

How eight mothers homeschooled their children.

Home Is Where The Learning Is: Homeschool Lifestyles
from Homeschool Moms

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Home Is Where The Learning Is:

Homeschool Lifestyles From Homeschool Moms

Written and Collected by
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Chapter One

The Basics of Homeschool

By
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One of the first things I learned when I pulled my children out of public school and started teaching them at home was that parents are ultimately the people responsible for educating their children. As I mentioned earlier, they go along in life sending their children off to conventional school assuming their children would learn all they need to know and not worry about it again. It doesn't always work that way. I now have nine children and through them I have learned that they don't always catch on the same way. There are more ways to teach one concept to a child.

My children are as follows:

Sarah – now 21 and just married. She started off in public school in San Diego and then I pulled her out in 4th grade because of the over crowding in the school system due to a year-round school schedule the school district had switched to. We homeschooled for a year there until we moved to Alabama. She went back to public school because I wasn't prepared to homeschool in Alabama. Meaning, I didn't have the curriculum or know the state law at the time. The next year I started homeschooling her and from then on she never went back to public

Valerie J. Steimle

school. She is our poster child for home school. She graduated high school through a home school program, went on to graduate from a junior college and then graduated in May of 2003 from Auburn University in Animal Science. She has done very well in her schooling and I know without a doubt that homeschool works.

My next three, Naomi (19), Isaac (18) and Tasha (16) all were homeschooled sometime during the grade school experience but went to public school as well. All three started out in public school. I then pulled them out to homeschool at the same time as I did with Sarah. But by 9th grade they each decided they really wanted to go back to public school during their high school years. I (as well as they) felt that they could be motivated better by other teachers. High school work is very much independent study as a homeschool student and if you are not motivated to finish on your own it is very difficult to get through. A homeschooled high schooler really needs to be self-motivated. The other three also wanted to be on sports teams, which we could not always find in city leagues. I think Tasha spent the most time in public school out of any of them.

They all did very well during that time but there were drawbacks to returning to public school. Namely, the peer pressure of other students was there and having to keep the public school schedule whether you are burned out or not was also difficult. From the parent's perspective, there is the problem of not really knowing what is going on in the classroom. Sometimes I would find out about a problem one of them was having with a teacher almost after it was too late to help with the situation.

It was made apparent to me that public high school is just too stressful to enjoy (especially in the honor's program) and the time at home is so limited. I saw the personalities of all three become either withdrawn or mean. Then, by the 4th year, all three got "senioritis". That is to say, they didn't want to go to school anymore nor do their homework. It was difficult to watch this happening to my own children. They wanted to finish what they started and graduate but they didn't care anymore. A high school diploma can be obtained in three years. The fourth year seems to almost be a waste of time. Most of the classes they took that year were offered to them in college. If my children had homeschooled during that time they could have finished their high school diploma and been on to something else. Now there is the boredom that comes with having to sit through a class twice to get the credit. Once during high school and then again in college. My oldest who homeschooled all the way through took the more difficult high school courses at a junior college and only had to sit through it once.

Naomi is in her senior year at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama. She is planning to go on to graduate school in genetics. Isaac is a sophomore at the University of South Alabama in engineering and Tasha is a freshman at Brigham Young University. They all graduated in the top 15 of their high school class and do very well in college. Notice that they are all younger than the usual seniors, sophomores and freshman in college. I attribute that to the time they spent in homeschool. When they went back to public school they were simply too far ahead to go to what

the school system considered their grade level and so they went ahead one year and did marvelously.

The next five are all being homeschooled through high school. We decided not to give these next five a choice. I think I am more able to handle the stress of the older homeschooled student and in the long run graduating through a homeschool high school curriculum is better.

Caleb (14) is already in his sophomore year in high school. Eliot (12) is doing a combination 7th/8th grade (as did the others); Lydia (9) is doing 3rd grade work and Moses (6) is in 1st grade. Henry (3) comes along for the ride.

Children have different learning styles and we as parents have to figure out what that learning style is. Children who are labeled “a trouble maker” or “learning disabled” could actually be quite intelligent but just learn from a different approach. For example, would your child rather *see* what they are supposed to do as opposed to handling it first or *listen* to an explanation? When you clump 15 to 20 students together it is difficult to get the individualized teaching that children sometimes need.

Do new sights distract the child? Do they remember things better if they see them first? If so, then the child is probably a visual learner. This is the most common way of learning.

Then, there is the auditory way, which is listening. I have one of those. Lydia (my nine-year-old) would much rather have all her school read to her than read it herself. For some reason she learns better that way.

