

**A Parents' Guide to Homeschooling**

**by**

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### A Parents' Guide to Homeschooling

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## Chapter One: Why Homeschool?

Homeschooling is now the fastest growing educational phenomenon in the United States. It is also becoming increasingly popular in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and England. And with good reason. More and more parents have become convinced that the public schools--that is, schools owned and operated by the government--are incapable of the kind of reforms that parents want.

Ironically, government education is in the process of massive restructuring and reform under such titles as Outcome Based Education, Performance Based Education, School-to-Work, or by some other descriptive designation, but it is not the kind of reform parents have clamored for. It is reform imposed from above by a cadre of radical change agents who are carrying out their own social agenda which has nothing to do with traditional concepts of academic excellence and individual intellectual growth. In fact, what they are imposing is in direct conflict with traditional educational philosophy. And therefore parents have simply given up on the system, opted out and decided to do it themselves. And do it they can, for what they have wanted and asked for is simply a return to the teaching of basic academic skills, which the schools no longer want to do, but which thousands of parents have now learned they can do quite effectively.

How big is the homeschool movement? No one knows for sure. Estimates are that in 1996 about a half-million to a million children were being home educated, or about 2 percent of the school-age population. But it may be lots more. When this writer first started lecturing and doing workshops at homeschool conventions back in

the early 1980s, attendance figures were usually around 300. In 1996, this writer lectured to homeschool audiences in the thousands at huge convention centers with hundreds of vendor exhibits! And at least half the attendees were young parents with babes in arms determined to home educate their youngsters. Why? Not only because of what has happened to public education but because the new wholesome family lifestyle that comes with homeschooling has become increasingly attractive to young parents eager to experience the best that family life has to offer.

## **THE RISKS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

As for public education, its shortcomings have become more and more apparent to those Americans who read newspapers. Today, children in the public schools are at risk in four major areas: academically, spiritually, morally and physically. The academic risk is very real: 40 to 60 percent of school children emerge from the process seriously handicapped and intellectually crippled because of the educational philosophy and teaching methods used in the primary grades. These methods can cause reading disabilities which are later diagnosed as dyslexia or attention deficit disorder. In other words, some of the teaching methods widely used in the public schools can and do cause cognitive dysfunction among millions of perfectly normal children.

Almost everyone today knows someone with a reading problem. The pain, frustration, and misery these problems cause cannot be understated. But we do know that they can be avoided with the proper teaching methods. And home education provides parents with the opportunity to use the best and most rational methods of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. When children master the basic academic skills, they can learn just about anything else. The satisfaction that parents get in imparting these skills to their children is what makes homeschooling so enjoyable and

worthwhile for both parents and children.

In addition, there is the growing problem of ADD--attention deficit disorder--which now afflicts millions of school children. Four million children are now being given the drug Ritalin every day so that they can sit in class and do their school work. There is something wrong with a school system that must drug four million children in order to be able to "educate" them. Is it possible that ADD is caused by chaotic, irrational education in the classroom? One hardly hears about ADD among homeschoolers. Maybe homeschooling will produce a miraculous cure for the ADD diagnosed child!

Children are also at risk spiritually in the public schools because of what is being done to undermine their home-grown traditional religious beliefs. This is done through such programs as values clarification, sensitivity training, situational ethics, multiculturalism, transcendental meditation, death education, the teaching of evolution as fact instead of theory, comparative religion, moral relativism, etc. All of these programs tend to undermine the child's belief in traditional religion and moral absolutes. This risk has motivated thousands of Christians and other adherents of traditional Biblical religion to remove their children from the public schools.

But even non-religious, humanist parents realize that their children do not get the necessary spiritual nourishment in school that would enhance their sense of being. The result is that many children, who get no religious reinforcement at home, emerge from public schools not as rational humanists, but as amoral nihilists capable of the most sickening crimes.

## **THE MORAL RISK**

Then there is the moral risk. It is known that sex education programs lead to premature sexual activity among children which in turn leads to unwanted pregnancies, unwed motherhood, abortions, venereal disease, and emotional

traumas. Many parents are convinced that the distribution of condoms to school children sends the wrong message to children who should be persuaded to abstain from sex until marriage. The schools have also become the chief marketplace for drugs. Most children get started on drugs through peer pressure from fellow students. Much touted drug programs, such as DARE and Quest, have failed to make a real dent in student drug experimentation and trafficking. In fact, recent years have shown a dramatic increase in drug use, alcohol consumption, and smoking among school children. The landscape is littered with the bodies of students dead from drug overdoses. Homeschooling removes children from the drug culture that now permeates our public schools.

