


THE P FAMILY
SAINT LOUIS, MO

IT WAS WORTH IT!

Real Stories to Inspire Your
Homeschool Journey

A photograph of a family of four sitting on a blanket outdoors. A woman in a purple top is reading a book to a young girl in a pink dress. A young boy in a dark blue shirt is pointing at the book. A man in a light blue shirt is sitting behind them, looking on. They are all smiling and engaged in the activity. The background is a lush green forest.

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FOREWORD

Last January, we hosted several homeschool moms from around the country at the Sonlight headquarters in Littleton, Colorado. They came for convention training. Every year, Sonlight selects several homeschool moms to help us greet customers and answer their questions at conventions throughout the summer. We believe real homeschool moms are better able to answer your questions about the best educational choices for your children, as they've actually had real-life experience from which to draw.

One night during a dinner conversation, our founder, Sarita Holzmann, and a couple of the other moms were reminiscing about the challenges of homeschooling. Sentiments such as, "I just wanted to pull my hair out" and, "I was at my wit's end" were bandied about.

Then, in unison, Sarita and another mom announced, *"But it was worth it!"*

That started us thinking about all the things homeschoolers go through – for example, the fear of teaching, dealing with multiple children (especially when they're younger) and the constant concern, "Am I doing the right thing?"

So we began contemplating ways we could help new homeschool moms, and also inspire veterans to remember their mission, maintain long-term vision and stay the course. We wanted to find a way to let you know that you aren't in this alone. To confirm that your role in helping spark and ignite a lifelong love of learning is essential. To encourage you to let your validation be the light that goes on in your children's eyes when they "get it."

To assure you that all your hard work will pay off, down the road.

We reached out to homeschoolers across the land. Some are everyday Sonlight users and some are well-known in the homeschool community. Some names you may recognize and some you may not. Not surprisingly, we kept hearing a recurring theme: *"It was worth it!"*

What ultimately developed from our myriad discussions was the e-book you're about to read.

Our hope is that these inspiring stories encourage you now, and also let you anticipate your own *"It was worth it!"* realization that awaits – that certain sense of fulfilment and accomplishment, as well as joy and happiness, knowing that your children are well-equipped to succeed wherever God calls or life leads.

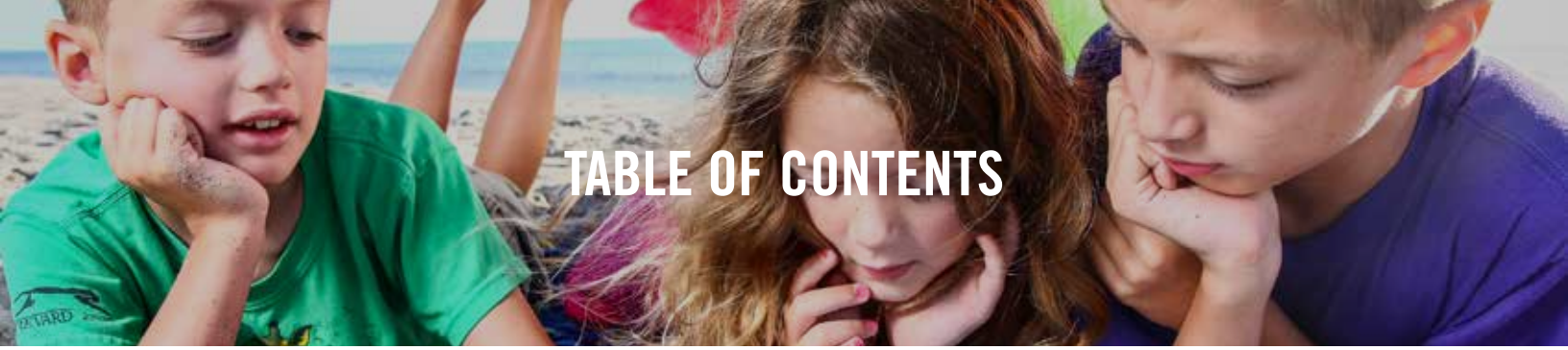


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1 HOW HOMESCHOOLING FREED MY CHILDREN TO BE THEMSELVES

by Sarita Holzmänn

I thought Amy was thriving at her private Christian school. As our oldest child, she earned straight A's and had lots of friends. The teachers all spoke highly of her. My husband, John, and I just assumed we'd keep her in the school.

At the same time, it was clear that we wouldn't be able to send our three younger children to Amy's school. We just didn't have the money. Luke was already in half-day kindergarten there. But the next year, he'd move to full-day first grade and Jonelle would enter kindergarten.

The tuition plus our monthly rent would more than consume our meager missionary-support income. We knew that the struggling local public school was not an option for us. So I surrendered to the idea of homeschooling. If we couldn't send them to private school and didn't want to send them to public school ... I guess I had to teach them at home.

“I thank the Lord that he led us to homeschool in the first place.”

Then I read Ruth Beechick's *The Three R's* and felt inspired. Perhaps homeschooling could be enjoyable after all. So with fear and trembling, I dove in and started teaching Luke and Jonelle, while my youngest, Justin, toddled around. We started to see all of life as an opportunity to learn together. Every day, we'd learn through great books while cuddled together on the couch.

But Amy stayed in private school.

Then one day she came home and saw me doing a simple experiment with Luke and Jonelle to demonstrate centrifugal force. We were rolling a marble around the inside of a slope-sided bowl. We noted how the faster the marble rolled, the higher on the slope it flew. Jonelle and Luke were having a great time, but Amy got angry. Here she was, almost done with fifth grade, and no one had ever told her about this amazing phenomenon. She had certainly never done an experiment to see it in action. What right did her younger siblings have to get ahead of her academically? I still remember

her declaring, “You never gave me that kind of education! I want to be homeschooled.”

Amy was relentless in her request. She even told all her friends and teachers that she was going to be homeschooled the next year. And so when sixth grade rolled around, we brought her home for school.

As we got going, I slowly realized that perhaps her private school hadn’t been so great for her. While the model student at school, Amy had always struggled at home. Her three little siblings would get on her nerves, she would have big mood swings, and she was just frustrated a lot.

To my pure amazement, we watched her transform in those first few months at home. She opened up and settled down. It’s as if an invisible stress had lifted off her little body and she was able to be herself. She became a happy and cooperative member of the family.

John and I eventually realized that perhaps Amy had been using all her energy to hold up her ideal self at school. It took major effort to get perfect grades, please all her teachers, and be the perfect friend to all her classmates. By the time she got home each day, she was wiped out!

But when we brought her home, she was finally able to let down her guard. She had time to recharge when she needed it. She could be herself in front of her siblings and me. Her gifts really started to come out.

Years later, I found out that when the kids would get into fights, Amy would take them all down to the basement and hold a conference. Each child would take turns saying his or her version of what happened while everyone else listened. Then Amy would help the offended parties reconcile, often through doing a simple chore together. Who knew that the formerly hostile Amy would blossom into such a natural peacemaker?

I thank the Lord that he led us to homeschool in the first place, and that he gave Amy the conviction that she wanted to come home as well. We only homeschooled her from sixth through eighth grade, but I wouldn’t trade those years at home with her for anything.

In fact, I wouldn’t trade my time at home with any of my kids. I firmly believe that homeschooling kept both Luke and Justin from being labeled. I fear Luke would

have gotten the message in school that he was unintelligent. In reality, he just had an eye-tracking disorder that it took us far too long to figure out. The mechanics of reading were painstakingly difficult for him. But as I taught him at home, we were able to progress in reading at his own tortoise pace, while we raced ahead in our other subjects. I simply read his Science and History out loud to him, and let him dictate his writing assignments to me. In school, his difficulty with reading would have put him behind in all subjects.

Instead, Luke knew reading was hard, but he never once thought he was unintelligent. By the time he started public high school, he had figured out how to work around his difficulties. He graduated valedictorian and went on to pursue a meaningful career in media and film.

I also think that homeschooling protected my youngest son, Justin, from being labeled. I am sure he would have been diagnosed with ADD if he had been in school. This child could not sit still and focus on his own to save his life. But that's how God made him, and since it wasn't too severe, we were able to figure out what worked for him at home. For example, I would sit down beside him for Math every day. I would point to one problem and say, "Now let's do this one." When he would finish, I would point to the next and say, "Great, now let's do this one." He could do the work; he just needed a lot of help to learn how to stay the course on anything. (And I must confess – if all four children had needed the one-on-one patient guidance that Justin did, I would have torn my hair out!)

But in the end, it worked. Instead of Justin coming to hate learning because he had to sit still in a classroom all day, he got to be at home and work in short but concentrated bursts. Then he could get his energy out in other ways. He is now a successful adult who finds pretty much everything and everyone truly fascinating. He is so different from his siblings, but homeschooling let him discover his unique strengths and thrive.