Then, there is the kinesthetic or tactile learner. Or in other words, the feely, touchy child. This child has a hard time sitting still and is always grabbing for things. This child usually takes longer in the beginning to catch on. They are also the children “the experts” label “dyslexic”. For some reason, I am most like the kinesthetic. I was never a good reader and I couldn’t seem to sit still. I probably would have done better learning to read by feeling the letters rather than seeing the letters, but back in the sixties that was unheard of. I think the kinesthetic learner has a harder time learning because we as parents or teachers expect students to be visual learners. The need to touch in order to learn is much harder to teach.

Actually, your child can be all three but at times learning is easier if the teacher knows which learning approach is a better fit for your child. Especially for the kinesthetic.

So, if your child is having a difficult time learning in school you might consider some of these ideas with your child’s teacher.

This reminds me of a story about a boy who was described by others as “retarded, addled, troublesome, precocious and mischievous”. But “Little Al”, as he was called, was the seventh child to Nancy Elliot who was a devout Presbyterian, and she never gave up on him. He was always very curious about things, which usually led to some kind of trouble. (Like burning down his father’s barn) His mother learned that he was a hands on learner and was bored by the classroom routine, doodling and daydreaming to wile away the hours. After Al overheard a conversation

with some teachers about how “addled” he was and that school for him would be a waste of time, his mother pulled him from public school and nurtured his education with books. She “implanted in his mind the love of learning” and he became a “voracious” reader. She kept him on the right path of learning which was a blessing for the rest of the world because Thomas Alva Edison, as he is better known, found solutions to problems towards the end of the 1800’s which would usher in the new age of technology. He had many inventions including an improved stock ticker machine, kinescope, motion picture camera, phonograph and my personal favorite: the light bulb. Mr. Edison was heard to say: “My mother was the making of me. She understood me; she let me follow my bent. She cast over me an influence which has lasted all my life. ¹”Wouldn’t that be great if we could all do for our children what Nancy Elliot Edison did for hers?

Mrs. Edison shows us one viewpoint common to most all homeschool families: that her child was not stupid and that she could do a better job meeting his unique educational needs.

Homeschool families also usually desire a simpler, self-reliant lifestyle and they are concerned with restoring traditional family roles and strengthening the church that they attend. They really care about the world around them and for the most part involve themselves in some grass roots organization to help this cause along. ²

From Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moores’ *The Successful Homeschool Family Handbook*, comes this list of eight common characteristics of homeschoolers.

This is from a consensus of studies in 1994:

- 1) Home-educated children are highly competent socially, seldom age-segregated, and generally respectful of their parents.
- 2) The children study a full range of conventional and enrichment subject matters.
- 3) The average annual family income is around \$25,000. (This might be surprising)
- 4) Most parents have some college education.
- 5) Most have definite philosophical or religious convictions and high moral values, although homeschool rationales reach far beyond religious views to include family integrity, desire for children to excel, and examples of successful neighbors and friends.
- 6) There are nearly three children per family.
- 7) Curricula vary widely from extremely flexible programs to quite formal teaching.
- 8) Children are taught with a great deal of warm parental responsiveness and camaraderie in study, work and service. They develop an adult level of reasonability five to eight years sooner than conventionally schooled students. ³

If you know any homeschool family personally, they would probably fit into any number of those characteristics, which are not only an asset to their community but also a benefit to the children themselves.

Just as there are different learning styles of our children there are also different educational styles. I think it would be beneficial to list them here so you can understand the basic approaches of homeschooling.

Common Educational Approaches

Textbook Approach

Traditional: In the traditional approach, parents use graded textbooks and/or workbooks. They follow a certain schedule for the entire school year of 180 days. There are usually teacher's manuals, tests and record keeping materials that correspond to each text and workbook. This material is also available on the computer. You can also find these kinds of courses or "curriculum" through some public school districts, through private schools, through companies that sell pre-packaged curriculums or parents can pick and choose by buying directly from textbook publishers.

Non-Textbook Approach

Classical: Children under age 18 are taught the tools of learning known as "The Trivium". The Trivium has three parts. Each part corresponds to a childhood developmental stage.

Stage 1: Grammar Stage: Early elementary ages focuses on reading, writing, and spelling, study of Latin, developing observation, listening and memorization skills. The goal of this stage is to develop a general

framework of knowledge and to acquire basic language arts and math skills.

Stage 2: Dialectic Stage: This stage starts about the age of middle school. Children begin to demonstrate independent or abstract thought, which is molded and shaped by teaching logic discussion, debate and how to draw correct conclusions and support them with facts.

Stage 3: Rhetoric Stage: This is the final phase of the Trivium which seeks to produce a student (usually by 15 years of age) who can use language, both written and spoken eloquently and persuasively.

Unit Study Approach: A Unit Study takes a theme or topic (a unit of study) and investigates deeply into all there is to know about that topic, integrating language arts, science, social studies, math and fine arts. Instead of studying seven or eight separate, unrelated subjects, all the subjects are blended together. For example, a unit study on bears could include reading and writing about bears (language arts). You could also include famous biologists who studied bears, studying their body parts, eating habits and life cycles (science). You could calculate the body fat needed to hibernate all winter (math) and learn about the habitats and ecological impact on their life. You could learn to sketch bears and so on until you have learned everything there is to know about bears.

