'd be a good teacher; what I hadn't realized was that he would be his own best teacher.*

*It's a Wonderful Life!  
Lillian Jones*

# 12

## Confessions of a Famous Homeschool Author

### Mary Griffith

It was very nearly an accident that I wrote a couple of homeschooling books. I'd first seriously considered the idea of homeschooling when my older daughter was barely a toddler, and we'd decided to try it and see how things worked out. After a year or so, I'd begun to work actively with a state homeschool support group. (I'd sent a letter to the newsletter editor offering to help, and the reply was essentially, "How would you like to be editor?") Several of us on the group's board fantasized from time to time about one day writing a book about homeschooling, but none of us did much of anything to pursue the idea.

Then one day, I got a call from an editor with a company that was considering getting into publishing curriculum for homeschoolers. She wanted to learn about the homeschooling market, so I sent her a big packet of information, including our newsletter, other homeschooling publications, and a list of other resources, and thought no more about it. But a couple of weeks later, she asked me up to the publisher's offices where I was introduced to a small flock of editors around a very large conference table. These editors asked lots of questions about homeschooling. They said they planned to put together a test package, and asked me to return and give them some feedback when they had something more concrete.

So after another few weeks, I visited the publisher's offices again, and in a smaller conference room, was shown their first attempt at an English curriculum package for homeschoolers.

It was a flat white corrugated cardboard box. ("We'll have some nice colorful graphics on the outside, of course.") Inside the box were a folding game board (blank) and a smaller box that contained cardboard geometric shapes in various colors. ("This will be a board game using different shapes for each part of speech.") There was also a good-sized paperbound volume, which I picked up to look through, only to discover that the inside was as blank as its cover. ("We'll hire outside writers to develop the actual content.")

"We're looking," said the editor, "at a price point of fifty dollars. Do you think homeschoolers will buy this?"

"No," I said.

They were taken aback that I seemed so certain. I explained again the legendary cheapness of homeschoolers (though that's a tricky thing to get most non-homeschoolers to understand: we are exceedingly cheap, but we'll also spend ridiculous amounts on things we think worthwhile). It was remotely possible, I went on, that homeschoolers might spend that much on a single academic subject, but it would have to be something spectacular, and it would certainly have to have its content available for viewing before any homeschooler would decide that it was spectacular enough to be worth fifty dollars.

And that was that, I thought.

But another couple of weeks later, I got a call from a different editor at the same publisher. She told me they'd decided there really wasn't a viable market for them in curriculum, but they thought there might well be a market for a trade book about homeschooling. Would I be interested in writing a proposal for such a book?

Since I'd been lazily thinking about such a project for a couple of years, it didn't take me long to come up with an outline and the other bits and pieces for a proposal. About a week after I sent it off, the editor called to accept my proposal for *The Homeschooling Handbook*, in which I would try to provide new homeschoolers with all the information I would have liked to have when I first started homeschooling.

When *The Homeschooling Handbook* was first published, my daughters were only thirteen and nine. We'd been homeschooling all their lives, but we knew lots of families who'd been homeschooling far longer, who'd actually got their kids through high school and into college, and on to adult lives. I thought of myself as someone who'd learned quite a bit from homeschooling, and was lucky enough because of my work with the state support group to have begun to get an idea of the kinds of things other homeschooling families were up to. We were just another homeschooling family trying to figure out what we were doing—except that Mom was suddenly a Famous Homeschool Author.

In 1997, mainstream publishers were only just beginning to discover the potential homeschooling market. John Holt's *Teach Your Own* was available, Warner Books had picked up Micki and David Colfax's originally self-published *Homeschooling for Excellence*, and David Guterson's *Family Matters* had actually been released in hardcover, practically a first for a homeschooling title. Just about everything else in print was either self-published or from a religious house.

Neither I nor my family was prepared for the response *The Homeschooling Handbook* received. I'd spoken at homeschool conferences before, and at not-back-to-school information nights, but always before I'd been just another homeschooling parent, like those in my audience, but with—perhaps—a bit more experience. But now that my book was in print, and

people could order it from Amazon or walk into a local bookstore and pick a copy off the shelf, many in my audiences apparently believed that what I had to say was more credible and more important than it had been the previous month, before I had become a published author.

Suddenly parents asked questions I didn't know how to answer: How many and which types of arithmetic problems should their six-year-old be doing each day? What time should their nine-year-old be going to bed? If they required their kids to keep journals, what should they make sure their kids wrote about? How could they keep their kids from watching TV or ingesting sugar products when they were at other people's houses?

My daughters thought all these questions were hilarious. Kate, the then-thirteen-year-old, was the one who came up with the "Famous Homeschool Author" label for my speaking persona, and she managed to invest that title with all the ironic, pitying contempt that a thirteen-year-old can muster for a parent so obviously lacking the skills and expertise expected of any grown-up, let alone someone who was supposed to know what she was talking about. Christie, nearly four years younger, was more direct: "Mom, why do they ask you things you don't know?"

It's not like I ever pretended to know all the answers to those sorts of questions. My usual reply was to give examples from my own family's experience and from that of other homeschooling families I knew, and to explain that the whole process of homeschooling is a matter of trial and error, of learning what works best with you and your kids this year, and learning how to adapt when your own and their needs and interests change. I always thought this an eminently reasonable response, but more often than you'd think the questioner would become angry and accuse me of keeping secret some magic that would make the whole process of homeschooling easy, even automatic.

Ah, if they'd only known.

It's easy for me, now, to live with the ambiguity and the suspense inherent in homeschooling, but it took me years to become (relatively) comfortable with the reality that there are no definitive answers. I'd read every issue of *Growing Without Schooling* (I started subscribing with Issue #42 and bought all the back issues) and most issues of *Home Education Magazine* (though I'm not sure why I never got around to buying all the back issues of HEM). I read lots of homeschooling success stories and knew many older homeschoolers who turned out to be perfectly nice and perfectly competent human beings. Intellectually, I knew homeschooling would also work for my own kids.

Emotionally, however, was another matter entirely.

I'd coped fairly easily with Kate being a relatively late reader—I could see all the skills developing and had no doubt she'd start reading on her own when she was ready, which she indeed did when she was about eight-and-a-half, becoming the same kind of voracious reader I'd been as a kid myself. But Christie didn't start reading on her own when she was eight, like

her sister, nor when she was nine, or ten, or eleven. Christie wasn't interested in reading stupid stories, as she put it—she wanted to do things, not read about them.

Then Kate, who'd always enjoyed playing around with numbers and shapes and mathematical ideas, developed a horror of arithmetic that extended itself through algebra and geometry and beyond. It wasn't so much that she couldn't understand it as that she wouldn't. If it was labeled "mathematics," she'd fall into a panic and not be able to let herself think rationally about it.

There I was, the Famous Homeschool Author—not only was I unable to answer questions from other homeschoolers, but I couldn't even help my own kids learn basic concepts and skills they needed. And I had the hubris to write a book advising other families about homeschooling? What could I have been I thinking?

It was the ultimate Parental Panic Attack. We're talking major, existential doubt—complete terror that my whole life's work had been totally misguided. What was I to do? I couldn't exactly call my editor and tell her to withdraw the book. ("Uh, I've got a little problem. You know the book I wrote, the one you just published and shipped out to bookstores all over the country, the one that's getting such good reviews? I've decided it was a mistake and I think you should recall every copy.")

Maybe the best thing to do was to forget the homeschooling entirely—just put the kids in school and learn to live with the school system. But how would that look? A Famous Homeschool Author putting her kids in school? The publisher could probably sue me or withhold royalties or something for sabotaging my book sales. It would be just plain embarrassing.

That's how I discovered that sometimes embarrassment can be good. Unable to figure a dignified way out, I was trapped in homeschooling, letting things go on as they always had. Life went on.

After a couple of months, I realized that I wasn't panicked any longer. Christie still wasn't reading. Kate still feared and avoided math. But I again believed that one day they'd find their way.

Later that spring, when I started putting together workshop topics for the summer conference season, I reread sections of *The Homeschooling Handbook* to prepare for a presentation on coping with parental panic attacks. I'd avoided even looking at the book at all for several months—the whole process of editing and proofreading had required me to read through it carefully more than half a dozen times in the space of three or four weeks, and I'd become thoroughly sick of it.

Rereading it this time, I began to laugh, and I laughed until I couldn't see the print for the tears. Right there in Chapter 12, "Coping with the Rough Spots," in the section on parental panic attacks, were my suggestions for coping:

- Take a deep breath, and count to 10 (or 20 or 50 or 100 or 10,000). Don't make any drastic changes in your lives for a few days—wait to see if the worry just evaporates.

Even though I'd forgotten what I'd written, I'd managed to take my own advice. I read on:

- Reread a favorite homeschooling book or article. Sometimes you'll find you just needed to be reminded of the ideas that got you into homeschooling in the first place.

I doubt my own books will ever be my favorites. For one thing, I know too well how far they fall short of what I'd wanted them to be. But it's been long enough now since I wrote them (or had to proofread them) that they no longer sound so much like my own voice babbling on at me. Occasionally, I've even been pleasantly surprised by bits and pieces I've written. ("Wow! I wrote that? That's actually pretty sensible!") But more often than I'd ever imagined, I've found myself referring to my books for homeschooling information for myself.

What I've made myself remember most often is the advice I still give again and again in workshops—whether for dealing with panic attacks or just checking that things are going along okay: There isn't any one right way to homeschool—and if you've found what seems like the perfect process, it won't last. You'll change, your kids will change, and—eventually—you'll learn to live with, and even appreciate, the changes, recognizing that they are a sign of growth, a sign of healthy development.

So, does the process really work? Did Christie ever learn to read? Or Kate learn to love math?

When they were good and ready, they each did what they needed to do. Christie definitely reads, both for learning and for the pure pleasure of it. She still likes doing things better than reading about them, and will probably never be as much of a bookworm as her sister and I are, but she's often startled by how little many of her friends read, and how little joy they take in it. And reading is one of her favorite tools for learning about places and people and things she can't get to (yet) in real life. At sixteen, she's starting to look into colleges that will help her continue her athletic career as a saber fencer.