When I think about it, my four adult children are as different as can be. Each has a different personality type, a different learning style, and a different career trajectory. With all their differences and ten years between the oldest and youngest, I seriously doubt they'd be friends now if it we hadn't homeschooled.

But when we gather each year for family vacation, my kids can't get enough of each other. They stay up talking and laughing until three in the morning just because they

enjoy each other's company. They genuinely like one another.

It's times like that that make me stop and thank the Lord he led us to homeschool. When I consider the immense shared history we built together as a family at home, I am so grateful.

It's true that I felt quite reluctant when I first agreed to homeschool. But my time at home teaching my children blossomed into a beautiful gift with lifelong rewards. I can say without a doubt that it was all worth it.



A pioneer in homeschooling, **SARITA HOLZMANN** started Sonlight Curriculum to help missionaries stay on the field “one more year.” Her literature-based approach to homeschooling has proven to be a favorite for families all over the world. Now celebrating 25 years of Sonlight as a leading curriculum, Sarita looks forward to helping even more families raise lifelong learners in the next generation. She is a featured speaker at homeschool conventions and a regular contributor to homeschool magazines, blogs and radio shows. She is happily married, with four children and eight grandchildren. You can join her on the journey at sonlight.com/blog.

I really miss using your curriculum, but I graduated my only child from high school in 2010 after using Sonlight for 12 years. My National Merit Scholar student graduated cum laude from USC in 2010 with a BS in chemical engineering. He's currently receiving a full fellowship at Notre Dame, pursuing his PhD. But my son's fine education is not the main reason I'm appreciative of Sonlight. More important than academics was the gentle nudge of the Teacher's Guide to share our hearts with our son. As a result, we have a strong, grounded relationship that isn't challenged by a 2,000 mile separation. The young lady in his life once told me how impressed she was with the way he spoke about his parents. It was clear we shared an unusual bond, and she wanted to be a part. Thank you so much for your exceptional curriculum. Maybe one day I'll get to use it with my grandchildren!"

SANDRA AND WILLIAM C.

Sonlight parents



2

HOW THIS SCATTERED MAMA CAME TO LOVE HER HOMESCHOOL

by Sarah Mae

I love homeschooling my kiddos.

But that wasn't always the case. In fact, I felt fearful, nervous, inadequate, and unsure. I read homeschooling blogs and posts from homeschooling moms who seemed to be so good at schedules and crafts and organization. I began to feel like I had no business homeschooling. I'm not organized, I'm not detailed, and I'm not into crafts or strict schedules.

But I know now that those aren't the requirements for homeschooling.

I also know now I'm a Type-B mom. And I'm finally okay with that. But before I embraced who I was, I almost quit.

I sat down on a friend's couch and told her I thought I should just put my kids in school. I wasn't cut out for homeschooling, and I didn't want my kids to miss out. I felt so torn up about it. What to do?

“The main thing I've had to learn? I can homeschool from the personality God gave me.”

On the drive home from her house, I called another homeschooling friend who put her daughter in private school for a year and I explained my thoughts and asked her for advice. She asked me this question, “Why did you decide to homeschool?”

Good question. I hadn't even considered it in such a long time I had forgotten about it. But there it was: Why?

I said to her, “I want to disciple my kids, and teach them according to their bents and strengths. I want to do life with them and help them along, preparing them for the world.”

And there it was. The biggest thing was that I wanted to be with them, discipling them, day in and day out. Yes, I want them to have a strong education, but first and foremost

I want to teach them how to live.

It was that conversation that reminded me of the beauty of homeschooling, and furthermore, made me realize I didn't have to homeschool according to how anyone else did it. I could tailor our homeschooling to my personality and our unique family dynamics. Recognizing this truth was a game-changer for our family.

You see, this has always been an uphill battle for me. I can be lazy, unmotivated and undisciplined. I also fear too much: "What if she hates homeschooling? What if I push her too hard? What if I don't push her enough?" I am a seriously neurotic mother. But I am teachable, and I have heart, lots of heart, and I want to be with my babes as they learn. So I've had to learn a few things, I've had to discipline myself, and I've had to serve hot chocolate to get Ella to smile while she does her work.

And the main thing I've had to learn? That I can homeschool from the personality that God gave me. That I can focus on what works for my family's unique personality. And that changes everything. These days, I am not fearful, and am much better at not comparing myself to other homeschool moms. I am enjoying homeschooling, and I adore watching my kids grow into who God fashioned them to be.

I make no claims to be a wise homeschool veteran. I'm just a determined mama who has made it through the first few years of this homeschool life. But if you'll let me, I'd love to share a bit of how I got to this place.

First, as I said, I had to embrace who God made me to be. Not just accept my personality, embrace it. Sure, we all have our quirks, our shortfalls, and there is that pesky sin-nature, but the core of who you are, all that color stuffed inside your soul from the Master Artist, that's you. And Your personality is God-given and I believe He delights in it, because when you are fully you, He is fully glorified. To deny who you are, or to try and be like someone else, is to deny His handiwork. So maybe you're not into details, or maybe you rock at them, either way, be you in how you homeschool and you will experience great joy in the process.

I also embraced who our family is. Everyone has a different family dynamic. What works for me isn't going to necessarily work for you. Figure out the unique chemistry of your people and go with it. Do you like to sleep in and get school going over late morning pancakes? Great! Do you like to watch the sun rise and hit the ground

running? Great! We are all different, and there isn't a right or wrong way to homeschool. Figure out what works for you, and get on with it.

I also finally accepted that kids learn at different rates. My daughter is an avid reader, but my son, who is eight, has struggled. He is still only reading BOB books. But he is improving slowly, and I get to be with him to encourage him and not make him feel anything other than what he is: smart.

And this is the beauty of homeschooling. You don't have to push them before they're ready. You can watch and observe as they grow and how they learn, and push gently when the time is right. You'll know. You gain confidence the more you do this homeschooling thing. I used to think I had to understand how my children learned before we even began, and it overwhelmed me! I finally let that go and just did my best, and it became evident when something was or was not working. I didn't have to force understanding it, it just presented itself.

As my mentor, Sally Clarkson, shared with me, "If you want your children to be brilliant, read to them tons (and give them good books), have them around adults, and play good music!" I may not be super organized, but I can do that.

And can I just tell you what a relief it is to be free from the comparison game? (Well, mostly free. We're all still growing, right?) Praise God I don't have to look like other homeschool moms. My children can be themselves and grow at their own rate.

I love homeschooling now because it is what God has called me to do for this season. When I question whether the daily ups and downs are worth it, I remember how homeschooling helps me give my kids what I so deeply desire for them: I want to disciple them and teach them according to their bents and strengths. I want to do life with them and prepare them for the world. I want to teach them how to live.

And somehow, God is using me to do just that. These days I look in grateful awe at how God is using this imperfect homeschool life to form my children and me.



SARAH MAE is a writer who encourages women to keep on and begin again. Listed as one of Christian Broadcasting Networks "Six Women Leaders to Follow on Twitter," she is an influential Christian blogger, conference cohost, and coauthor of the bestselling book, *Desperate: Hope for the Mom Who Needs to Breathe*. She makes her home in the beautiful Amish countryside of Pennsylvania, where she often ponders what life would be like if she actually finished all the laundry. You can find her and her books at sarahmae.com.

Now, that work which is of most importance to society is the bringing up and instruction of the children – in the school, certainly, but far more in the home, because it is more than anything else the home influences brought to bear upon the child that determine the character and career of the future man or woman. It is a great thing to be a parent: There is no promotion, no dignity, to compare with it. The parents of but one child may be cherishing what shall prove a blessing to the world.

CHARLOTTE MASON

From Home Education



3 TAKING THE TIME TO ENDURE

by Sally Clarkson

“Cour-a-geous ... men ... fight ... best ...” Lord, how long must I endure this? “when ... they ... have ... no ... ill-u-sions.”

Though I felt like I was about to burst inside, I kept my composure as Nathan continued to read, word by tedious word.

“I ... won’t ... force ... any ... man ... to ... stay.” I tried to straighten my leg to relieve an annoying cramp. I had been balled up on the futon intertwined with my wiggly eight year-old for more than half an hour. My endurance was waning.

“De-clare ... your ... in-ten-tion ... step-ping ... over ... this ... line.” Off in the distance from the far back bedroom, I could hear Joy calling impatiently, “Mom-my! Momm-my! Mommm-my!” But I didn’t want to break Nathan’s intense concentration on his reading. After thirty minutes, he had covered only two-and-a-half pages, a milestone for him, but still. Lord, I can’t do this much longer!