The Living Books Approach: This approach is based on the writings of Charlotte Mason, a turn-of-the-century British educator. She felt that

Valerie J. Steimle

educating a child was preparing them for life and helping that child to live the fullest right now. She believed in respecting children as persons, involving them in real-life situations and allowing them to read really good books instead of what she called “twaddle”- worthless, inferior teaching material. This approach is probably best for elementary aged children. They are taught good habits, to be involved in a broad spectrum of real-life situations, and given ample time to play, reflect and create. Young children were not to have formal lessons at all. But when children are at an older age she would use what she called “living books” to educate. For example, for literature the children would read the classics. For history, she would pick historical biographies. For geography: well-written travel books. In art, the children would study great art pieces. If the children couldn’t read they would be read to. Arithmetic is not mentioned at all but I suppose you could add this in for a well-rounded education.

The Principle Approach: This approach uses three American Christian concepts: the knowledge of our Christian history, an understanding of our role in the spread of Christianity and the ability to live according to the Biblical principles upon which our country is founded. Learning is based on seven principles: 1) Individuality, 2) self-government, 3) Christian Character, 4) A person’s conscience is the most sacred of property, 5) The Christian Form of Government, 6) How the seed of local self-government is planted and 7) The Christian principle of American Political Union.

The belief here is that God has given us principles that govern every area of life: politics, education, and business. These areas of focus make up the curriculum for this approach. This kind of learning has been misunderstood as a history course but it is not. It does involve the study of much American history and encourages the use of notebooks for recording information. The whole emphasis as Mary Pride tells us is “on reasoning through basic principles rather than regurgitating facts.” Thus the principle approach.

The Unschooling Approach: This is probably the hardest approach to explain and least understood. Unschooling is letting the children learn through their own desires and curiosities. It is the least structured learning approach. This allows children to pursue their own interests with parental support and guidance. The child is surrounded by a rich environment of books, learning resources and adults who model a lifestyle of learning. John Holt had started this style of homeschool. His motto was “trust children”. He believed that children really want to learn and that they will learn what they need to know if left entirely to themselves. This style of learning is particularly scary for parents. There is always that doubt in the back of the mind, “Is my child learning all that he/she needs to learn to be an educated person?” I have known several families to use this method and they like it.

The Mixed Approach (also known as Eclectic): Many homeschoolers use a blend of the different approaches. I think that is the best way to educate and I have used this approach throughout most of my homeschool experience. Parents can use the best ideas from all the different approaches. I think strictly using one approach can limit what a child will learn. For example, you can use traditional math and science textbooks, but use unit studies around historical periods and geography. Then maybe use a computer program to teach typing and foreign language. I really like the idea of learning history through historical biographies. I have used this approach many times.

There is a lot to think about when trying to decide whether you want to homeschool your children. It seems scary at first, but with good preparation and lots of praying, it can be done at any time in your children's life. Some women (as you will read) know they want to homeschool from the time they give birth to their first child. Other women don't really know they want to homeschool until their child is already in 3rd grade. At times, public school will accentuate learning problems and it becomes obvious to the parent that something more needs to be done. I have known some mothers who pulled their children out of middle school, homeschooled for a year or two, and then let them go back for high school. There are many different ways to educate your child and at any age.

As you begin to think about whether you want to homeschool your children keep in the back of your mind several important points. This will

be helpful to find out before you pull your child out of traditional school and start your actual learning time.

- 1) What does my state law say about homeschooling?
- 2) What kind of curriculum will I use?

State Laws

Every state in the United States of America says something in their law books pertaining to homeschooling. According to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association, there are four areas which states are divided into for homeschool requirements.⁴

1. States requiring no notice: The state does not require parents to initiate any contact with the school district when they decide to homeschool their children.

States: Alaska, Idaho, Indiana, Illinois, New Jersey, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas.

2. States with low regulation: The state requires parents to notify their school district of their intention of homeschooling.

States: Alabama, Arizona, California, Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Montana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Nebraska, Nevada, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and Washington DC.

Homeschooling in my home state of Alabama, as in many other states, also requires you to be registered with a school of some kind or be a certified teacher. This school is called a “Legal Umbrella”. It could be a

private school or church school but this law requires the administrator to collect attendance records, which shows proof of participation.

3. States with moderate regulation: Parents are to send notification, test scores, and or professional evaluation of student progress.

States: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Virginia.

With this requirement, many homeschool umbrellas will set up testing for their students and assign a certified teacher to meet quarterly with the parents. Some schools use a “portfolio” as part of the student progress report, which is just a sampling of the student’s work through out the year.