Kate eventually made herself reasonably competent at manipulating numbers. After wrestling resentfully with the SATs and the rest of the standard college admissions process, she realized she didn't want a traditional liberal arts education. When she applied to theater schools, she discovered that she'd need to present some sort of outside certification that she possessed a basic secondary education, and settled on a GED certificate as the least bothersome option. If dealing with math was something she needed to do to get into a theater program, that's what she'd do, and do it she did. Now twenty, she's in New York, studying acting (and managing her own finances).

Eventually, we all get hit in the head with the incontrovertible fact that our kids are no longer ours—if they ever really were—and that all we can do is give them the best tools we can and a few directions to explore, and let them know we're there when they need us. Everything else is up to them.

Deep down I always—most of the time, anyway—knew things would work out.

After all, I wrote it in a book.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Mary Griffith is the author of [The Homeschooling Handbook: From Preschool to High School, A Parent's Guide](#) and [The Unschooling Handbook: How to Use the Whole World As Your Child's Classroom](#). While she still speaks now and then at homeschool conferences - especially about coping with the dreaded parental panic attacks, she is more often found these days at fencing tournaments as a member of the U.S. Fencing Association's national tournament staff, and is currently working on a book about competitive fencing. Catch her online at [www.marygriffith.com](http://www.marygriffith.com).*

*My homeschool friends and I didn't think about learning—we just lived and learned. Friends in school thought of learning as a separate activity from life that was usually a burden or a chore—they thought of learning in the same way that people often think of work.*

*It's a Wonderful Life!  
Ethan Jones Bassett*

# 13

## Why Was I Surprised?

### Beverly Krueger

A funny thing happened on the way to graduating our oldest homeschoolers: They became independent learners. Yes, that was our goal, and the ability to learn independently did manifest itself early in their high school years. However, this independent learning took on a life of its own that I found surprising, even though it was a logical conclusion of our homeschooling lifestyle.

We began our homeschooling journey in average fashion with five children, ages one to twelve, one dad off to work daily, and one mom busily trying to mimic the school classroom. The inevitable collapse followed and thereafter we learned to relax and started out on our eclectic journey.

Over the years, we strove to measure success by who our children were becoming. Were they creative? Did they express themselves well? Did they have their own developing relationship with God? Were they engaged in their community? Did they have personal passion? Admittedly, these yardsticks were initially co-equal measures with standardized tests and other academic evaluations. Worries about whether they were learning all they should plagued our minds. That seems to be a common experience for homeschoolers.

Perhaps it was my own experience, first as a community member and then a community leader in the America Online (AOL) homeschool forum, that helped me realize that there was something better for my children than textbook-style lessons and a steady march along the typical educational path. It was there that my own passion for eclectic homeschooling was born. My children saw first hand how passion for a subject motivates someone to gain the skills needed to pursue that passion. Their moderately computer-oriented mother became a super geek, learning to use the proprietary scripting language Rainman at AOL to create pages in the homeschool forum, taking online training in file library management, and serving as moderator for guest-speaker chats.

My first-hand experience in rubbing online shoulders with other dynamic homeschool parents eventually led me to begin my own newsletter that morphed into a small magazine

and finally into the *Eclectic Homeschool Online*. My children did not learn lessons in hard work and determination only by reading about others' accomplishments, but also by watching their mom spend hours folding magazine pages and struggling to learn to use imaging software. They were there to watch their mom's passion for helping others homeschool in freedom become something truly terrific, a homeschool Web site with nearly 50,000 distinct readers each month. It also led to a second career. The skills it took to turn the *Eclectic Homeschool Online* into a database-driven site with thousands of pages of resources were exactly what I needed to become an Internet Web site developer. I've gone on to develop sites for a variety of companies, including creating an entire online scheduling system for one. I can remember the jealousy evoked in a friend who teaches Microsoft classes in the local high school when she discovered that I was using programming skills to make the church database feed into the church Web site. "You can program in Visual Basic!" I guess I can. But I learned it all on my own. Watching their mom busily learning what she needed to pursue her passions became a way of life for my children.

But, let's get back to where all these eclectic notions about education were taking my children. Our fears were increasingly quashed as our oldest children began demonstrating their maturity. Our oldest daughter started taking classes at the local community college at sixteen. Her classmates, all older adults returning to school, were amazed when they discovered how young she was. She easily managed the social interaction and the course work of her English class. She didn't fare so well with math. Our second daughter, a force for creative expression from birth, didn't follow her sister's path to community college. She chose to work thirty hours a week her junior year of high school to pay for a summer trip to Europe. She also taught an art class for other homeschoolers. Our oldest son will leave the nest soon, and his experiences, too, are unique. He's working as a deejay for a local radio station and taking computer courses at a computer learning center.

Well and good, you say. How lovely. But how have your daughters fared after homeschool? That's where the surprise came in. One that you may be anticipating, but when you're in the thick of things the future can be hazy and some things are not as readily apparent. We had encouraged our children to do their own thing. They were completely assured of their capability to learn whatever they needed at the time they needed to learn it. After all, they'd seen mom do it. Learning, for them, became a never-ending process, but a process that need not follow prescribed educational norms. So far, none of our children have chosen to take the typical post-high school route to a slot as a college freshman.

They surprised me by making the eclectic homeschooling lifestyle an integral part of who they are. They didn't receive a typical education, and they are not typical young adults. They are strong-minded individuals who are not inclined to passively accept being told, "You can't do it that way" or "That's not the way things are done."

Our oldest, rather than continue with college, attended a school for massage therapy and is now self-supporting, and back attending college to become a nurse midwife. She will shortly marry the man of our prayers and her dreams. She discovered a passion for ministering to

pregnant women in massage therapy school, making college once again a necessity. My squeamish daughter plans to become a nurse midwife. I couldn't have imagined this five years ago. She's also now conquering college algebra. She needs it now, so she's making it happen.

Daughter number two is in her second year of Master's Commission, a program that is a cross between an internship and Bible school, with heaping doses of discipleship thrown in. We're currently in negotiations for her next step in life after Master's Commission. She's undecided and quite unconcerned. God will let her know, she assures us, just what she should be doing. Of course, we still fall prey to the age-old worries that certain steps must be taken to assure future prosperity. We're nudging her towards college. She placidly remains unnudgeable. What she will do in the coming years is anybody's guess.

Our oldest son has special medical needs that require he have health insurance. His two options after high school are a job with benefits or full-time school and remaining on our health insurance. Much of what he is doing in his senior year is designed to make both options possible. He was a computer geek early on, helping his dad network our home computers, playing with a Linux partition on one, and working with computer game creation software. It was a natural extension for him to begin taking classes and work toward certification. He may move further into radio. He demonstrated sufficient maturity at the radio station that, soon after accepting him, they gave him the keys to the station and a 6:00 to 9:00 a.m. shift by himself.

Our younger children, twelve and fourteen years of age, are still in the process. Those nagging worries and self-doubts about whether homeschooling will have positive results are greatly tempered by our experiences with our oldest children. We continue to nurture their passions, help them open doors of opportunity, and give them the tools to become independent learners. I expect surprises from them, too.

Independent, life-long learners; mature, responsible adults; and individuals that make their passions central parts of their lives: All this is the result of our decision to homeschool. Would the same have happened if we had kept them in school? Who knows? It's hard to imagine my children as other than the surprising individuals they are.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Beverly Krueger has homeschooled her five children a total of forty-five years and counting—counting each child separately—they are homeschooled separately...except when they're together. She's in year twelve if you prefer to look at things in a concurrent fashion. She serves the Eclectic Homeschool Online (<http://eho.org>) in the capacity of Senior Editor, webmaster, advertising exec, and a bunch of other stuff. She has a mind like a steel sieve, which is demonstrated far more frequently than she would care to admit.*

# 14

## Educating Mom

Barbara Frank

I am a firstborn, and a recovering perfectionist overachiever. That's probably why God gave me four very different children. He had many things to teach me, and He knew it was going to take several children to bring me to the point of surrender when it came to my controlling ways.

He began this task the minute he made me a mother. Our first child was so eager to tackle life that she was born a week before her due date. Beautiful, blue-eyed, blond Sarah had definite ideas about sleeping and eating that didn't conform to the parenting books. By the time she was eighteen-months-old, most mornings found her toddling back to her bedroom, where she struggled to put on clothes she preferred over the ones in which I had dressed her. "No" was her favorite word for what seemed like an eternity.

In the thick of her toddler rebellion, I gave birth to her brother Peter. Fortunately, he was an easygoing little fellow, but the arrival of two babies in eighteen months quickly put to rest any dreams I had of a home that ran like clockwork.

Still, to paraphrase the old saying, God wasn't anywhere near finished with me yet. He then gave my husband and me a vision for homeschooling. One might think homeschooling is a way to control your children's education. That thought had occurred to me. In fact, that was one reason why homeschooling appealed to me. (I had not yet discovered that you can't control what a child learns; you can only encourage learning.) Once I found out you could teach your children at home, I couldn't imagine sending them to school, where others would choose what they would read and learn. I wanted that job for myself.

So we began our homeschooling adventure with set hours and an opening ceremony that included the Pledge of Allegiance and a rousing chorus of "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Since I was a product of the public schools, this was the only way I knew how to "do school," and I had to do it the "right" way. I bought a curriculum, and learned to follow it.

As the years went by, like many homeschoolers I found that I sometimes had to bypass my lesson plan because the kids had gone off on a tangent and wanted to learn about

something that wasn't on my list. At least I was flexible enough to allow that, though I felt guilty about the assignments we had postponed in order to accommodate the children's interests. Yet my children were thriving. I started to rethink my ideas about education, realizing it wasn't all up to me. "Ah, yes," God said, "we're making progress."

Still, He had to keep me on my toes. Teaching two children became a lot harder when morning sickness was added to our routine. Baby number three was on her way, bringing with her more attitude adjustments for Mom. Suddenly my lesson plan didn't seem so important, especially when compared to making it across the room without becoming sick. We gave up our orderly math flash card procedure at the table. Instead, the kids sat by the sofa where I was beached, and I tossed each card to whichever child called out the correct answer. They thought it was great fun, and I was too queasy to feel guilty.