“Lib-er-ty ... or ... death!” We looked at the library for a grade school book about his hero of the Alamo, Colonel William Barrett Travis. But there wasn’t one, and I didn’t want to disappoint him, so we took home a book that was beyond his reading level. Like his Alamo heroes, we fought hard over many words, and each sentence was a victory. I was amazed at his persistence, but I was ready to raise the white flag.

“When you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”

Before I could surrender, though, Nathan looked up at me with an excited smile and said, “Isn’t this the neatest book? I think it might be the best book I’ve ever read. I love reading, Mom! Let’s keep reading this until we’re finished.”

I was momentarily stunned. I couldn’t feel my cramp, I couldn’t hear Joy, and I forgot all my griping. Nathan’s words, “I love reading, Mom!” just kept ringing in my ears. This was the child who always complained about reading lessons, and even reading aloud,

interjecting an impatient, “Can we be done now?” after only a few minutes of easy text. I had endured his resistance, hoping that one day he would discover the joy of reading, yet I had grown weary in the task. Now, in one unexpected moment, I could see the reward of my endurance.

Eighteen years later, recalling that sweet memory with Nathan reminds me of some familiar words from Scripture: “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised” (Hebrews 10:35-36). The embattled Jewish Christians of Hebrews were tempted to give up on doing the “will of God.” They had started out strong, but the Christian life had grown hard and now their faith was waning as they wondered if their choice to follow Christ was really worth it.

Just like those Christians, I was tempted many times during my thirty years of homeschooling to give up. It was too hard. But every time I would remind myself that I was doing the will of God by choosing to homeschool. And if I threw away my confidence then I was throwing away a “great reward.” So I chose to endure.

We tend to think of endurance as “gutting it out to the end,” but the Greek word literally means “to remain under.” It is the picture of someone bearing up under the weight of a heavy load, but endurance is about more than just dead weight. It is an active force that matures us and makes us stronger (James 1:2-4). True biblical endurance is always forward-looking—it is patient, waiting for a desirable end. It can be said that both the weight, and the wait, of endurance makes you stronger.

I knew in my heart God designed me to be at home with my children. No matter how difficult the homeschooling became, my commitment was always to do God’s will, not my own, even though I could have selfishly chosen an easier lifestyle. There was no turning back. No giving up. No white flag of surrender on my battlefield of faith. I would follow Jesus to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” so that I would “not grow weary and lose heart” (12:1-3). I would endure because I believed that God would be waiting at the end of my race to reward me with the “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

We all hope for those big eternal rewards of our faith, to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” But there are also smaller temporal rewards for doing God’s will. They are the rewards along the way that remind us that homeschooling was worth it. That we made the right choice.

Some of the richest rewards for me have been seeing the hearts of my children growing in godliness and Christian character, and then seeing them grow up to become the kinds of people that I can enjoy as friends. I love Sarah’s mind for theology and literature as she studies at Oxford to become a teacher. I love Joel’s gift of music as he composes songs and makes music that glorifies God. I love Joy’s desire to teach and influence young college women as she pursues a Masters in theology and literature at Yale. My children’s beautiful hearts and minds are the rewards of my endurance.

But I want to come back to Nathan. You see, enjoying the rewards for my third child tested my endurance. What I didn’t realize sitting on that futon with him was that in a few short years, Nathan’s reading challenges would become full-blown ADD. It meant I would spend many hours helping him learn, and many more myself learning how to be a patient and persistent mom and teacher. It was hard. And it got much harder when he was also diagnosed as a teen with OCD, a condition he will deal with all his life.

But here’s “the rest of the story.” Nathan went on to study acting in NYC, and then moved to LA. When he could not find roles that he felt did not offend God, he wrote his own script, raised money, and produced his own film, “Confessions of a Prodigal Son,” which was picked up by a major distributor. My out-of-the box, ADD, OCD child grew into a godly young man who made a film that calls prodigals back home to God. That is a rich reward. But it took time.

And that is my encouragement to any mom who makes the choice to homeschool her children: The richest rewards take time. They take faith. They take endurance. But it’s all worth the wait. When life gets hard—and it will—don’t think about giving up. Remind yourself to patiently endure, to press on because you are doing God’s will. God will reward your faith: “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). You can do it. God is with you. It will be worth it.

Some material excerpted and adapted from *Seasons of a Mother's Heart* (copyright 1998 and 2009 by Sally Clarkson, Whole Heart Press and Apologia Press).



SALLY CLARKSON is the mother of four grown wholehearted children. She's a conference speaker, blogger, and author of numerous books for mothers. She and her husband Clay started Whole Heart Ministries in 1994 to help Christian parents raise wholehearted children for Christ. Their homeschooling handbook about WholeHearted Learning, *Educating the WholeHearted Child*, has been in print for more than 20 years. Since 1998, Sally has ministered to thousands of mothers through her Mom Heart Conferences. She blogs at SallyClarkson.com, and helps mothers start Mom Heart groups at MomHeart.com. For more information, visit WholeHeart.org.

Another expectation that homeschooling instilled in me is that most things are learnable and, more specifically, that I can learn them if I set my mind to it. This is incredibly useful, especially where emerging fields like Digital Humanities are concerned. I don't feel like someone needs to show me how to do something, though that's always nice. I'm willing to teach myself. More than that, I want to teach myself – my curiosity was fostered and fanned into flame throughout middle and high school, and no one ever told me that learning should be boring. This mentality opens the world up to me, and people seem to recognize and value it.

ABIGAIL SARGENT

A 2009 homeschool graduate, currently applying for Ph.D. programs



4

HOMESCHOOLING'S HEART SONGS

by Taryn Hayes

I stumbled across homeschooling in a rather haphazard way. In the early days, I was convinced that it was a very bad idea – you know, unsocialized weirdos and all that. And, as a high school teacher, I felt I had the authority to make rash judgments. That is, until I had my eldest daughter and realized that I wasn't so confident about the mainstream educational options that lay just five years in the future. Around the same time, a literature-based homeschooling catalog fell into my lap. I was rapidly persuaded that this was the way I wished I had been taught. Before long, both my husband and I became convinced that homeschooling was a very viable option for, at least, the foundation years. Twelve years later, I have not looked back.

“Years of daily interaction with people of all sizes, ages, creeds and colors have shaped my kids in ways unexpected.”

Don't get me wrong. While I've not looked back, I still look heavenwards often enough. Some days, I am in despair over my own lack of discipline or patience or self-control or insert-virtue-deficiency-here. Other days, I despair at my kids' flaws, wondering if we will ever get through a day without someone disagreeing with another. I've chopped and changed academic approaches and still find myself second-guessing methodology from one child to the next.

Yet I do not regret homeschooling one little bit.

Because, despite the difficulties along the way, homeschooling has given us the freedom and flexibility to work through the difficulties and face our shortcomings head on. It's given us thousands of opportunities to practice grace, forgiveness, selflessness, patience and kindness. Best of all? Homeschooling has given us time. Time to delve into heart matters in the middle of a history lesson. Time to slow down and focus on a difficult concept in math until it is mastered, or devour months of reading in a matter of weeks. Time to explore interests. Time to nurture relationships.

And I see the results almost every day – I see it when hours of self-directed learning result in an array of home-crafted, natural lip balms and cosmetics from my younger

daughter. I see it in the delight on my eldest's face when she receives payment for another published story. I see it when my youngest suddenly realizes that he can read, after the painstaking sounding out of his early readers. I see it when my eight-year-old son lends me his homemade, functioning flashlight in the middle of a power outage. I see it when I have all four kids cuddled around me begging for just another chapter, Mom! from our latest read-aloud.

But what makes my heart sing, more than the delights of their learning, is the beauty of their relationships.

Years of daily interaction with people of all sizes, ages, creeds and colors have shaped my kids in ways unexpected. Growing up in a typical suburban life while attending a co-ed primary and high school, I was accustomed to a culture of ignoring little kids, being respectfully wary of most adults, and feeling wide-eyed admiration for those just a few years older. I missed out on many quality relationships – something I regret deeply. Thus, it warms my heart when, time and again, I hear other moms thank my older girls for including their younger kids in an afternoon's visit. Or when, at the local market, I find my kids engrossed in a conversation with a shopkeeper who expresses his delight in their warmth and interest. Or when I watch my hot-tempered eldest child take a deep breath and reach out in sincere apology to her younger sister. It's when four children, who each occupy their own corner of a personality-type quadrant, work together towards resolution of conflict; or when they serve guests with joy; or dance about the kitchen singing *Annie* songs together while happily doing chores that I abhorred as a child; or pray for one another; or bring their doubts and fears, joys and delights to my ears ... it's in these moments especially that I am grateful for the time that homeschooling has afforded us to nurture relationships of all kinds.