4. States with high regulation: State requires parents to send notification or achievement test scores and or professional evaluation, plus other requirements. (i.e. curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, etc.)

States: Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia.

This is pretty severe and there is less freedom for the parent to teach what they wanted. Curriculum is assigned from the grade level and you must follow a certain schedule of work. This is basically public school at home. The federal mandate for all public schools is to have 180 days attendance and as a requirement, each family would be required to fulfill that mandate.

Some parents feel that their rights are being taken away by the state. They want to make the decision about what is right for their child and not be forced to follow what some state bureaucrat has decided was good for every child in that state. There are intense debates; big lectures and long articles written on this very subject. All of this discussion can promote freethinking and might even help change state laws to be better than they are, but, for the time being it's best to follow your own state law. You might ask why this has to be. There have been numerous conflicts between school districts and families that homeschool. If you are abiding by the law of your state you have no cause to worry whether the state will investigate why you are homeschooling. If you aren't following the laws, then there are drastic measures that the state can take, including taking away your own children.

Curriculum

As for the curriculum you use there are many to choose from and much to read about. Right now there are thousands of web sites, workshops, book fairs and companies of curriculum, which specialize in this homeschool arena. Many times curriculum can be very overwhelming to a new homeschool parent.

When parents ask me what kind of curriculum they should use for their children, I tell them they need to find out for themselves what their own children need to learn. Homeschool for parents then takes on an everlasting job of finding out exactly what their children need to learn in

their life until they get out on their own. This is sometimes done by trial or error but there are some points you can keep in mind.

1. There is a great deal of study involved before you start.

One thing I have learned after attending numerous homeschool curriculum fairs is that you need to study up on the different types of catalogues, lesson manuals, books, computer programs and other materials before going to those fairs. You can find much of this on the Internet by typing “homeschool” into a search engine. You can also ask other homeschool families what they use. If you don’t know any, find out about your local association meetings and ask questions. Or you can read about curriculums from companies willing to send you a free catalogue. Then, when you go to a curriculum fair for the first time, **DO NOT BUY ANYTHING**. Just look at what is there. Then, leave. The next day go back and look again. If you still feel strongly about buying something (especially the \$200-\$300 sets) then make an educated purchase. I have heard from many parents that the biggest mistake they make is that they spend big money on a curriculum they don’t know much about and then end up not wanting to use it and then they are stuck. All that can be avoided if you do some research on what is available.

2. If you do make the mistake of buying the wrong kind of curriculum, don’t make the mistake of pushing your children into finishing the whole book. Either pick bits and pieces out to use through out the year or just resell it to someone else and start over.

But don't despair about the curriculum. Start early enough before you have to actually home school so you will have time to decide. For example: if you have a preschooler at the age of 3 or 4, that would be a good time to start looking around and studying what options you have to teach your child. You don't always have to start a child at the age of five.

If there is an emergency where you have to pull your child out of school right away, contact your local homeschool association. Many times you can find second hand books suitable in an emergency and they will know the state law requirements. This does happen quite often. But with genuine concern for your child and persistent parental study, you can get through anything.

Homeschool is such a challenging opportunity. I say challenging because it can test your patience with your own children and make you feel as if you didn't learn anything when you went to school. I say opportunity because your child will have the chance to learn at home in a comfortable environment. Who ever said having the same age group peers help children to learn appropriate behavior? Being in the company of adults regulates how a child should act. Remember "The Lord of the Flies"? At home, there are no drugs, no high stress demands from teachers, no peer pressures, no sassy mouths to contend with. I think teenagers would not talk back to their parents so much if they were respectful to what their parents were doing for them. Also there is no audience from other teenagers outside your family. In homeschooling, you

also get to decide what your children will learn. There are no state mandates and no school authorities breathing down your neck.

You also have to remember that public school is a modern invention. It has been only in the last 150 years of human history that we have had this public school system to teach our own children. Parents used to educate their children or find a tutor to do it for them in their own home. So this system is still really being tested and the trouble spots are still being resolved.

Another added bonus for homeschooling is that you will learn all that you missed from school and at the end of the day; you feel that you really accomplished something. It is much more satisfying than a regular 9 to 5 job. Best of all, you will learn to love your child like no one else ever has. You will get closer to each other, which builds a great parent-child relationship.

I know I have come to appreciate the process of teaching my children what they need to know. I have seen the benefits of homeschool in many families as well as my own. We are closer together, we talk more and I can solve conflicts my children have before they get out of hand. If I had to do it over again, I would still homeschool all of my children. My efforts were well worth the time that I spent with them. They are intelligent, caring and hard working people and for the most part have learned what they needed to know to have a good well-rounded education. I hope this book will help you find what is best for your family and will

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help you make an educated decision of whether you would like to homeschool your own children. Happy Homeschooling.

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