The birth of our sweet Mary put a stop to school for three months. My little world had become so overwhelming that I didn't even worry about that. Once we finally started back up, I learned to be more flexible about what I hoped we could accomplish in a day. After Mary became mobile, school grew even more challenging. There were repeated interruptions of spelling tests and read-aloud sessions so that we could pull the baby out from under the sofa, away from the potted plants, and most importantly, off of her big brother's carefully arranged display of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. I learned to expect my plans to be changed. I was making progress, but evidently not enough, because within fifteen months we found out another baby was on the way.

My husband, a firstborn himself, refers to that particular time period in our lives as "when God taught us that we are not in control." Our little man was born with fuzzy, blond hair, a sweet little face, and Down Syndrome. We were plunged into a strange world we never knew existed, a world of newborns with wires attached to them, and ventilators, and monitors.

Joshua spent his first month of life in the hospital. My mother-in-law, who came to spend one night at our house while I had the baby, ended up staying for six weeks. While we daily prayed and watched over our newborn in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, she was a blessing, caring for our older children at home.

"I draw the line at homeschooling them!" she warned us. That was fine. Homeschooling was the last thing on our minds.

After a few close calls, Joshua stabilized enough to come home on a heart and breathing monitor to a house in utter chaos. A month's worth of mail covered the kitchen counters and hospital bills as long as my arm besieged us. Our toddler had begun calling her grandma "Mommy." Hard things, for sure, but we were overwhelmed with gratitude that our son was home.

It was at this time that God showed me just how little control I had over my children's education. We did no school from early March, when Josh was born, to the following fall,

because we were in survival mode. Yet the achievement tests Sarah and Peter took in June showed each had gone up two grade levels since the previous year. Hmmm...

The pace of life with four children, much less one with disabilities and medical problems, finally forced me to let go of my strict adherence to lesson plans. We still had guidelines and goals, but the kids began to take ownership of more of their day because I was too busy to do so. I was not completely comfortable with this, but I had no choice. I consoled myself with my heart-felt belief that anything was better for them than putting them in our local public school.

It was around this time that we bought our first personal computer. Its purpose was to pave the way for my husband's self-employment plans. He could see I was floundering, and we decided that having him home would be best for our family. He bought the computer so he could learn the software he would need to start a business. When he wasn't on the computer, the children took turns with it.

Sarah and Peter quickly became proficient. When I used it, I found myself asking for their help, and they loved knowing so much more about a subject than I did. I was amazed at how quickly they had figured it out, and without any help from me. Slowly, the light was dawning for me. They didn't need me in order to learn. In fact, they learned quickly when I stayed out of their way.

I began to loosen up even more. As they reached junior-high age, I let them choose the order in which they worked on their school assignments. I initiated sessions we called brainstorming, where they came up with all the things they wanted to learn about, and I used that information to obtain books and resources for them. By the time Sarah reached eighth grade, I had become flexible enough to actually let her skip schoolbooks that were too easy for her and move ahead. As for Peter, he was doing so well in math that, after encouragement from my husband, I let him surge past Sarah into Algebra 2.

I'd like to say that I just kept getting steadily better at letting go of my need for control, but that's not what happened. As high school loomed, I decided that I could not provide Sarah and Peter with the kind of high school experience I thought they'd need to succeed in college, or indeed, in the adult world. Besides, surely God did not expect me to do high school when I had a toddler plus a baby with disabilities, right?

Yet my husband and I could not send them to the local high school, which did not have a good reputation. Instead, I convinced him to move. We found a house in a "good" school district, and put ours on the market. But we couldn't sell it in time, and lost the house. Disappointed, but undaunted, we took a short break, and then put our house back on the market. This time, while a buyer materialized fairly quickly, we could not find an affordable house that could hold the six of us and my husband's business comfortably.

In the end, we expanded our house, and I had to accept that maybe God wanted me to homeschool for high school after all. Like Jonah, I had tried to run away, but it didn't work. God wanted me to do this, and I needed to have faith that He would equip me for it.

By now, Joshua was seeing multiple therapists, so I was limited in how much I could do with my teens. They had to take responsibility for getting their assignments done on time and correctly. They also had to help with their siblings and the housework. The combination of these things did not leave them a lot of personal time, yet they managed to thrive in a number of areas without any help from me at all.

In her mid-teens, Sarah became very interested in Christian rock music. She also had a heart for the unborn. She combined these interests by arranging a benefit concert for the pro-life cause at a local Christian college. She obtained the venue and the bands, publicized the event, and ran it. It was a success, and started her on several years of volunteering for Rock for Life, a pro-life organization for young people. She raised thousands of dollars for that cause by setting up merchandise booths at Christian concerts, where she sold pro-life bumper stickers, clothing and jewelry as well as handed out free pamphlets educating kids about abortion.

After she had been doing this for a few years, I helped her with a show. I was amazed at how organized she was, at how good she had become at selling, and how well she shared the pro-life message with the kids who came to the table. Just as with the computer, she had learned all of this on her own.

She also decided to start a Christian coffee house in our area. She sent out letters to over 40 local pastors, offering to run the coffee house if they could provide a site. One pastor responded, and, as a result, her dream came true. She booked bands and organized shows that eventually attracted more than one hundred teens each week.

Meanwhile, Peter took off in a different direction. At age twelve, he was introduced to a Major League Baseball player who had grown up in our church. Peter then developed a Web site about this player, his career and his faith. The site became so popular that it was written up in the national publication *Baseball Weekly*.

Peter used his Web design expertise to design the Web site for our church. He became vice president of the youth group there, helping plan activities and trips. He also began traveling each summer with other members of our church to Mexico, where they ran a Vacation Bible School for 250 children.

None of the activities that Sarah and Peter were involved in, and none of the talents and interests they developed, had anything to do with me beyond my willingness to drive them wherever they needed to go. This was a liberating realization for me. Just because I homeschooled them didn't mean I controlled their education or even their lives, and that was ok. I finally realized that any control I had was merely an illusion. God was in control, and He used homeschooling for His purposes.

Sarah and Peter never did go to public high school. They both graduated from homeschool high school, and are now young adults. True to her independent spirit, at twenty-one Sarah lives in her own apartment in Chicago. Currently a corporate sales representative for a major bookseller, she hopes to open her own shop in the city in a few years, and is currently researching that possibility.

Peter chose the college route. After a year in community college, he transferred to a Christian college in another state, intending to earn a degree in Business Management. While he was there, God called him to the ministry, and he is now a pre-seminary major in his junior year of college. He hosts a weekly radio show on the college's station, where he enjoys interviewing his theology professors about Biblical topics and playing Christian music. He also volunteers at an inner-city church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his ability to speak Spanish (something he hones in his yearly mission trips to Mexico) is a big help.

As for me, I'm still homeschooling our younger children. At thirteen, Mary is a violinist as well as a writer working on her second novel. Joshua is eleven, blessed with good health so far, as well as with a curiosity about, and love for, life that makes him a joy to be around. I cannot predict what they will do as adults, and I'm fine with that. God has brought me to a point where I realize that His plans are not only better than mine, but they're more interesting, too! I couldn't have imagined the things my children have done so far, and I eagerly await what they'll do in the future.

In looking back over the past twenty years, I see that the advantages homeschooling gave my children had nothing to do with me picking the right curriculum or arranging the right schedule and study environment. In fact, if I did anything at all, it was to listen to the Voice that put homeschooling in our path. After that, God took over. Through homeschooling He gave my children:

TIME to explore interests, to read, to draw, to play, to grow, to make decisions

SPACE to live in, without desks, bells and peer pressure

A FAMILY they could enjoy every day, where they could learn about true socialization by caring for each other, particularly those who are younger and weaker

SPIRITUAL GROWTH through the opportunity to learn God's Word every day

Through homeschooling, God gave me daily opportunities to see that it really didn't depend on me because I was not in control; God was. My job was to listen and obey.

My education continues. Mary has grown into a beautiful teenager; I need to trust God to lead her in the right direction for her life. As for Josh, it's tempting to worry about his future because of his disabilities. So I must continue to reflect on the biggest lesson God has taught me through homeschooling: I am not in control of these outcomes. And that's okay.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Barbara Frank is the mother of four homeschooled-from-birth children ages eleven to twenty-one, a freelance writer and editor, and the author of *Life Prep for Homeschooled Teenagers*. To visit her Web site, *The Imperfect Homeschooler*, go to [www.cardamompublishers.com](http://www.cardamompublishers.com).*

*To be accepted and loved unconditionally (love the child no matter what, hate the actions that are not right—and be able to convey that difference to him), to be allowed to explore and create and think and discuss and probe—those are the things that help a child prepare for that big world of grown-up-hood.*

*Babies Don't Keep  
Lisa Guidry*

# 15

## Why You're Homeschooling: The Kids

Marsha Ransom

You've decided to homeschool? Good for you! Homeschooling has been one of the most life-changing decisions we have ever made, and I can't imagine how different our lives would have been had we continued trying to make our kids fit into the public school mold. While we decided to homeschool one spring and I spent quite a bit of time that summer reading about homeschooling, over the years I have encountered more and more homeschoolers who pull their kids out of school and dive in feet-first. And that works, it really works! I didn't have the nerve to do that and I spent the summer agonizing over whether my kids would respond to me as a teacher as well as a mother, and other things that I really didn't need to worry about.

What should you do to get started? Spend time with your kids; get to know them. No, it isn't as important to learn about homeschooling as it is to learn about your kids. And the best way to do that is to spend time together. Do common, ordinary things like cook a meal, balance the checkbook, take a walk, play a game, choose books at the library and read them together, and talk. Be sure you listen to each other the most, and not to the neighbor or another homeschooler. After all, the main reason you want to do this is for your kids; not the neighbor's kids, or the other local homeschooler's kids, or the "average" kid. Is there such a thing as an average kid? If there is, I haven't met him or her yet. Anyway, what's designed for the average kid might not be the best for your kid.