It's time I would not swap for the world. Yes, I could be out working, contributing financially to our home and thus allowing for far fewer "we can't afford it, honey" conversations. Yes, I long for the time to write more books; the luxury of entire mornings alone to write while kids are away at school does appeal, I must admit. Yes, my kids may well miss out on some incredible opportunities mainstream schools afford. And I would be lying if I said that I didn't wonder from time to time what it could be like. But almost immediately thereafter, I find myself in the place where our journey began – that place where I peeked at a future, just five years ahead. This time, the picture holds a just-graduated high school student, with three others close behind. The years left to formally invest in that picture are few. We have to ask, how do we want it

to look? To answer that question, I have to look back.

This season of raising and educating children is so short, yet ours has thus far been filled with the riches of deep relationship, cultivated by hours filled with family, conversations, learning, loving and living, together. Homeschooling has afforded us the hours. Has it been worth it? Should we carry on? I only have to cast my eyes at the four children gathered at our dinner table at night, laughing together at a shared joke from a history lesson earlier that day, to have the answer roar in my ears: yes! Yes, indeed.



TARYN HAYES loves connecting and communicating. She wishes she could understand all languages, but has settled with a delight of English and a smattering of Afrikaans. Taryn and her husband, Craig, raise their four children, Kiera-Lee, Katie, Samuel and Micah in the beautiful city of Cape Town, South Africa. Through Sonlight Curriculum, Taryn discovered the richness of literature-based homeschooling. It led her to write ***Seekers of the Lost Boy***, a historical novel with homeschooled characters just like her own kids. Taryn's love for Jesus, family, community and homeschooling often expresses itself in her writings online at tarynhayes.com and in other publications.

Our best tip to families just starting out at what seems a very long road ahead is to remember Galatians 6:9: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

JENNIFER W
Homeschool mother



5

LOOKING BACK WITH NO REGRETS

Why Homeschooling Was Worth It to Me and My Children

by Lee Binz

I'm so thankful I homeschooled my children! In the midst of homeschooling, there are tears, joys, frustration, and elation. It is only when your children have left the nest that you truly appreciate the value of home education.

Socialization was the first thing that improved when we started homeschooling. Ironically, this was the one concern that had prevented me from starting even earlier. At school, my children had been teased and labeled as socially awkward. As gifted young people, they were not challenged and had trouble fitting in academically, as well. Once we began homeschooling, they were able to develop true friendships that were not based on academics, but on shared values and beliefs. My shy child immediately formed meaningful friendships for the first time. My outgoing child stopped bullying and became charming and warm toward others. Best of all, my children developed a deeper friendship with each other, becoming best friends and confidants within our home. They were playfully competitive, but our home became more pleasant and peaceful after we began homeschooling. The time we spent shaping and molding their behavior paid off almost immediately. Their interpersonal behavior dramatically improved and their self-esteem strengthened.

Homeschooling perfectly prepared our children for their career and college goals. Because homeschooling is so much more efficient and effective, they had more time to spend on developing their own special areas of interest. We homeschooled four days a week, and on the fifth day we concentrated on fitness, fun, and meaningful independent learning. At first, our extra day was spent at the pool or skating with friends. In high school, the extra day was spent at work, developing careers at a young age. One son would dive deep into economics, only coming up occasionally to

“Influence your children now, while they are still at home. Look back with no regrets by giving it your all and doing everything you can to prepare them for success as adults.”

eat ravenously, as teenage boys do. In high school, he became employed at a public policy think tank, researching ideas in economics that were published in articles and books. My other son spent hours studying chess and taught chess one day a week at local schools. Eventually, he gained employment at a local chess company. He began to recognize his long-term career goals in engineering because of his love for chess. He told the college admission department, "I love chess because it's about solving problems and it's hard. What is the hardest major you've got?"

Homeschooling through high school helped us receive college admission and scholarships, so my children could start their adult lives without debt and with great job prospects. At the time, I felt an almost overwhelming burden, wondering how a mere mortal mother could provide meaningful high school classes, but I kept the faith. I carefully chose curriculum intended for homeschoolers that helped my children learn independently. Sonlight Curriculum held my hand through all the schedules, assignments, and challenging subjects such as foreign language, Physics, Chemistry, and Calculus. Because of their rigorous academic preparation and unique interests, each of my children received a full-tuition scholarship to their first-choice university. We can see firsthand how helpful homeschooling can be for families desiring college admission and scholarships. During all our years homeschooling, we were able to provide the tools, time, and examples for how to live a healthy, balanced life. We required hard work and diligence. We modeled the value of a healthy marriage and the importance of fatherhood to our two boys. We spent time shaping and molding their faith and behavior, until we successfully launched them into the world as grown adults.

I would love to say that I homeschooled my children all those years just because I loved them, but that wouldn't be entirely true. I also homeschooled out of selfishness. I know it's not popular to confess selfishness, but that's part of why I kept homeschooling. You see, homeschooling through high school was good for me, too.

Homeschooling is intellectually stimulating, both academically and spiritually. While I'd always been committed to staying at home with my children, it was always done as a sacrifice of myself for the greater good. It was a sacrifice I had willingly made, but once I began homeschooling, I started to love staying home with my children. Home education gave me an outlet for my intellectual and creative needs. It's invigorating to have a meaningful job with long-term importance, both personally and socially. It's interesting to learn along with children, filling in the huge gaps left from my own public education that were deeper than the Mariana Trench. For the first time in my

life, I learned a meaningful and useable amount of history, English, Science, Math, foreign language, and fine arts. Surprisingly, it was enjoyable! The daily struggle of homeschooling stretched me spiritually, as well. Moving in faith, I continually reached out to my Savior for strength, wisdom, patience, and endurance. Being a stay-at-home mother was no longer boring and filled with only short-term successes. It became both challenging and thrilling.

Now an empty-nester looking back, I'm even more thankful that I homeschooled. I can reflect on my child-rearing years knowing that I did everything in my power to raise my children for the Lord. I gave it my all and did my best to raise well-educated, productive members of society. The rest is up to them. There is a truth about raising children that younger parents don't understand. Once your children grow up, you have no control over them, and very little influence. When they are adults, you are one voice among many that can sway their decisions. You only have a few, short years to shape and mold them into quality individuals, well-prepared for life's challenges. Influence your children now, while they are still at home. Look back with no regrets by giving it your all and doing everything you can to prepare them for success as adults.



LEE BINZ, The HomeScholar is a dynamic homeschool speaker and [author](#). Lee's mission is to encourage and equip parents to [homeschool through high school](#). She is an expert on how to craft a winning [homeschool transcript](#) and get the big scholarships. She's helped thousands of homeschool parents muster up the courage to complete their homeschooling journey. Sign up for her free monthly homeschool e-newsletter, The HomeScholar Record, at [TheHomeScholar.com](#) where you can also get a daily dose of high school help. You can find her on Facebook at [Facebook.com/TheHomeScholar](#), and read her blog, [The HomeScholar Helper](#).

Sonlight is the way you wish you'd been taught. I would have loved school in a tree fort or perched on the side of a mountain with a fantastic book. Fortunately, I'm able to give this experience to my children.

Since we discovered Sonlight, our seven-year-old has gone from dreading reading to loving it. The heart and soul in the books have captured his heart and make for great discussions and character development. We love being able to read amazing books we might have passed by in a bookstore. What jewels these books have turned out to be!

We're moved to tears with each story. A perfect example is I Heard Good News Today. The other day my son said to me, 'I think the best job you could have is to be a missionary.'

Raising our children to love God and to love learning about His world are our goals, and Sonlight helps us accomplish this in spades.

DEVON S.
Sonlight parent

THREE R'S FOR HOMESCHOOLING MOMS:

Patience, Humility and Wisdom

by Rebecca Keliher

The weather that day was not particularly memorable. It was April 4, 1999, and it was Easter Sunday. As tradition dictated, our family dressed in matching spring colors and loaded into the car for church. Our family looked ideal. Husband, wife, and three little girls under the age of four. I don't remember the service, but I vividly recall the drive to my father's house to celebrate the holiday.

My husband and I got into a terrible fight. Upon arrival, more ugly words were exchanged, and I took our three-month-old baby and drove home, leaving hubby and two older kids. I was not a Christian. I was a southern gal, and that meant once you had kids, you went to church. I was a hurting woman with a past full of abuse and pain.

That afternoon I sat at home alone and read the Scriptures, desperate for life to change. The Lord drew me, and the blinders on my eyes were lifted. I saw myself as a sinner and called upon the Lord for salvation. I became a child of God.

Fast forward a few months to the day we decided to homeschool. I bought the Phonics and Math books for kindergarten and read through the teacher manual. Simple enough, I got this.

“I was a desperate and broken woman who was rescued by the arms of Jesus!”

By the third day, though, I realized I did not possess the most important teacher requirements. These requirements are not offered as a degree option at higher education institutions, nor are they easily learned through books. Patience, humility, and wisdom are the qualities that were missing from my teacher toolkit.