There is also a very intelligent movement among homeschoolers to encourage courtship rather than dating. Dating implies many premature romantic relationships which often involve premarital sex. Such relationships inevitably lead to breakups, jealousy, partner switching, all of which can lead to physical abuse, severe emotional breakdowns, and even murder. Add to all of this the moral rot and violence young people ingest from television and movies, popular music, rock concerts, etc., and many parents have come to the inescapable conclusion that their children need all the protection they can get while growing up.

Last, but hardly least, is the physical risk. More and more children are assaulted, robbed, and murdered in school than ever before. More and more children come to school with guns and knives. Some children carry these weapons for self-protection against other students. A culture of violence, abetted by rap music, drug trafficking, movies and television, and racial tension, has engulfed teenagers. And there seems to be no improvement on the horizon. Also, the bus rides to and from school entail numerous risks. In other words, parents can greatly reduce the physical risks of going to school by educating their kids at home.

In addition to these risks, there are other reasons why home education is

preferable to the schoolroom. In a class, the child is constantly forced to measure himself or herself against others. The learning experience is constantly undercut by the comparisons made by grading students in their performance. This is particularly harmful when the class is organized according to the educators' own view of intelligence and ability. Feelings of inferiority and inadequacy easily develop among many students in this kind of atmosphere. At home, there is no classroom hierarchy of intelligence that sets up a constant comparison with others. The child learns and explores on his or her own, guided by loving parents, developing interests that satisfy youthful curiosity about the world instead of being constrained by the need to do better than others in teacher-directed study.

These are the reasons why parents should consider removing their children from the public schools and putting them in a private school they can trust or educating them at home. While the private school may be an attractive option for working parents, it still entails enough risks to make it a nonstarter for those parents who are attracted to the homeschool lifestyle. In addition, the private school still subjects the child to that comparative environment in which he or she is constantly measured against others. But if you are a single parent who must work, then the private school is undoubtedly the only option available. But private schools charge tuition and there usually aren't that many good ones to choose from. Some single working parents have found homeschoolers willing to take their children into their homes. A single parent may be able to find such an accommodating homeschool family by contacting a local homeschool support group.

As for working parents, one parent may have to give up a full-time job in order to homeschool. This decision may require economic adjustments for the family as a whole, but with desirable and beneficial tradeoffs. Also, sometimes a parent can earn money by doing work at home, thereby contributing to the family budget and home educating at the same time.

In other words, one should think of any number of ways of adapting the family to the needs of home education. If freedom from the risks of government education is the goal, then the family must be prepared to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to achieve that goal. And once that goal is achieved and the benefits of home education become more and more apparent, the sacrifices will seem all the more worthwhile.

## Chapter Two: It All Starts With Parenting

It goes without saying that homeschooling starts with parents who enjoy parenting. Love of one's children is the key to the concern over their education. That is not to say that parents who put their children in public schools don't love them. They are simply doing what their parents did and what generations did before them. And many of them actually get to know their children's teachers and are pleased with what they find in their classrooms.

But when problems arise, they usually assume that these are natural phenomena over which no one has control. For example, if the child is having trouble learning to read, the first reaction is that the child must have some sort of learning problem. There is never any suspicion that the teacher may have a teaching problem because of a faulty instruction method being used. In such cases, the child is then core evaluated by a battery of counselors and psychologists, diagnosed dyslexic and placed in special education.

Another phenomenon that parents readily accept as natural and inevitable is teenage rebellion. But if teenage rebellion is so natural and inevitable, why is there so little of it among homeschoolers? Perhaps teenage rebellion is more the result of conflicting values, values acquired by the child in public school that conflict with the values of the child's parents. Homeschooled children tend to adopt the values of their parents, and therefore rebellion rarely occurs among them.

There was a study done some years ago by a popular magazine to find out what children wanted most. It was discovered that what they wanted most was more time

with their parents! The separation of children from parents can be the most traumatic experiences in children's lives. The tearful separations of children from mothers on that first day of school is familiar to all. Some children adapt themselves to the new school experience very nicely. Others are not happy with the separation at all. These are the children who grow to hate school and rejoice when their parents decide to home educate.