Kids are special; every single one of them: unique, diverse, hard to understand, perverse, and special. Yours, too! A one-size-fits-all curriculum will likely fit nobody. I haven't found a textbook yet that I haven't had to tweak to make it work for us. I never have found a curriculum that I've seriously considered spending good money on.

If you really feel like you need structure, and you purchase a curriculum or a textbook, use it loosely; don't use it as a bible. There are plenty of sample curriculums on the Internet or in homeschool catalogs too. Use the curriculum as a guideline. Get ideas from it. Use it; don't let it use you. Early on in our homeschooling experience, my oldest son was attracted to a used history book at a library sale. The big deal was a set of map overlays, colorful and eye-catching,

in the middle of the book. It didn't take him long after purchasing the book to realize that the text itself was dull, dull, dull, not at all in keeping with the colorful maps. So instead of having him continue reading the dumbed-down textbook, we turned to the table of contents, made a list of the topics, and went to the library on a book-finding mission. The first chapter was about explorers, and we studied explorers for a good long time, by finding biographies and stories about each one. The maps did come in handy in charting the movements of the explorers, whom we enjoyed learning more about than the one or two paragraphs allotted to each one in the textbook. We did move on to the westward movement eventually, but only after my son's delight in reading about the adventures of the explorers waxed cold.

While the interest is there, milk it. When the interest is gone, help them find something else to spark interest. One of the advantages of homeschooling is that you don't have bells interrupting the bliss and you don't have to do every subject every day; you can take a topical approach. Some homeschoolers call it unit studies and make that very structured; but even unit studies can be done in a relaxed fashion. We have done many, many interest-based, what I call "relaxed unit studies." I don't do a lot of pre-planning, but when one of the kids has an interest, we tend to gravitate toward things that are about that topic. It might be a library program, or a special exhibit at a museum within a day-trip's reach. Maybe we get on the computer and order some books on inter-library loan, if our local library runs out of materials on that subject. If it's something very specialized, we might have to make a run to a big bookstore, check the shelves, and special-order something. Or maybe half.com or e-bay will have just what we want.

We have found many models, craft projects, and other hands-on ideas. Building a diorama, painting a picture, and making a poster can all be fun ways to have your child express their impressions of what they have learned. For two full years, our daughter's studies centered on the ocean. We studied the flora and fauna, learned the names of the oceans of the world, and read children's stories about kids who had real-life adventures in the sea. We planned a trip to California around this interest and visited the ocean, collected shells and used them for math manipulatives after identifying them, and used the extras for arts and crafts. We visited Sea World and an ocean research center (thanks to my brother, who knew someone who worked there); later we spent time exploring a tidal pool. We even painted my daughter's room to look like an aquarium and found her a seashell-motif bedspread. We sponged and stamped sea stars and dolphins on the walls, the furniture and the bookshelves.

We began homeschooling because our oldest son, a late walker and early talker, just didn't do well in the school setting. He made fairly average or above-average grades, but his attitude suffered. From being inquisitive and talkative, he grew to become surly and negative. We didn't like the change. At the same time, our next son, who tested in first grade into a gifted program that didn't start 'til third grade, was unchallenged and bored, though he shone as a social star in the public school halls and on the playground. After six years of struggling through the system, which made us feel our kids were round pegs trying to fit into square holes, we began homeschooling. We never looked back.

My oldest son, now twenty-five, followed his passion, all things mechanical, to a career as an automotive technician specializing in electronics. Later, that led to a job teaching automotive technology and he's been happily pursuing that for the past five years. I think he'll be a lifetime student, as many teachers are, but that's okay, I was trying to raise lifelong learners! He's owned his own home since age twenty, served on the village council, and enjoys teaching a career camp in automotives every summer.

My second son had no clue what he wanted to do, but working in the family painting business as a way to earn money started him down the road to his choice. College from the age of fourteen, and a car accident that necessitated working for a major retail chain during a layoff from the family business cemented his realization that being in business for oneself might be a good career path. This year, at twenty-two, he is buying into the family business as a partner, while simultaneously building his own house (with lots of help from his family) and planning his wedding next summer.

Our third son, seventeen and always homeschooled, is a senior this year. He's been taking classes in AutoCAD at a nearby tech center for the past two years as well as taking dual-enrollment classes at the community college. He's also in the Academy program at the tech center this year, which will gain him some credits from yet another community college. His experience on the Robotics Team at the Tech Center helped him determine his career path. He has been accepted into the Mechanical Engineering (Robotics Specialty) program at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. He has already been awarded a Board of Trustees scholarship, and 14 of his college credits have successfully transferred! We are busy applying for more scholarships and preparing for him to move almost 500 miles away this fall.

Our fourteen-year-old daughter is immersed in fine arts: private violin and guitar lessons, playing in two orchestras, and taking art lessons. In between practicing and rehearsals, we fit in writing practice, math, social studies and as much reading as we can. Time will tell us where her muse will lead her.

The most important thing I can tell you is don't lose sight of the reason you are homeschooling: the kids. If you are spending your time agonizing about having the right program, or the right curriculum, or the perfect textbook, you may be losing precious time you could spend learning directly from your children just what they need. Just think how exciting it would be to see the whole world through the eyes of a child again; that's what homeschooling should be all about!

\*\*\*\*\*

*Marsha Ransom, mother of four, has been homeschooling for fifteen years. She and her husband, a painting contractor, have been married for thirty years and live in rural Southwest Michigan. Marsha has been, over the years, a vendor audit clerk, secretary, shoe store manager, background investigator, adult literacy tutor, newspaper correspondent, and*

*freelance writer. Her newest hats include part-time bookkeeper/office manager for her husband and son's new business, part-time office manager for another local business, and working on her degree in business management. Ransom's articles have appeared in, among other places, Home Education Magazine, The Link, and Home Educator's Family Times. She has spoken about homeschooling in California, Michigan, and Texas and been interviewed by radio and television stations across the country. Her first book, The Complete Idiot's Guide to Homeschooling, was published in 2001.*

*When my daughters are twenty-five, nobody will remember their SAT scores, their GPAs, or even what their degrees are in (or if they have them). But they will know their character.*

*A Mom's Sentimental Journey  
Vicki Bentley*

# 16

## For His Glory

Amy Flanegan

The classroom was full of strangers. Twirling my pencil and staring at my calculator, I waited for that fateful instruction, “You may begin.” Along with hundreds of other students, I was taking the SAT—the crucial test that could determine where I would attend college and whether or not I would graduate college “broke.”

I was nervous that day, not because I doubted my test-taking skills, but because it was my first real match-up with the world of the public schoolers. Could I—a fifteen-year-old homeschooled junior in high school—hope to compete with the vast establishment of seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds who had taken advanced placement courses and had the benefits of highly trained teachers?

Our family’s homeschool journey began in Michigan in the mid-eighties, back when homeschooling was illegal in that state except for religious reasons. My mother, Kay, was a special education teacher who had decided to be a stay-at-home mom and my father, Dave, was an engineer. Both were well educated, and both were shocked when they learned that their close friends had decided to homeschool their kindergarten-aged son. At that time, Michigan required that each homeschool be overseen by a certified teacher, so our friends asked my mom to fill that role. After much prayer and soul-searching, my parents agreed.

It took only a few years of observation for my parents to realize that home education was superior to anything they had originally imagined. They liked the interactions they saw between parents and child, and, more importantly, they began to sense God’s call on their own lives. God was asking them to do this for their own children.

I am not equipped with a memory vivid enough to allow me comment on the challenges of those first years. I know that my mother has said that being a certified teacher was not a major benefit in teaching her own children. She felt that being trained in traditional teaching

methods could sometimes be a hindrance to exploring new ideas. And she had to relearn everything anyway, as each of us (eventually) five children presented new challenges and learning styles.

What I do remember, however, are the hours we spent in the evenings curled up next to Daddy, listening to stories. I remember the unit study we did on George Washington Carver and the peanut, especially the visit to a real peanut farm. And I recall the times when we made our lunches into art projects or read through early readers for the first time on our own.

Math and reading were important core subjects in our homeschool from the beginning, but Mom and Dad filled in the rest of the curriculum with rich experiences from a vast spectrum of life.

With the late elementary and middle school years came a subtle shift in my education. Now there were more workbooks and textbooks, some of which I loved and others I dreaded. Math was not a favorite. Though I understood it reasonably well, my joys came much more readily from reading books and writing the corresponding reports.

While my parents believed in covering certain basics with all of us kids, they allowed a lot of freedom for us to pursue our own interests. Spelling quickly became my favorite subject in school. I eagerly competed in our monthly homeschool spelling bees and the annual county spelling bee. In seventh grade I won the county bee and was invited to participate in the Kentucky state spelling bee. Many long hours of practice later, I placed fourth in the state.

Piano and ballet were my loves outside of traditional academics. These activities, along with church and community events, supplied some of the socialization aspect of home education that frightens so many. Additionally, our home was often full of friends. My sister and I would have a tea party with our girl friends and their dolls, or maybe another homeschool family would come over to participate in a unit study with us. Life was full of interactions, the most important of which were the interactions between Mom and Dad and us kids.

The time I had at home allowed me to observe, consistently and first-hand, the example of a godly woman (my mom). This experience could never have been matched in a traditional school setting. From doing Bible studies with my mom and sister to learning to cook and change dirty diapers, I value the life lessons I gained far above any academic advances.

One particularly memorable weekend I spent one-on-one with my mom at a state homeschool convention. As it was the summer before my ninth-grade year, I attended several “homeschool through high school” workshops. My mom used those as a springboard for discussing with me what to expect out of the next four years. High school, she told me, had certain requirements I must fulfill in order to graduate. As I would be pursuing a college preparatory track, there would be certain math, science, English, and social studies classes that I would be required to undertake. However, she said, raising my enthusiasm level as she

spoke, there were also a large number of electives available, and she wanted to help me in pursuing things that were interesting and important to me.