That was more than fifteen years ago. Today our family is a bit larger, with three girls and two boys. We've celebrated two graduations, while we continue to school our three younger children. But as I reflect back over our journey of homeschooling, I think I am the one who has come away with a “higher” education.

Homeschooling, as an offshoot of parenting, has been the ideal setting in which I've learned a few long-lasting lessons:

Patience

In homeschooling, the definition of patience is not confined to waiting with calmness while my 7-year-old figures out the Math problem. Patience is recognizing the need to put my own desires on the back burner and serve my children. It is not simply a reaction to a specific circumstance or a practiced response. Patience is a way of thinking that guides our choices. It's a daily, and even hourly, required skill.

To my surprise, amazing relationships of love and trust with each child have been the result of patience! Over the years, there were times I failed miserably, but even then, the situation gave opportunity to learn another character trait.

Humility

Early on in homeschooling, I was a new Christian, and I messed up more than I did right. Each morning started with Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. I was learning what it meant to admit wrong without blaming, deflecting, or justifying. These beautiful lessons learned at the feet of Jesus were instrumental in my interactions with our children.

When patience didn't lead the way, humility often followed as I admitted wrong to my children and asked for forgiveness. Years later, I realized I was doing much more than giving an apology. I was training my children how to respond to failure, take responsibility, forgive, and press on. This type of education cannot be purchased in a curriculum.

Wisdom

Training children when they are young requires diligence and repetition. But as they grow into the tween and teen years, it takes on a new form. In these years, training becomes a series of random conversations about the most interesting topics and requires a great deal of wisdom to navigate. Little did I know the years of practicing patience and humility, in all sincerity, would naturally result in wisdom.

Wisdom is not simply knowing right from wrong. Wisdom is walking through the experiences of life with God and responding accordingly. This isn't a characteristic that comes by chance, by age, or by training. It's a deep relationship with Christ that slowly,

over time, changes our core to be more like him.

As I reflect on my life since that Easter Sunday, I am often brought to tears. I was a desperate and broken woman who was rescued by the arms of Jesus! I spent a great deal of time pouring over the Scriptures, journaling, and learning from each situation life brought about. In the process, I received an education of my own.

Spending time with Jesus and learning from him has allowed me to navigate parenting and homeschooling with patience, humility, and wisdom. And that has been the key to both teaching and developing meaningful relationships with my children.



REBECCA KELIHER, founder and CEO of [Home Educating Family Association](#), is a homeschool mom just like you. She put her love of scrapbooking to work and turned a homeschool newsletter into the what has grown into ***Family Magazine***. Also known as the Well Planned Gal, Rebecca used her eye for design and knack for organization to create the original homeschool planner, [Well Planned Day](#).

I meet teaching parents all around the country and find them to be intelligent, enthusiastic, creative people doing a marvelous job of teaching their children. But, sad to say, most of them do not know what a great job they are doing. Everyone thinks it goes smoothly in everyone else's house and theirs is the only place that has problems. I'll let you in on a secret about teaching: There is no place in the world where it rolls along smoothly without problems. Only in articles and books can that happen.

DR. RUTH BEECHICK

From You Can Teach Your Child Successfully
(published by Mott Media)

WHY BE CRAZY ENOUGH TO HOMESCHOOL?

by Ann Voskamp

Questions land in my inbox asking how a Christian family makes educational choices for their family. (Why would anyone really be crazy enough to homeschool?) And I smile and nod ... and tentatively, prayerfully, attempt to meander through some of these queries ... but only with no small trembling, and this very tentative humble preface:

I don't write specifically about homeschooling often, as I'm not an expert and I'm very concerned that the topic can sadly be divisive, and too, we are still deeply in process ... by His grace, still growing, changing.

So to say from the outset, that I do not think in any way that homeschooling makes a family virtuous — and there are a myriad of very good educational choices.

Homeschooling is not a formula for perfection, nor is homeschooling a panacea for all the sin in this world.

“What I love most about the homeschooling lifestyle is that we are all together, in all our glorious mess.”

We're all messy and fallen and sin-scraped. We and our children are born sinners.

Homeschooling will not fix any of that. Only Jesus and His grace can.

It's scary to share that we homeschool.

But it's part of who we are and I am praying for your grace, in just taking us anyways. We are all called differently, but all for the singular purpose of His Glory. I humbly and fully believe that Father Himself leads each family. With that preface, some thoughts ... ~warm smile~

I was a third year university student, taking a concurrent degree in Education and Child Psychology, when I began to consider the possibility of home education for our future family. Sitting in child development classes, studying how a child needs a close attachment with his or her parents, especially before the age of ten, if they are to emotionally thrive through adolescence, I began to question whether it was best to be

separated from young children for the majority of their waking hours.

I came to agree with Dr. Neufeld, who writes in *Hold on to Your Kids* that the problem today is that “parenthood is no longer lasting as long as childhood” – that our children need parents to be intimately involved, moment-by-moment, not till they are only four years old and leave home for school and possible peer dependency, but they need us to be parents until they are fourteen years old and older. “We need to hold on to our children and help them hold on to us. We need to hold on to them until our work is done,” he writes. “We need to hold on, not to hold them back but so that they can venture forth.”

For us, forging a deep attachment to parents was a key factor in our decision, so that children had a strong foundation for their own sense of self, saw parents as more important than peers, and as we modeled the preeminence of God in our lives, our children could see, too, how to live out that faith model.

What I love most about the homeschooling lifestyle is that we are all together, in all our glorious mess, day in and day out. We are not time-torn or fragmented. We are gathered. There is no dichotomy between God and secular: We are making a one-piece life. This works for us.

We are real, transparent, and growing – sometimes painfully – with each other, season upon season, and God is in the center, bathing us sin-scraped ones with His Grace. That’s rich.

And so, in fear and trembling, we plan to homeschool, Lord willing, throughout highschool.... Yet we do that in a supportive, large homeschooling community that offers a myriad of resources that makes it possible to have top-notch online teachers in classes with students all over the globe.

And why would we continue?

Because homeschooling is this magnificent crucible, to reveal impurities and sinfulness and brokenness.

It keeps us on our knees. Homeschooling often hurts and disappoints.

You cry and wonder if you are insane to try to educate these children, to disciple these

little hearts, while laundering, cooking, cleaning, managing a household, and still being a wife, a sister, a daughter, a missionary in your community, a servant to Christ and in your faith community. And He smiles and says that He walks with you, has grand and glorious purposes, and He understands radical and crazy!

Homeschooling is about going higher up and deeper in, for you learn to sacrificially love in ways you have never loved before. You come to know your own heart in ways you never imagined, the souls of your children in intimate, very real ways.

For you will be together, making memories together, laughing together, crying together, praying together, and asking forgiveness together. Throughout your day, you worship God, together. And you learn to die-to-self together. It's about doing hard things ... together. And there will be no fragmentation of learning, home-life, friends, work, God.

We keep homeschooling to weave a one-piece life – hallowed threads of parenting, love, pain, education, growing, stumbling, creativity, forgiveness, wonder, sacrifice, and God all woven together.

We wear it, and it's not perfect and it's messy — but oh, it's a good fit for us!

Grace, Joy, Gratitude.



ANN VOSKAMP is the wife of one good farmer, the home-educating mama to a half-dozen exuberant kids, and author of the *New York Times* Bestseller, *The Greatest Gift*, and *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*, a *New York Times* 60-week bestseller, the royalties of which the Voskamp family has given all away, the joy always in giving the gift back. Named by *Christianity Today* as one of 50 women most shaping culture and the church today, and a partner with Compassion International as a global advocate for needy children. Her blog, one of the Top 10 Christian blogs on the web, has become a daily well for the weary and soul-thirsty: www.aholyexperience.com.

Nine years ago, with much excitement and a little fear, I sat down beside my first-born daughter, Ariella, age 4 and opened my new Sonlight curriculum to begin what would become a most extraordinary journey.

I knew I wanted to be the one to see all the ‘lights’ go on as my precious children grew and learned.

Sonlight has been with us since little hands proudly held their first “I Can Read It” book. Since then, Sonlight has been with us as we grew to a family of seven.

My first twinge of fear was quickly replaced with confidence in knowing that Sonlight would be there for me, making it easy and allowing me to spend countless years of quality time reading and learning with my family.

I had no idea back then that this blessed educational journey would one day lead me to a barn filled with human kids, goat kids and Sonlight books, for a true kid-centered education!

LAURIE L.
Sonlight parent



8

A HOMESCHOOLER AWAY FROM HOME:

A Homeschool Graduate's View

by Laura Lee Ellis

Her question hung in the air between us, her eyes holding a genuine curiosity. “What about college?” she’d asked.