I felt like I had been handed a blank check! I could help plan my own education? How wonderful! And indeed that is what my parents had been moving me towards as I grew older: self-motivated, self-taught education. I had the tools I needed from the years of self-discipline and exploratory skills that had preceded high school. Now it was time to put them to the test!

My elective credits were quickly fulfilled as I pursued my loves of music, photography, Bible, and home economics. I also began working at an office job and doing volunteer work in the community, and tangible fruit came from my years of piano lessons as I opened my own studio for homeschool students, gradually building up to twenty-three students in my senior year of high school.

However, those “required classes” began to be a thorn in my flesh. Math, which I had never really liked, was now taking two hours a day. My tenth-grade course in biology was another issue. I was not enjoying it and could not see the point in spending so much time on subjects I “didn’t enjoy and would probably never use,” as I confided to my journal. Why couldn’t I spend all of my time reading, writing short stories and playing music? Investing time in those things that I enjoyed and could foresee myself doing in the future seemed much more reasonable to me.

My journal at the time reveals the moment of truth. “Earlier I was feeling very discouraged about biology . . . I still don’t understand everything, but this sure helped put it in perspective: ‘To give unto them that mourn beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.’” (Isaiah 61:3) This verse told me God could give me joy in doing a burdensome thing, and more, why I should do it! It will bring glory to God!”

Although this revelation didn’t mean that I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of my education that followed, it did represent a change in attitude—and a change in purpose—that has served me well ever since. My education was for the purpose of glorifying God. And if math and biology would somehow allow me to do that, I would cheerfully learn them, even if I couldn’t understand why I needed to learn them otherwise.

As it turns out, God knew why. He knew that I would choose to spend my years of college at a science and engineering school. He knew that I would fall in love with calculus and enjoy chemistry so much that I would choose it as my major. Had I never pursued a broad, basic education in high school, I could have spent the first year of college taking remedial classes. Perhaps I would never have gone to college. I certainly would not have graduated with a chemistry degree. I firmly believe that the foundation I received throughout my homeschool years propelled me through college with relative ease.

Because I had been homeschooled, I knew how to think. My parents had talked about important things with me, had made me think through my views on issues, and I had been asked to write those things down. This made writing papers and giving speeches for college classes easy. Because I had been homeschooled, I was self-disciplined. The college environment, where professors don't hold your hand, was no shock to me. I had already worked through teaching myself advanced mathematics, history and science in high school. I knew how to study and glean information for myself without being dependant on a teacher to spoon-feed me. Because I had been homeschooled, I loved to learn. I pursued classes of as wide a variety as my schedule would allow. I pushed myself to be excellent because I knew that as I did my best unto the Lord, He would be glorified.

I graduated *summa cum laude* from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in May of 2004 with a 4.0 grade point average. Throughout my college career, I received several awards and many scholarships that allowed me to complete my education free of charge. I also took on various leadership roles within a campus ministry, leading Bible studies, discipling another student, and organizing social events. I reaped the benefits of home education in many ways.

And I believe that I continue to reap. My experiences and training during my homeschooling years produced in me a deep desire to be a stay-at-home wife and homeschooling mom. Even though I attended college and sought God's guidance about my career path, I always knew that I would be happy to drop those plans at a moment's notice should God provide me with a husband.

While in college, I met a godly chemical engineering student, Keith Flanegan, who had also homeschooled. After a couple of years of friendship, it became clear that the Lord was leading us to consider marriage. We courted, were engaged, and married in July of 2004. We are now expecting our first child—the first of a second generation of home-educated students.

Can a homeschooled student be successful? I enjoyed remarkable success at the college level, as do many homeschooled students. But what of it? I am not working in a chemistry-related field. In the eyes of many, I am wasting my education.

But not as I see it. Each step in the journey that has brought me to this point is marked by God's sovereign hand. My academic pursuits were worthwhile because in my understanding of history, I see God's plan unfold and have come to understand the present in which we live. Because I studied math and science, I have a far greater appreciation of the unity, complexity, and design inherent in this creation of our God. As I learned to read good books, my viewpoint broadened and my understanding of the nature of God and man has expanded. Not to mention that my college degree will be immensely helpful when it comes time for high school math and science with my own children!

My success will not come from chemistry papers published in peer-reviewed academic journals. But, God willing, it will come as my husband and I train up little minds and hearts to know and serve their Lord and to strive for excellence in all that they do—for His glory.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Amy Flanegan was homeschooled from preschool through twelfth grade along with her four siblings. She graduated from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in 2004 with a degree in chemistry. In July of 2004, she married Keith Flanegan, also a homeschool graduate. They live in Memphis, Tennessee where Keith works as a chemical engineer and Amy does volunteer tutoring. They are expecting their first child in May 2005.*

*Today I meet so many moms who want to homeschool their children right out of the crib – this is very scary to me. Are we so influenced by society’s push for the genius child and the “homeschool hype” that we are trying to create geniuses instead of just enjoying our children and helping them discover their paths on this earth?*

*Babies Can Wait  
Lisa Guidry*

## 17

# About My Homeschooled Graduate...

Bette Bittner

I've just become a grandmother. "Peanut," as he's been dubbed, is due to arrive in this world in May 2005. His father is my first-born son, Keith, my homeschooled graduate. As I begin to tell you about Keith, my worldly temptation is to list his high school GPA, college attended, awards and degrees received. I'm fighting this temptation.

Keith has an infectious, overwhelming excitement and gratitude for life. This is a blessing because he, as is true for most of us, was not handed life on a silver platter. His father and I divorced when he was in first grade. The Lord also gave him a strong personality that took me many years to figure out how to mold gently rather than attack with a jack hammer, and it took years for all of us together to find the most effective educational path for this very special child. (Now you're thinkin' he's not too sharp—but nothing could be farther from the truth.) What I slowly learned is that education is not just about academics; it is about much more. I learned that it is about respect, manners, attitude, our place in this world and eternity, *and* about textbooks.

Keith's kindergarten teacher threatened to flunk him. This was the ending to a pre-Christmas conference discussing Keith's unruly behavior. "He knows all the work, probably before he even sits down to do it; he's disruptive, doesn't have a sense of appropriate behavior, and seems almost bored. If his behavior doesn't improve immediately, he will have to repeat kindergarten."

This conference was the first of *many* with teachers over the next four years. Most of the conferences were not to share good news. The problem was always the same... He knows the work backward and forward, but he's disruptive, he's bored, he's not sure how to behave. Sadly, very few teachers we interacted with understood the need to help us teach Keith to be less impulsive, think before he spoke, think before he touched, and at the same time to push him academically. Instead they all seemed to want to stifle him—brilliance, creativity, impulsiveness, childishness—stifle it all. Not one of the conferences ever seemed to make a difference.

The ultimate low point was when Keith told me his teacher hated him. I said, “For goodness sakes, of *course* she doesn’t hate you—she likes you.” Keith’s classmate looked and me and said, “Yes, she does hate Keith. Everyone in our class knows it.”

We started homeschooling Keith when he was entering fifth grade. (Yes, finally!) We had “done” public school, we had “done” parochial school. It was obvious that these organized institutions weren’t what Keith needed. Homeschooling was an answer from the Lord for what Keith needed—and an answer that we all loved.

The first book I read about homeschooling was *The Christian Homeschool* by Greg Harris, and it heavily influenced our implementation of schooling in our home. One of Harris’ main points is what a joy it is to be with your child, to teach him, to help him focus on his strengths and loves along with “necessary subjects” like handwriting. I wanted school to be joyous and I wanted Keith to fully explore subjects that were of interest to him. Explore we did.

We made puppets and put on Christian puppet shows with another homeschooling family. Keith wrote piano music and entered contests with his music. He attended seminars on trees and landscaping, and then planted a windbreak around our home. He took art lessons from an artistic homeschool mom. He “jammed” with other homeschoolers who loved music. He played Little League baseball for eleven years. And yes, he studied!

I never wanted to have a little replica of a public school in my home. Neither public nor parochial school had worked for Keith and the more I learned, the less I wanted to emulate them. I wanted him to be well-educated, but I wanted his education to be very different from the average American product. I wanted his education to help him shine as a Christian, as a son, as an American, *and* develop his mind academically. We sought a balance of much family time, much time for personal development, and an excellent curriculum.

Carole Seid, a literature-lovin’ homeschool mom and national speaker (and a monumental inspiration to me) says “All you need to do a good job educating your child is a Bible, a math curriculum, and a library card.” Now it’s true that if you looked at my shelves you’d see a few more books than that... Nevertheless I am an advocate of a simple curriculum for grade school with extremely strong basics (math and reading—high-quality literature) with a long-term, consistent application of the two, and the Bible.

The changes in Keith’s behavior didn’t happen as soon as he stepped into our homeschool—it was slow but steady. It was with Keith in our home, with us *much* more than he’d ever been with us before, that we were able to really make those changes. We also, after much study and reading, were able to better understand which were character issues, which were personality issues, what was sin versus bad habit, etc. We worked on personality issues that Keith absolutely needed to understand were a problem: Impulsiveness of tongue and body were probably his two greatest hurdles. We worked at encouraging his inquisitive spirit while curbing his argumentative spirit. (Keith had a *great* need to get in the last word.)

Change did happen. He began to understand how to have restraint, and some forethought. He even learned to bite his tongue and not meet every one of our decisions with, “*But...*” Over the years our lives together got more and more joyful. (*No*, if you’re wondering, he is still far from perfect!) We did reach the point, though, that other parents were hoping their children and Keith would be friends; parents were expressing gratitude that our children were friends. We even reached the point where several parents hoped one of their daughters would become Keith’s wife! It was such a long distance from those early grade school years.... and the dull dread when asking very timidly of Keith’s teacher, “How’s it going?” These homeschooling years also cemented Keith’s relationship with the Lord. Keith has accepted his reserved spot in Heaven and he plans to love every eternal moment of it!

Despite how wonderful it was, we stopped homeschooling for two years in eighth-grade and Keith attended a little Christian school we’d helped start in our church. He was essentially an only child and was craving more fellowship. (I had remarried when he was in grade school, so the little brothers that eventually came along were much younger.) After two years, though, we all missed the independence and flexibility of homeschooling—everything about homeschooling. Back home Keith came.