It’s a question I’m bound to hear when I tell people I’m homeschooling my children, right after “What about socialization?” and “Don’t you want a little more time for yourself?”

I smiled, remembering the homeschooling-induced benefits of independent study and critical thinking and the confidence I had in seeking out professors as mentors. I assured my friend that my own K-12 home education had prepared me to thrive in college.

“You were homeschooled?” Her incredulous response betrayed the unsaid, “You seem so normal” comment that many don’t hold back.

I am deeply thankful that my parents invested in my education. I’m grateful to have had an opportunity to socialize beyond my peer group and learn to work with people from a variety of ages and backgrounds. They stood me in good stead in preparing me for college and career.

With my formal education behind me, I have all the medals and pieces of paper that “prove” homeschooling prepared me for higher education.

Graduating summa cum laude on full scholarship with academic medals shows that I was prepared to handle the rigors of academics. After being crowned Homecoming Queen, named “Miss Union University” and given leadership awards, it was apparent socialization was not an issue. But with my degree earned and my dream job landed, what else is there to show that homeschooling “worked”? Are those things why it was worth it?

I just can’t shake the feeling that the real question to ask about education, homeschool

“I want them to build lifelong friendships with each other and use that as a model for offering grace and love to the world.”

or otherwise, is not “What about college?” but “What about life?” How can you prepare someone to live life to the fullest?

The reason homeschooling is worth it to me reaches beyond the types of accomplishments I could put on a resumé. It’s a eulogy rather than a resumé I have in mind as I think about what I want for my own children.

What will I be glad I invested in? How did I pour myself out for the Kingdom? Have I been faithful to those given me? We each have to ask and answer those questions as the Lord leads.

I am compelled to homeschool to capture the fleeting moments I have with my children. To help them understand the rescue mission of Jesus and the beauty of a life wrapped up in him, and what it means for them to live on mission wherever they are.

At the risk of sounding melodramatic, I am homeschooling because it helps me live the life I want to remember on my death bed. Will I want more time to myself then?

Time. It’s the greatest blessing and single greatest challenge in my homeschool journey. It’s the reason I want to homeschool, and on some days, the reason I’m tempted to quit.

On those sleep-deprived, bleary-eyed days when it seems all I do is navigate the landmines of Legos, merely to feed and diaper in never-ending cycles, I’d often pay a pretty penny for an afternoon alone.

But I only have so few years with these children that have been gifted me. My children are more than the sum of tasks it takes to care for them; they are souls, ready to be nurtured. And I’ve learned by walking alongside my own parents that anything worth doing is worth hard work.

The urgency of this opportunity is before me: A choice to say yes or no to this way of serving my family, of delving in deep to these relationships, knowing that I can’t reach perfection, but I can be faithful.

And so I say yes to my children, yes to home, yes to being together “all the time,” yes to serving, yes to messes, yes to light bulb moments, tears over endings in stories, laughter over shared jokes, and knowing my children’s strengths and weaknesses. I

embrace the beauty and messiness of life with this family of mine.

One of our family goals is to create an environment in our home that inspires learning. I want good books and art and music, and hard questions, and glimpses of big ideas and different cultures to permeate our home and beckon our children on a daily basis.

I want them to build lifelong friendships with each other and use that as a model for offering grace and love to the world.

I just can't resist, "Will you read one more chapter, please?" I want to be there for the reading of those first words and for the cuddling, the character training and the conversations. Any involved parent can do these things; homeschooling simply allows us more time to work out our values in our children's lives.

Homeschooling gives us the freedom to provide excellent tools. It allows us to live out the kind of life we want our children to emulate. We get to be the first and primary influence in our children's lives. We get to shape their worldview as they engage society. Best of all, we get to keep learning right along with them!

I'll never forget the night my mom whisked all of us kids out of our beds at 3 a.m. We found ourselves wrapped in blankets in the back of our station wagon on the highest hill near our home just to get a glimpse of Halley's Comet—a once in a lifetime moment. Seeing the comet shoot across the sky was incredible, but the lasting impression wasn't the astronomy lesson. I was in awe that a grown woman could be so excited about experiencing something new, and so willing to do something crazy to capture a learning moment. She made me want to explore boldly, dive into beauty, and find out the "why" behind things.

So I'm indebted to you, Mom, for molding me into a lifelong learner. Your sense of wonder serves as my inspiration to ignite these sparks of curiosity in my own children and carry on the legacy you began. Thanks for saying "yes" to me.



LAURA LEE ELLIS is a writer, speaker, former missionary to Africa, and a second-generation homeschooler. She is passionate about world missions and the potential of motherhood in shaping culture. She has contributed to national magazines and radio and works as a writer for Sonlight Curriculum. She, her husband, Nick, and their three children have lived in six countries and recently returned to the States from the University of Oxford, England. She believes in the power of stories to bring people together and inspire action. You can find her at lifeasroughdraft.blogspot.com.

In looking back, the time we spent with our kids was the single greatest contributor to the success of our homeschool. Within weeks after we returned to the homeschool, the kids became more optimistic and their spirits softened. We read, drew, played, traveled, skied, shopped and did so many other things together that would never have been possible had we not homeschooled. We went to museums, plays, parks and made trips to visit family in Mexico during the school year that would never have been possible had we not homeschooled. Most of all we talked and talked and talked about virtually everything under the sun in a way that was natural and not forced due to lack of time. We do believe in that old adage that, when it comes to children, quality time is quantity time.

KEN CHAPMAN

Homeschool father



9 HOW HOMESCHOOLING SAVED MY FAMILY

by Karen Fernandez

I came to homeschooling late and would say I was pushed, kicking and screaming the entire way. I was a public school educator for 13 years before my daughter arrived. I knew one way and had no interest in learning another. I had fully planned on continuing to teach part time while finding day care for my daughter. But the day she was born I knew I would not teach in the classroom again for a long while and I hung up my chalk.

My daughter was an easy child, a pure delight, and then she got sick. We struggled with her health issues from kindergarten through third grade. We had tears every night as we struggled to make up work missed in class due to extreme absences. We struggled to make up homework on top of class work. We struggled to stay involved in meaningful activities even though we missed much due to illness. We struggled to find joy as a family because the stress had zapped us and left us empty. Plain and simple, we struggled. Life was hard; emotions were close to the surface and always ready to boil over.

“I knew God had led us here and I found comfort in the fact that as resistant as I was, He never gave up.”

One day a friend asked me to read some books she had been reading on homeschooling. Traditional school had never been a fit for her son and she was considering homeschool as an option. She knew I was an avid reader and a former educator. I said sure, but in all honesty I thought she was crazy. Homeschool was just never on my radar and I never had an interest in hearing about it. I knew people who homeschooled but I never engaged them because I had a path and I wasn't getting off it.

But I started to read the books and couldn't stop! I became fascinated by the idea of homeschooling. Also, I felt relief; here was an option for us. I remember shedding tears and offering up a silent prayer of thanks for this friend who pushed these books into my hands. The idea that I could set our schedule for school and skip unnecessary homework and meaningless worksheets, and instead focus on a literature-based education was something that as an educator brought me enormous joy!

Our lives changed, for the better. Our evenings were our own and we played board games (we are fierce Scrabble players). We took walks at the beach and watched TV documentaries at night. We read late into the evenings because we just couldn't put down the book! Our lives stopped being dictated by school bell schedules. We woke later and stayed on subjects longer, as my daughter needed or wanted. We studied what interested her and delved deeper into subjects, because we had the time and the desire.

My daughter blossomed. Her health improved and her immune system finally kicked in! She had less stress because if she was unwell she could rest without worrying about all the work that was accruing. She found interests and hobbies she finally had time to develop. She found out what interested her and became a lifelong motivated learner.

I changed, too. I learned to be more open to new things and think outside the box. I learned to enjoy all the different types of homeschooling going on in my community without judgment. I found a blend of what fit my daughter's learning style and schedule. I stopped worrying so much. I knew God had led us here and I found comfort in the fact that as resistant as I was, He never gave up trying to put our family on the best path. We have been homeschoolers for five wonderful years now and yes, it has been worth it!



KAREN FERNANDEZ is an educator, homeschool mom and author of *ABC Trace* and *Say Alphabet Book*. She has taught young readers for 15 years in California and early literacy is her passion. Her personal mantra is that reading and writing should be easy and fun for children. She uses Sonlight curriculum for her own daughter and loves literature-based learning. Ms. Fernandez holds a Master's Degree in Education and is a Reading Recovery Teacher. She resides in San Diego with her husband, daughter, three rabbits and a dog. For more information please visit her at www.ABCtraceandsay.com.