When he graduated, he had essentially spent half his time in public or private schools and half in homeschool. I make this important point about homeschooling Keith for only half of his primary/secondary education because I know there are people out there who think it’s too late, “We’ve already started something else.” Homeschooling was the best change we made for Keith. (So good we made it twice!)

In high school, as in the earlier years, I also am an advocate of simplicity. (I didn’t say mediocrity or a light load!) We tried hard not to make it more complicated than it was. We plotted out a course of what we wanted to accomplish and what we thought we should accomplish. Because Keith was college-bound, some of our guidelines were the entrance requirements set by universities he was interested in. Another requirement set by us was that he take enough business math, on top of “college math,” that he would be very clear on how to keep accounts, balance a check book, file taxes, etc.

We kept track of courses (including the textbook used and a course description) in a simple spiral notebook. I gave credit where credit was due. Keith took piano lessons and group music and wrote music, so he received several music credits; he biked, exercised, played organized baseball and soccer, so he received several physical education credits, and so on. Because he had such an eclectic mix of interests and activities, as well as demanding academic goals he wanted to meet, Keith graduated with far more credits than is typical. I believed that giving him all the credits due him, even if he didn’t need the additional credits in order to graduate, demonstrated on his transcript that he was well-rounded and very interested/involved in the world around him.

We took all this information, made a “pretty,” detailed transcript, and Keith applied to several schools. He was accepted at all of them; he chose one, and off to college he bounded.

In many ways, it was a difficult, difficult journey. The years of teaching, planning, acquiring resources, pooling resources with other homeschoolers for classes like speech and science labs, defending our decision to homeschool... these were challenging hurdles. It was worth it.

“Peanut” will be born around Keith’s twenty-fourth birthday. Keith’s wife, Amy, is a lovely, homeschooled, Christian woman that we have been thrilled to welcome into our family. And yes, Keith had a good GPA, did well in college, won awards, earned degrees, and made us proud. Very proud.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Bette Bittner has been a homeschooling mother for thirteen years. She and her husband reside in rural Texas, along with their four youngest sons and a menagerie of pets. For twenty years Bette’s been teaching in various ways in addition to homeschooling, including high school science, math, and speech; and currently community GED classes. Bette, who has a B.S. in Technical Communications, was a computer software technical writer prior to homeschooling her children.*

*In looking back over the past twenty years, I see that the advantages homeschooling gave my children had nothing to do with me picking the right curriculum or arranging the right schedule and study environment.*

*Educating Mom  
Barbara Frank*

# 18

## See, I Told Me So!

Tammy Cardwell

### **There Will Come a Day**

“Will I ever stop worrying?” the anxious homeschool mom asked after my workshop. It was with regret that I explained that I never had, so she probably wouldn’t either. Not surprisingly, her face fell; she’d surely been hoping for reassurance that some magical day would come when she would suddenly know for a fact that everything really would turn out all right where her kids were concerned. “But,” I declared, “one day, after my sons graduate and prove that everything came out all right, I’m going to write a book entitled *See, I Told Me So!*” We both laughed, but I determined right then and there that I *would* write such a book, because I knew that we weren’t even remotely the only worried homeschoolers in the world.

This, nearly ten years later, is that book, and though I could have written it by myself, I ended up calling on others to help me write it, because it occurred to me that it would be a much more powerful vehicle if I could bring together a variety of veteran homeschooling parents and their graduates, from myriad backgrounds, who had homeschooled in dramatically different ways. As you read this potpourri of offerings you have likely met homeschool families that look a lot like yours, a little like yours and nothing even remotely like yours. We hope you have realized that almost any obstacle can be overcome or can be turned into a stepping-stone that takes you to higher ground. You have also found that we are all saying the same thing. “See, I *told* me so! I told me to stop worrying, that everything would work out all right!”

And, as I predicted, for us it has. I now have two grown, responsible sons and the oldest, with his wonderful wife, recently gave me my first grandson. Contrary to my fears, this same son not only entered our local junior college without any trouble, but also tested out of English Composition 1 with a perfect score on his essay (something that hardly ever happens) and was courted by the Honors department. My youngest has plans to enter the Art Institute of Houston and is currently working a full-time job as well as designing Web sites and

graphics on the side. Both are highly respected and much sought after in areas of ministry at our church. Both are proof that homeschooling worked and I need never have worried.

So, in a nutshell, our life as homeschoolers was a breeze, right? Not even! Life itself has been far from a breeze.

## Compartmentalized Life?

One fallacy of homeschooling is that it is a thing you *do*. Perhaps, for some, this is the case, but from the essays you've read in these pages you've seen that what held true for our family holds true for most, if not all, of the successful homeschool families represented here. Homeschooling is a lifestyle.

Just as I don't believe it is natural to compartmentalize education into blocks labeled "English," "Math," etc., I do not believe it is natural to compartmentalize life into "Homeschooling" and "Not-Homeschooling." The danger with compartmentalization in such instances is that one ends up believing that this part of life—education—can only take place in its own compartment. Schools illustrate this quite well; all-too-many students (and school professionals) seem to feel that learning only takes place within school walls. Yet people disprove this myth every day as they learn the new skills required to follow their passions and purposes.

The same holds true in homeschool. Learning, if we're doing things right, doesn't start when we pull out the schoolbooks and stop when we put them away. Let a child of any age follow his nature and, assuming that inquisitive nature has not been restrained by negative training, he will be learning constantly. You would have to work hard to stop him from exploring his world and discovering (learning) new things.

## My One Regret

I know this from personal experience. I let my own anxieties over Thomas' future drive me to compartmentalize math, to push him to approach the subject in a way that didn't work for him. It was my own fear-inspired actions—forcing him to use a curriculum I never should have chosen instead of letting him experience math his way, and then continuing to use similar programs in a vain attempt to make him fit into my box—that caused him to develop math phobia.

Yes, this young man who tested out of English Composition 1 with a perfect essay score, who is obviously highly intelligent, who is a gifted and primarily self-taught musician (who refuses to believe that music is math), graduated convinced that he was "math stupid." I take all the blame for this. In most other things I did just fine. I let him follow his passions and while on this path he found everything he needed; he learned how to learn and continually gained greater confidence in his own abilities. In math, I insisted on following my own fears and did the "respectable" thing, forcing him to try to fit into the commonly accepted mold. We failed abysmally. Had I only permitted him to explore math as he did everything else, in a

mostly unschooled manner, we would have been fine. Yes, he still may have graduated without certain math knowledge, but he would have retained confidence in his ability to learn math when he needed it instead of developing a mental block so strong that it would take a miracle to get through it. I blew it, and this is my one regret.

## Homeschooling through Hard Times

I said earlier that life, and therefore our homeschool life, was far from perfect. I did not exaggerate. In fact, I recently decided to offer a conference workshop entitled *Homeschooling through Hard Times*. It was a last-minute idea and I'm not sure what prompted me to think along these lines, but when I started writing the workshop description, thinking about all we had been through in our homeschooling years, I was honestly shocked. In writing that description, I learned something: I learned that God is faithful to help us leave the past behind, that even though the hard times seem to go on forever and ever when we're in the midst of them, they do eventually come to an end, and that we can see a time when we will have to be reminded that we ever even walked through them.

### Homeschooling through Hard Times

They say that anyone can homeschool, but is it true? Is homeschooling possible while running a business, with Mom going through a nervous breakdown, in years when your gross income is well below poverty level, with an extra family living in your home, when your son is gravely injured, when Dad hits that dreaded time known as mid-life crisis, with both parents working, while watching a close family member die a slow and miserable death? Yes, it is, because the Cardwell household survived this and more. Hard times hit everyone and homeschooling can survive it all if you are willing to do what it takes—and some of what it takes may surprise you. Come to this workshop for encouragement and the chance to discuss your own concerns with someone who has “been there and done that.”

I had forgotten much of this; I honestly had! When you read this list, which, I might add, is incomplete (I only just remembered our bout with Child Protective Services, for instance), you may think that our homeschooling life was one challenge (some might say disaster) after another, but for all that everything I mention here did happen, my memories of those years are mostly good.

Homeschoolers hear many excuses from non-homeschoolers—reasons why they believe they couldn't possibly homeschool their own children. Homeschoolers, or “wannabe” homeschoolers, also question themselves. “But could we continue homeschooling if...?” Through the various essays in this book, you have seen that the answer is almost definitely a resounding, “Yes, you could!” In fact, one thing that held true in our lives is that it was easier to go through these hard times *because* we homeschooled. Not only were we not living by

someone else's calendar and answerable to someone else's authority, but we were free from the other worries institutionalized education brings—things like daily schedules, excessive homework, needing “just the right” clothing...keeping up with the Joneses.

As a side note, Thomas once thanked me for raising him in such a way that he had no overwhelming emotional need to have the expensive belongings so many of his friends thought were necessary for a happy life. He felt that some of these young people had been done a disservice by their parents, because they grew up believing that they had a right to anything and everything. He saw that as they entered the work force and started trying to move out on their own they were having trouble adjusting to reality, and he was grateful that he'd avoided the same.

But how did we make it through the hard times? To be honest, in those early years it was sometimes by the skin of our teeth, because we hadn't yet learned certain things. In more recent years, however, those hard times were nothing more than challenges to be faced and overcome or, as I expressed it earlier, something we could use as stepping stones in our travels up to higher ground, to higher levels of faith. There's one good thing I can say about having faced life's challenges as we have: Our children are prepared for whatever the future may bring, because they've already lived through—lived victoriously through—many challenges already. Being homeschooled meant they weren't sheltered from the real world like some children are when they spend little time in their own homes.

The things we learned that helped us come through those later hard times victoriously, rather than merely surviving them as we had the earlier years, are really very basic. In fact, I can't help but wonder if someone, somewhere, tried to share them with me in my early days and I missed it—or didn't realize that they had anything to do with homeschooling.