Being homeschooled helped me to become an independent and self-motivated learner, which are characteristics essential success as a student in college and as a researcher in graduate school and beyond. Throughout middle school and high school, I had the opportunity to explore the Bible at a deeper level, to investigate the conflicts between different world views, to read books about church history, and to be exposed to some of the big topics in apologetics in addition to traditional subjects like math and science. Because I had thought about difficult questions and some of the common challenges to Christianity before, I was able to clearly and confidently explain to classmates and professors why I believe in and follow Jesus when opportunities arose. I have no doubt that the education I received at home played an invaluable role in getting me to where I am today.

MARK PANAGGIO

A 2005 homeschool grad and current professor of mathematics



10

THE SECRETS OF A RELUCTANT HOMESCHOOLING MOMMA

by Heather Sanders

I know it isn't popular to say, but for me, homeschooling has never been anything but challenging – in more ways than one. In the early years, the thought of quitting surfaced regularly, but I didn't because I couldn't.

Why?

Because. God.

Because. Jesus.

Because. My husband Jeff and I made a commitment based on our oldest daughter's need in the Second Grade, and that need never changed – not once.

Not with the second child, nor the third.

The need remained – to develop a love of learning, and, this is tantamount – to keep their education nested in a biblical world perspective.

Not naiveté or sheltered, but grounded in Truth, and fine-tuned for the gifts and talents woven into their very being by their Creator, Lord God, who gives all knowledge.

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

See that narrow path? Good. Let's take it.

As parents, there are defining moments when we swing our leg to step forward into the formerly known and realize we cannot continue in the same direction any longer.

We see there are no agreeable options there in the known.

That's when we pivot.

“I can see now that the overwhelming new conviction to homeschool was an opportunity, a blessing.”

That's when we venture into the unknown.

That's when we fall to our knees and pray for wisdom and discernment, as King Solomon did, "O Lord my God ... I do not know how to go out or come in." (1 Kings 3:7-9)

Initially, I gave in to my fear. It covered me. I felt smothered, terrified really.

How would I manage this new thing?

This unimaginable thing?

Homeschooling.

I wasn't one of "those" people.

I didn't have a degree in Education.

Nor did I have a denim jumper or a pair of white Keds, just, I'm embarrassed to say, a ridiculous, prideful stereotype.

I am extreme in nature. Knowing I had to dive all-in, or I couldn't be in at all, I chose to own this new identity.

Chin up and shoulders back, I tried on a few titles.

"I am a homeschooler."

No, that didn't sound right.

"I am a homeschooling mom."

Ugh. That wasn't right either.

"I am a home educator."

No. Just, no.

I am Heather.

Simply, Heather.

Better yet, I am His, and He is mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

Still, my identity took a beating even before I began combing the bookstores and Internet for “How to Homeschool a Second Grader.”

Here’s the thing: I can see now that the overwhelming new conviction to homeschool was an opportunity, a blessing.

Most opportunities, if you look closely, are blessings, aren’t they?

Yes, that means you sometimes have to look really close.

And maybe get a microscope ...

But the blessings are there – they are always, always there.

Homeschooling became God’s tool for my refinement.

While my kids learned reading, writing and arithmetic, their momma took lessons in patience, forgiveness and grace.

The last lesson? Grace? It took years. I’m still working on it.

There are some mommas, my friends included, who do this homeschooling thing with grace – lots and lots of grace.

There are others who, if not abundant in grace, are at least masterminds of creativity, pulling together, and creating their own curriculum, for example.

And there are still others who exude these attributes and more while remaining humble and relaxed as a summer day. They always seem at ease, don’t require a plan, and raise children who feed on learning much the way I feed on Mexican food.

Don’t mind me. I’m just over here with my tortilla chips and queso.

As a homeschooling momma – as Heather – I fall into the “honorable mention” category.

You know, like those kindergarteners who love soccer, but haven't grasped the game yet, so they unknowingly kick the ball into the wrong goal?

Their parents whoop and holler simply because their child dribbled the ball down the field and kicked it in a goal – any goal.

YES!

That's me.

Each time we round out a school year, I've kicked that ball into the goal.

Is it the right goal? Time will tell.

But I've built up a tremendous support network over the last decade, and they stir up quite the ruckus of enthusiastic encouragement from the stands.

“Go! Go! Go!”

“You can do it! Look, that one is graduating. SCORE!”

I'm not going to win any trophy, but know this: I will wear my yellow participation ribbon with pride because I know what it took to get me here – to get me to this place.

How did I do it? And how do I keep on doing it?

So, what was the motivation to continue homeschooling when the day's laughter turned to the night's tears and understanding crumbled into confusion?

Because friends, that happens – please know that it does happen.

One moment you'll soar, taking in the beauty of a successful day of Phonics and later, heaven help us all, Algebra.

The next moment, you'll glance back to check on your babies (they will forever be your “babies” after all), and BAM!

You fly straight into a post, a wall, or a mountain for crying out loud.

Lying flat on your proverbial back, you'll think, "I simply CANNOT do this anymore."

That's when you stop and pray.

First, always pray first.

Then, grab your phone, excuse yourself to the bathroom, lock the door, and call that person who gets it – whoever that person is. Maybe it's your husband, momma, friend, whoever ... and tell them about it.

Tell them everything.

Talk until your tears run dry, you've rubbed your nose raw, and the kids have shoved countless fingers and notes under the door.

I did that.

I still do that.

On the phone, my husband reminded me that he loved me, and he was proud of our decision to homeschool.

On the phone, my homeschooling friend reminded me that she loved me, and she understood what I was going through at that very moment.

On the phone, my momma reminded me that she loved me and that I was insane for homeschooling.

I'm joking! My momma is one of my biggest supporters.

Simply put, all of them know homeschooling isn't just a frivolous, emotional decision; it is a calling.

I answered the calling, and I stick with it through good and bad because that's what you do with a calling.

Right now, in this season of my life, this is my race, and I want to finish well. (2 Timothy 4:7)

And yeah, I get tired.

And yeah, I have doubts.

And yeah, I'm going to need a heck of a lot more salsa to get through it all.

But. Honestly? I think I have a shot for an A+ in stick-to-it-iveness to display right alongside my yellow ribbon.

Y'all hear that?

SCORE!



HEATHER SANDERS is a freelance writer living in Huntsville, a smallish town on the tail end of the East Texas Pineywoods. Married to Jeff, the love of her life, the two chose to “go forth and multiply.” Their three kids are Emelie, the oldest who graduates August 2015, and the two younger kids Meredith and Kenny, who are in 10th and 8th grade. Contributing Editor for The Pioneer Woman’s Homeschooling blog for the past seven years, Heather’s personal blog is HeatherSanders.com, where she blogs about faithsizing her family into a 960 sq. ft. lake cabin desperately in need of renovations.

Homeschooling gave me the opportunity to develop my own critical thinking skills in ways that have benefited me enormously in the years since I graduated from high school. I entered college with a level of self-motivation and academic proficiency that helped me stand out from the beginning. When I applied to Harding, I was among 30 students in a class of over 1,000 to be given a full-tuition Trustee's Scholarship. Spiritually, I believe that homeschooling was a good choice for me. My parents have always been my spiritual mentors, and their availability to me when I was growing up was so important in forming my convictions.

LEILA ANDERSON

A 2009 homeschool grad currently pursuing a
Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy



11

RADICAL

by Heather Schwarzen

Tomorrow, our daughter walks across the stage at the state homeschool graduation. She'll wear a cap and gown, she'll move her tassel from right to left, and we'll hand her a diploma certifying that not only did she meet our requirements for closing the door on her official high school career, she met the state's as well.

“That dining room lesson was a shot across the bow that taught my daughter that time spent seeking to deepen one’s understanding is worthwhile.”

And like that, the door to a season will close. Now, it's just this season, and it's just with this child. But oh, my heart. It is the end of so much.

In January of 2002, I sat beside my precocious 4½-year-old, reading *Charlotte's Web* on our ratty loveseat and thinking truly radical thoughts. What if we didn't send her to preschool in the morning? What if I stopped trying to fit her (and us) into a box that didn't quite fit? What if I stopped trying to teach her to read and just acknowledged that somehow, she already knew how? What if we gave up on the notion that she needed constant exposure to peers to be socialized? What if we homeschooled?

All of this led to more radical thoughts, and more radical steps, until finally, there I was one morning, dragging the melamine-topped, child-sized table and chairs into our dining room, fitting a triangular pencil into my little girl's hand and saying, “If you can read it, you can write it.”

And so began the journey that winds its way to a final, enthusiastic culmination on a small stage tomorrow afternoon.

We've spent the last week pouring over 12 years' worth of memories in the form of photographs, reliving every baking soda and vinegar volcano eruption, every papyrus paper making, every 4H fair season. Looking at it now, that thing that seemed so radical at the outset clearly mellowed from “are we getting this right?” to “this is how

we do life” very, very quickly. Without fanfare, without a rule book.