This brings me to another digression. I intentionally invited both Christians and non-Christians to submit to this book, because I believe anyone can homeschool successfully and that our potential readers needed to witness as much diversity as possible; what you hold in your hands really is the result of an open invitation that flew through the Internet. I am a Christian, however, and I find it odd that some Christians will say (and I've heard it many times), “We're Christians, but I don't really want that to be reflected in our homeschooling.” What? This leads me right back to my earlier statement, that I don't put much faith in the power of compartmentalization. In my opinion, Christians who serve God wholeheartedly can't completely separate their Christianity from their daily life or homeschooling any more than they can completely separate the broccoli from the cheese in a broccoli and rice casserole. (Yum...just happened to remember one of my favorite dishes.)

In a recent discussion on one of my email lists, some people were frustrated by conference workshops that they felt didn't have anything to do with homeschooling, workshops they contended should have been offered in religious conferences instead. I had no time to take part in the discussion myself, but I definitely read, and I was astounded by what I saw some Christians saying. I was astounded because I know from our personal lives that the very

things many of those workshops taught are some of the foundational principles that made the difference in our ability to homeschool successfully through everything we experienced; if we'd not learned them, the end result might well have been something totally different.

So what were those things?

I'm laughing here. This is not at all the direction I expected my chapter to take, but in telling our success story I must share the things that made the difference between success and failure, and many of those things fall into this category.

First, we finally learned that God's priorities really are different from man's, and that if we wanted His hand to be in our lives completely—and we did—we had to line up with His priorities instead of expecting Him to line up with ours. If I am to walk in a way that is pleasing to God, then my priorities must be *God, my spouse, my children, my church, and my job/business/homeschooling*. Most of us have a problem with putting God first anyway, but here in the United States we have an especially strong tendency to move the last priority, the job (or homeschooling), into first place. This is asking for trouble, and I've seen it break up many a family.

When I lost my mind, which is what having a nervous breakdown feels like, it was a direct result of letting my priorities get out of order. There were many things that contributed to the problem (ie. improper diet), but my downhill slide started when God told me to do something and I refused. Only when I actively returned my focus to God and repented, backtracking to undo the wrong I'd done, did things improve. And believe it or not, we did continue homeschooling through that time, though there were those who couldn't understand how. I'm not sure I understand how myself, except that God does have mercy.

Likewise, when my husband went through a mid-life crisis, it was keeping my focus on God and spending huge amounts of time in His presence that brought us all through. I could have quit at any point, but I was determined not to. I also had God's promise, made directly to me during one of those times of intense prayer and fellowship, that if I would just stay in the boat He would make sure we all made it safely to the other side. I'm ashamed to admit that I was consistently closer to God at that point than at any other time in my life, before or since. Desperation drove me to my knees, figuratively speaking, and kept me there, and in that place I grew more spiritually than I have ever grown in any other single span of time. I would never choose to relive it, but I learned a tremendous amount from it—the primary thing being that staying focused on Him is the key to success in everything. We are not only still here today, but our marriage and family are stronger now than ever. In fact, where some homeschooling couples face an empty nest with fear and trembling, we face it with anticipation, ready for whatever God has in store for us next.

Money was another issue, or could have been, but we learned there as well. When we got married, my husband and I determined that tithing and giving offerings was a given. There was a time in our early years of marriage when we decided we couldn't afford to tithe and stopped; what we learned, the hard way, was that we couldn't afford *not* to tithe and give

offerings, because once we stopped tithing and giving we started losing blessings we'd been taking for granted. Only when we went back to tithing and giving did those blessings return. Because we were continually doing this one thing (refusing to rob God of tithes and offerings—Malachi 3:8-11), God always made a way for us, even in those really bad years when the industry that had always supported us so well suffered major setbacks, leaving us living below the poverty level and my husband seeking a career change.

Not that I'm saying we've been rich, mind you. In the workshop description, you read "...in years when your gross income is well below poverty level..." and I do mean years—years on end. Is it possible to homeschool when your gross income isn't just below poverty level, but thousands and thousands of dollars below poverty level? Yes, because we've done it, and done it more than once...or twice. Our children have never lacked for anything they genuinely needed where school was concerned—or where any other aspect of life was concerned. We didn't always have the fun extras, of course, but we never lacked the necessities and we usually did have enough extras to make for a well-rounded life and education. Had you put onto paper everything that came in and everything that went out, the numbers would never have added up, because more always went out than came in. God is good at that—multiplying what's left in your hand after you give Him His part. So yes, it is possible to homeschool during times like this, *if* you do it God's way. I do believe it's possible to homeschool in such times without God's help, of course, but it will be a much greater challenge and you'd best have a good library nearby.

Another of life's challenges, for us, was seventeen months during which a family lived with us. This was the time that ended up convincing me that the unschoolers really did know what they were talking about when they said that if you gave a child the right environment and freedom to explore his world, he *would* learn. We tried to continue homeschooling for a while when this family first moved in, but eventually decided it just wasn't possible. As a result, we went something over a year without any formal education at all. Once the other family had moved out and we'd had time to properly reclaim our home, I ordered a placement test for my oldest to see just how much ground we'd lost during the long wait. As I wrote in an article once, the test results left my mind boggled. Not only had we *not* lost ground, we'd gained ground. Somehow, in spite of what I'd always been led to believe by traditional education philosophy, learning had taken place regardless of the lack of formal teaching. While learning a lot of valuable lessons in interpersonal relationships (Anyone who's ever hosted another family for an extended time knows what that means!), learning a lot about politics and assorted other topics while listening in on conversations and debates between the two men in the house, learning about... (fill in the blank), learning was naturally taking place in academic areas as well. The only subject in which no huge progress had taken place was math. Unfortunately, rather than rejoice fully in the great progress made in all other areas and really checking into the unschoolers' philosophy, which a year in our house had proven was firmly rooted in reality, I latched onto the math score and allowed fear to

take me down the path I mentioned earlier—one that led to a son who developed honest-to-goodness math phobia.

We moms are learning constantly too, I'm glad to say. At least I didn't fail in that area with my younger son.

We went through many more hard times through the years. We watched my stepfather die a slow and miserable death from asbestosis. We dealt with Child Protective Services and the terror they can inspire. (The accusations made against us were proven wrong, of course, and getting that letter of dismissal in the mail was a time of great relief.) Thomas was shot in the eye with a paintball gun and faced too long a period of not knowing what would happen to that eye. The endless days of watching him around the clock, experiencing sleep deprivation in the literal sense, left no room for any thoughts about homeschooling; fortunately, by then I had already managed to slip into the unschool mode where he was concerned. Even though I worried, pretty much continually doubting myself, I stuck by my decision to let him learn in the way that was so obviously right for him. I trusted (or tried to trust) that though he was completely restricted from reading or any other close eye work for a very long time he would still continue learning as naturally as he had been all along.

I will never forget the evening my husband and I were watching a documentary on volcanoes. Thomas was passing through the room behind us as one erupted, spewing smoke and ash into the air. He paused, muttered, "Cool! Pyroclastic cloud!" and walked on to his room, unknowingly leaving his parents sitting there in stupefied shock. And when had he learned this? Who knows?

Something similar had happened with Terry, earlier in our homeschooling days. From the time he was six until he was a little over seven I tried to force-feed him phonics, banging our mutual heads up against a brick wall while I wondered why this child wasn't learning to read as early as his brother did. One loving friend finally made me understand the concept of developmental readiness and I did us both the favor of putting all of the phonics books away, promising myself that I wouldn't pull them back out again until we'd both had the opportunity to recover and he showed signs of being developmentally ready to read. I never got the chance to pull them back out. Shortly after his eighth birthday, about six to nine months after we set the phonics books aside, we were sitting in an IMAX theater, waiting for everyone to leave after the movie ended, when I suddenly realized the little "non-reader" beside me was reading the credits aloud to himself. *The credits!* I was frozen, desperately wishing I could get my husband's attention, but not daring to do anything that would spoil the moment. Somehow, at some point, in spite of all the wrong things I'd done in trying to force him to read, when I'd finally decided to relax and wait, it had happened without me doing anything at all. I still cry sometimes, thinking about it.

One of the reasons I was finally able to let go and let Thomas unschool (Terry did more formal studies for part of high school, because that was the right thing for him), was that *finally*, years after I should have done it, I thought through what education really is. In

educationese, that means I developed my Philosophy of Education. Developing a Philosophy of Education is, in my opinion, one of the most important things any homeschooler can do if they truly desire to have a successful homeschool life...and if they want to avoid spending hundreds of dollars on the wrong curriculum. I'll note here that the very best help I've found where both developing your Philosophy of Education and choosing curriculum are concerned is in Cathy Duffy's *100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum*. This book walks you through all the steps, including working on your Philosophy of Education, that are needed to all but guarantee that the curriculum you purchase is the right one.

I didn't go to any books for help, though, or at least I didn't pay them the attention they deserved. I also didn't pay enough attention to the many excellent homeschool speakers I heard at the conferences I inevitably attended. I merely muddled through from year to year, with an overall idea of what education really was, but no clearly-defined picture, until God asked me a single question.

“A thousand years from now, which will matter, that he knows Me, or that he knows math?”

*That* forced me to think through my purposes in homeschooling my children. Whom was I trying to please? Was I trying to please doubtful family members who needed to be shown that my kids were just as smart and well educated as everyone else's even if they didn't have the supposed benefits of public education? Was I trying to please the other homeschoolers out there, who presumably needed to see my sons graduate with honors so they'd know that this author and homeschool magazine editor wasn't a fake? Was I trying to please my own sons...my self...my husband...? No, once I'd thought it through, I realized that I had begun homeschooling for one reason and one reason only: God had commanded it. I mean that literally. The day Thomas came home from public kindergarten with yet another colorful addition to his vocabulary, one that I considered completely unacceptable though everyone else in his class apparently considered it a normal part of conversation, I asked God what we were going to do and He answered quite clearly. “You're going to homeschool, like I've been telling you to.”

I'm snickering at myself now, because I just realized that in my response to Him I ignored the “like I've been telling you to” part, but He really had been telling me to homeschool and I'd been doing my best not to listen. Jack had decided that we were going to homeschool before Thomas was born and I'd told him he was welcome to do it if he wanted to, but for me it wasn't an option. My closest friend had recently started homeschooling and had been telling me about their homeschool life with great enthusiasm; I had no idea she was another part of God's plan. In her usual way, my new-homeschooler friend leapt straight into scheduling a conference with Gregg Harris. She had “just happened” to ask me to help her in a specific capacity, one that would keep me busy during the conference, and was waiting on my answer. After unsuccessfully arguing with God, using excuses like, “I don't have the patience; I'd kill them!” I finally picked up the phone and called her. “Eva, I can't help you in that position,

because I have to be in the conference, but I'll gladly help you somewhere else. Now tell me about homeschooling."

And that, as they say, is that. Over time, however, I'd somehow let the significance of the reason I'd started homeschooling slip away from me. I'd forgotten that I was homeschooling for one overarching reason—to please God. Once my focus turned back in the right direction, I was able to see education from a whole new angle—the *really* long-term perspective. What would matter in a thousand years? It would matter that my children loved to learn and it would matter that they knew how to learn. Yet there were other things that would matter much more, things like who they were in Christ Jesus, how much of their hearts belonged to God, how confident they were in answering His call... When I started thinking in the really long term, rather than the earthly long term, math shrank back into its proper place. Oh, if only I'd followed this path from the beginning; maybe I'd have avoided all of the pain I let my worries cause us in those earlier years.

## Worry is Destructive

Repeatedly, in the Scriptures, Jesus tells people not to worry. In fact, if I remember correctly, it's something like 366 times. Jesus never said a thing without reason, or without power. He commanded people to stop worrying because where there is fear there can be no faith. To stop worrying is absolutely essential, because worry is destructive. You see what my worries did where Thomas and math were concerned, and that's only one example; you could probably think of many in your own life.

I share this one point and many look at me in desperation. I can almost hear the thoughts, "But I *can't* stop worrying!" That's a lie we've unintentionally bought into. Jesus never told us to do anything that we were unable to do; the very fact that He commanded it means that it is possible. I *did* stop worrying, and it took an act of will on my part. I *chose* to refuse to give worry any place in my life. Unfortunately, I only managed this in the last few years we homeschooled. Oh, if I had accomplished the feat earlier, when my children were young enough that my being free from worry would have opened for us those doors that remained firmly closed.

*You* can stop worrying. Getting this one message across to you is the entire purpose of this book and I hope, I pray, that we have accomplished our goal and you see now at least that the possibility is there. I've shared from my adventure, as have all of the other authors, in the sincere hope that our stories will make your own a little easier to live. My story comes from a distinctly Christian perspective, but I do believe that anyone has within them the ability to shut the worry down completely, to deny it and its destructive nature access to our lives. Having shut that one door, we can then turn to find many others standing wide open.

I trust that one day you will look back on your homeschooling years with satisfaction, grin, and whisper to yourself, "See, I *told* me so!"

\*\*\*\*\*

*Tammy Cardwell has been married nearly twenty-five years and delights in her husband, her children (including her daughter-in-love) and her grandson. She is one who has lived in the trenches and “been there and done that” where homeschooling is concerned. Alongside teaching her own sons, she has also helped homeschoolers in a variety of ways from running local support groups to planning conferences to teaching in homeschool co-ops to editing an Internet-based magazine, to speaking at conferences, to publishing books. She now proudly accepts the title Homeschool Veteran.*

*Tammy actively serves homeschoolers today as one of the editors of the Eclectic Homeschool Online [www.eho.org](http://www.eho.org), as an author (*FrontPorch History*, *God Doesn't Want Volunteers*, *Meditations on the Word*, and many articles), as a publisher (C J Press is her company) and as a speaker. You can catch her at [tammyc@cjpress.net](mailto:tammyc@cjpress.net).*

## Author Information

Many of this book's contributors are business owners, authors, speakers, and heads of ministries. For your convenience, we list their contact information here.

**Lillian Jones**

*It's a Wonderful Life!*

[www.BestHomeschooling.org](http://www.BestHomeschooling.org)

[Lillian@BestHomeschooling.org](mailto:Lillian@BestHomeschooling.org)

**Marilyn Rockett**

*Freedom—Homeschool Style*

[www.thetimeminder.com](http://www.thetimeminder.com)

[marilyn@thetimeminder.com](mailto:marilyn@thetimeminder.com)

**Joy Marie Dunlap**

*Homeschool Worries from a Wheelchair*

27695 Blue Diamond Lane

Romoland, CA 92585

[www.LightHome.net](http://www.LightHome.net)

[joy-marie@LightHome.net](mailto:joy-marie@LightHome.net)

**Lisa Guidry**

*Babies Don't Keep*

[www.projectnoah.org](http://www.projectnoah.org)

**Yvonna Graham, MA Educ.**

*A Tale of Two Sisters*

Mumbling Marmot Tutoring

200 Riverview Drive

Durango, CO 81301

[bygraham@frontier.net](mailto:bygraham@frontier.net)

**Karen Mohs**

*What about College?*

Greek 'n' Stuff

P.O. Box 882

Moline, IL 61266-0882

[www.greeknstuff.com](http://www.greeknstuff.com)

**Rachel Ramey**

*I Hated Homeschool*

[www.homeworksbest.net](http://www.homeworksbest.net)

**Vicki Bentley**

*A Mom's Sentimental Journey*

[www.HomeEducation101.com](http://www.HomeEducation101.com)

**Mary Griffith**

*Confessions of a Famous Homeschool Author*

[www.marygriffith.com](http://www.marygriffith.com)

**Beverly Krueger**

*Why Was I Surprised?*

[www.eho.org](http://www.eho.org)

**Barbara Frank**

*Educating Mom*

Cardamom Publishers

PO Box 81

Algonquin, IL 60102

PH: 847-658-4363

FAX: 847-658-5180

[www.cardamompublishers.com](http://www.cardamompublishers.com)

[cardamompublish@aol.com](mailto:cardamompublish@aol.com)

**Marsha Ransom**

*Why You're Homeschooling: The Kids*

<http://www.marsharansom.com/hs/>

**Tammy Cardwell**

*See, I Told Me So!*

C J Press

PO Box 268

Baytown, TX 77522

[www.cjpress.net](http://www.cjpress.net)

[tammyc@cjpress.net](mailto:tammyc@cjpress.net)

[www.eho.org](http://www.eho.org)

## Invitation to Submit

Our original plan was for *See, I Told Me So!* to include thirty to forty chapters written by homeschoolers who spanned the full spectrum—school-at-home to unschool, Christian to non-Christian, single-parent households to traditional households, homeschoolers who went on to college and homeschoolers who followed entirely different paths.

Unfortunately, time is an issue for most homeschoolers and rather than coming in floods, chapter submissions arrived in trickles. The other contributors and I faced a decision: Did we wait on enough submissions to warrant a print edition or did we step into the ebook world so that our encouragement could be made available to homeschoolers now, when we know it is so very much needed?

We chose the ebook path, of course, and now we offer this invitation. If you are a homeschool graduate, or the parent of a homeschool graduate, who has successfully transitioned into “life at large,” please consider submitting a chapter for possible inclusion in the next edition. Also, if you know someone whose submission would enrich the next version of this book, please encourage them to submit as well.

We would especially like to see more essays about homeschool graduates who have chosen non-traditional paths in life. We’re proud of every homeschooler who finds his or her way into college, but success can be defined in a multitude of ways. We at C J Press have a goal, to share examples of as many of those ways—and as many homeschool “success stories”—as possible in hopes of helping anxious homeschoolers realize that they really can stop worrying.

# C J Press Supports

## *Mission of Joy*



C J Press is committed to world missions and has chosen to do its part in sharing the Gospel with the world by supporting **Mission of Joy**, a non-profit, tax exempt, organization that is also recognized as “tax exempt” by India, the country it serves.

**Mission of Joy** cares for widows, supports orphanages and native missionaries, helps build churches, holds evangelistic crusades and provides thousands of meals for hungry people every week.

For more information about **Mission of Joy**, or about sponsoring a child or native missionary...

web: <http://missionjoy.org>

email: [jeffreyoleary@jeffoleary.com](mailto:jeffreyoleary@jeffoleary.com)

mail: Mission of Joy

PO Box 64914

Tacoma WA 98464

# C J Press News

*See, I Told Me So!*, in this ebook format, is only the first of C J Press' offerings. More great titles are on the way.

It is our hope that this edition of *See, I Told Me So!* will inspire many others to submit chapters for possible inclusion in the next edition, which will be a larger, paperback version. Be watching!

\*\*\*\*\*

*God Doesn't Want Volunteers* is a booklet that challenges complacent Christianity by sharing the necessity of active, God-led involvement in the local church. It is available in ebooklet format at no charge and, because of its import, we grant the purchaser the right to print as many copies of this booklet as they desire.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Ebook Titles All in PDF format

*See, I Told Me So* ebook: \$12.95

*God Doesn't Want Volunteers*, ebooklet: FREE

C J Press  
PO Box 268  
Baytown, TX 77522  
www.cjpress.net  
[orders@cjpress.net](mailto:orders@cjpress.net)

# C J Press Order Form

All ebooks may be ordered and downloaded online, but we will also ship CDs containing the ebooks (as PDF files) on disk.

We accept payment by credit card only if using PayPal®.  
Address for PayPal® is [orders@cjpress.net](mailto:orders@cjpress.net). Include all product, shipping and contact information when ordering through PayPal®.

To order with a check or MO, mail payment and this form to...

C J Press  
PO Box 268  
Baytown, TX 77522

Note: There are no refunds on ebooks.  
We will happily replace corrupt files.

## Ship To

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

<i><b>TITLE</b></i>	<i><b>PRICE</b></i>	<i><b>QTY</b></i>	<i><b>TOTAL</b></i>
See, I Told Me So! (ebook)	\$12.95		
God Doesn't Want Volunteers (ebooklet)	FREE		
Subtotal			
Add 8.25% sales tax for products shipped to Texas			
Shipping (on-disk orders only)			\$1.50
Total Due			