We have beautiful images preserved – not just in my mind – of a sweet, freckled girl reading at sunset in a tent in Tijuana not because the school policy for Fifth graders required 20 minutes of silent, sustained reading every night ... but because it never occurred to her that this was a school book and she ought to view it with suspicion at best, and contempt at worst. We have photos of the jeopardy-style quiz games we used to review history facts, and of the amazing display of artwork she was able to present after a summer class conducted by a talented, professional artist who happened, also, to be a homeschooling mom. We have photos of camping trips that were more than nights in the woods, but excuses to visit cultural and historic landmarks. We have photos of French lessons in progress, of group film classes, of a girl sitting behind the wheel of a car for the first time. We have photos that prove that the fear that she’d have no friends, or be unable to fit in with her peers, were rooted not in reality, but in some alternate universe.

We have photos of a life well lived. Tomorrow and Sunday, it will be a life well celebrated as our family and friends come together to say that this journey, which we undertook quietly within the confines of our own home, was played out in a community that has both benefited and contributed to the growth, character, and education of the young lady who stands before us today.

That small, radical step in my dining room has led us here, to this sweet spot of closure. But perhaps the most beautiful, the most radical part of all is that even with the culmination of a diploma being placed into my daughter’s hands, the entire adventure does not end here. True, she’s not headed to a four-year university in the fall. Rather, in the style of this unique, meandering journey we’ve helped chart for her, she’s excitedly signing up to audit a college French course this summer, before she decides precisely what it is that she’ll be doing in the upcoming year. Just because. Ask her why she’d pursue something out of which she gains nothing, why she’d invest time and energy in throw-away pursuit like a class with no credit, and she’ll look at you as if you’ve grown a third eye.

Because that dining room lesson was a shot across the bow that taught my daughter that time spent seeking to deepen one’s understanding, energy invested in gaining knowledge, is worthwhile. Even when no grade is going on record, and even when no one is watching. Learning is pleasurable. It is ongoing. And it is one of the uses of your

time that you rarely regret.

Which is, as you know, radical. And oh, so rich.



HEATHER SCHWARZEN Schwarzen is the wife of one globe-trotting, church-planting adventurer, and Momma to nine beautifully messy children, ranging in age from infant to late teens. She writes about parenting, homeschooling, special needs, adoption, and serving a very big God through the mundane stuff of life on the family's blog, [To Sow a Seed](#). The family has been happily Sonlighting since 2002.

My kids were so excited to start school again this year and just love going through their books. Even my toddler, who has just listened while playing, kept asking throughout the summer on a regular basis if we could have “school”. Yes, it has taken much of my time, but it has been so worth it! Even I have learned so much in 1 year!

LINDA M

Homeschool mom and Sonlight customer



12

IT WILL BE WORTH IT!

by Crystal Paine

My parents began homeschooling us in the “pioneer days” of homeschooling — when homeschooling was relatively unknown, there were very few resources and support, and most of our friends and family thought were crazy.

We had a lot of difficult days in those early years. I remember that my mom cried a lot and there were times when she felt so overwhelmed that she would threaten to send us on the yellow school bus the next day.

But in spite of the criticism, in spite of the lack of support, in spite of our bad attitudes, in spite of my mom’s weariness and exhaustion some days with just how hard it was to train and teach seven children, my parents persevered.

And I’m eternally grateful that they kept going and kept walking in obedience to what God had called them to – even when it was so hard.

As I look back on my years as a homeschool student, there are many lessons my parents taught me that have made a lifelong impact on me. Here are three of the key lessons that have forever shaped who I am as a person:

Lesson #1: Character Trumps Curriculum

There were many weeks and even months when our family wouldn’t have won awards for being the “poster-family” for homeschooling. There were seasons when daily homeschool lessons had to be set aside for real life – such as when my mom had a miscarriage and then a stillborn baby, when we moved to the country and built a house, and when my mom’s mom died suddenly.

Looking back, I realize that we learned much more important things than academics during those seasons. We got to see first hand what it meant to trust God, how to walk through hard times, to see answered prayer, to reach out and minister to those in the midst of difficult seasons, to help our

“Your children will not remember all the facts and figures in their homeschooling lessons, but they will remember the life you lived before them.”

grandparents, and to serve people who couldn't do anything for us in return.

My parents wholeheartedly clung to Matthew 6:33 in how they taught us, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you."

They believed that the most important thing they could teach us was to seek first the Kingdom of God. In hindsight, I can attest that it was and has been. Nothing else really matters if we don't have a Kingdom-minded focus.

Now, let me be clear, this doesn't mean that there shouldn't be a strong emphasis placed upon academics, but I just want to encourage homeschool parents to remember that it's more important to raise your kids in light of what's going to matter most at the end of their lives.

Lesson #2: Obedience Is Paramount

My parents weren't perfect homeschool parents. They made many mistakes. They have many shortcomings. And they often had to ask our forgiveness.

But their commitment to walk by faith, even when no one else understood, and their dedication to follow God, even when it was hard, has forever impacted my life. Your children will not remember all the facts and figures and definitions you went over with them in their homeschooling lessons, but they will remember the life you lived before them.

As a young girl, I remember waking up in the "middle of the night" (it was actually 4 a.m.) and coming out to the family room to see my mom on her knees praying and reading her Bible

I remember my dad waking up every morning around 6 or 6:30 a.m. and reading his Bible and praying.

I remember my dad reading God's Word to us almost every morning.

I remember the times we spent praying together as a family.

I remember my parents serving and serving and serving – even when they were exhausted and spent.

Here's the thing: I don't remember perfect parents, but I do remember parents who loved Jesus with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength.

I challenge you parents: If God is calling you to something or stirring in your heart, step out in faith and

follow Him. Don't let fear of the unknown, or fear of criticism, or fear of failure, hold you back. Jump out of your comfort zone, walk by faith, and your example will more than likely impact generations to come.

Lesson #3: Perseverance Pays Off

I know some of you homeschooling moms are feeling burdened, tired, and overwhelmed. Right now, you might be feeling like you just can't go on.

Can I encourage you? Perseverance pays off!

Don't stress over finding the perfect curriculum or having the perfect schedule or being a part of the best homeschool support group or doing everything right. You're going to make mistakes. You're going to fail. You're going to have hard days. And when you do, those are opportunities to cry out to the Lord. The truth is, during the early years of our homeschool journey, my mom would cry almost every single day. It was hard. We had bad attitudes. We fought and argued. We talked back.

But despite all of this, my parents didn't give up. And I'm so grateful that they didn't!

On hard days in my own life, I often think back to those early years of homeschooling and I'm encouraged by her faithfulness to continue trusting the Lord, clinging to Him, and resting in Him – even when giving up or giving in would be a whole lot easier.

I'm discovering that God delights in calling us to things that feel humanly impossible to us so that we live in a constant state of needing Him to carry us through and show up on our behalf. I believe and have seen it to be so true in my own life and other's lives: God will give you everything you need for every day to do everything He's called you to.

Cry out to Him in those moments when you feel so overwhelmed and exhausted. Ask Him to give you the strength you need for the next minute, the next hour, the next day. Cling to Him and see Him do great and mighty things on your behalf.

Persevere! Don't give up! It will be worth it!



CRYSTAL PAINE is a child of God, wife, homeschool mom of three, author, and speaker. In 2007, she founded [MoneySavingMom®](#), a site that has since grown to become one of the most popular blogs on the web, currently averaging over 1.5 million readers per month. Her mission is to challenge women to wisely steward their time and resources and live life on purpose. She is the author of many bestselling books, including [Say Goodbye to Survival Mode: 9 Simple Strategies to Stress Less, Sleep More and Restore Your Passion for Life.](#)

I have just rather sadly unsubscribed from all Sonlight e-mails. My last child is finishing school in a couple of months, so really, practically speaking, I don't need any more temptations to buy homeschool materials. I want to say thank you to Sonlight for many years of fellowship. We started using Sonlight 18 years ago. For the first 8 or 10 years, I would continue to look at other catalogs and consider buying one or another. Each time I realised (fortunately, before buying) that with Sonlight I had everything I needed. My two oldest children have graduated with distinction from university. My third child is doing very well in university. Sonlight has left me with very, very full bookcases. My children are now parceling out the books between themselves. But the most valuable things I have received are the years of educating both my children and myself, the time we've spent together, the thought and discussion we've put into many issues, and the relationships we've built within our family

LINDA M

Homeschool mom and Sonlight customer



THANKS FOR READING!

If you're interested in beginning the homeschool journey or want to learn more about helping your child love to learn, check out sonlight.com/about/discover or contact us for a free homeschool consultation to talk about your goals: sonlight.com/advisors.

THE END