As for mothers putting their children in school for the first time, their feelings vary. Some may feel relieved that their children are going to be taken care of during the next three or six hours by someone else, freeing them to use their time as they wish, doing whatever it is they want to do. Other mothers experience a depressing feeling of loss as they deliver their child up to a group of strangers who will "educate" them, thus depriving the parent of the wonderful experience of educating one's own child. Is not that the greatest pleasure a parent can have: transferring one's dearest values to one's own child?

A parent who wants to educate his or her children must have a strong sense of values. These are the kind of parents who pioneered in the homeschool movement. They were the earliest to homeschool, because they had the strongest desire to bond with their children culturally and intellectually as well as emotionally. The idea of strangers bonding with their children and inculcating values the parents opposed was a strong enough incentive to homeschool.

For Christians, the imperative to pass on spiritual values to their children is exceedingly strong. Before there were schools, the Bible commanded parents to educate their children in the knowledge and love of God. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Christians have been the strongest and earliest advocates and practitioners of homeschooling.

But the notion of bonding with one's children intellectually and culturally is by no means limited to religionists. It is one of the reasons why private schools exist in

America. Parents generally seek private schools that reflect their own values. But parents with the weakest sense of values will more often than not find the public schools acceptable. The fact that most children are still in the public schools despite the well-publicized failures of government education, indicates that most parents are quite willing to comply with public norms since they have neither the desire nor the will to contest them. They may complain about the schools, but their general lack of knowledge about the system inhibits them from doing anything about them.

In addition, many parents have been so poorly educated by the system that they themselves can barely read or write and must depend on the schools to hopefully educate their children. Parents like these must rely on television for their knowledge of what is going on in today's classrooms. And, as we know, television provides the most superficial and often misleading information about our educational problems. But, believe it or not, more and more of these parents are beginning to shake off their educational dependency and are showing up at homeschool conventions to find out what is going on. The word is getting out!

## **DISTRUST OF THE CULTURE**

Clearly, what is bringing more and more parents to the homeschool movement is not only a dissatisfaction with public miseducation but also a distrust of the popular culture that has such a strong hold on today's youth. This is a culture that promotes recreational sex with all of its perversions, moral anarchy, irrational addictions, violent imagery and behavior, blasphemy, pagan-style religious practices, materialism and consumerism, the virtue of diminished intelligence, foul language, heavy metal and rap music, body piercing and tattooing, the mass legal killing of the unborn, etc. Many parents now realize that protecting one's child from this negative cultural onslaught means turning off the TV set and turning on to literacy and good books.

It is not surprising that most homeschooling families live in small towns where the cultural pollution is minimal. Urban dwellers, for the most part, have been so thoroughly seduced by the culture they live in, that the idea of trying to escape it never occurs to them. Some live in it but remain apart from it.

Thus, the homeschooling family, thinking of maintaining a wholesome and healthy lifestyle for its members, feels obliged not only to withdraw from public education but also to withdraw from the general popular culture. But that isn't all. The homeschooling family also finds itself in the peculiar position of defying the state. Even though homeschooling is legal throughout the United States, the existence of compulsory school attendance laws has given superintendents and other educational bureaucrats the idea that they can and should control what homeschoolers do. The result has been an ongoing battle between homeschoolers and the government over who has the right to do what.

From the very beginning, parents have asserted their right to educate their children as they see fit. In the first place, families existed long before governments were formed, and therefore families are quite capable of managing their affairs, including education, without the help of government bureaucrats. Since for many parents the transfer of values from them to their children is their most important parental duty, they are quite adamant in keeping the government out of their family life. Since education is nowhere mentioned in the United States Constitution, Americans in general tend to believe that the government does not have a right to dictate to parents how their children should be educated. Some parents even contend that the compulsory school attendance laws in and of themselves are unconstitutional because they constitute a form of involuntary servitude which is outlawed by the 13th amendment.

So far, homeschoolers have been quite successful in keeping the government at bay. The Home School Legal Defense Association has been quite successful in

defending parents' rights to educate their children at home with a minimum of government interference. Thus, if you wish to homeschool your children, be aware that you will be taking part in a quiet but assertive revolution by parents who are rebelling against government education, an amoral popular culture, and the almighty state.

By becoming a homeschooler you will also become part of that revolution to restore educational freedom and parents' rights to America. If we wish our nation to survive as a bastion of individual freedom with a government kept in check by a vigilant citizenry, then homeschoolers must take part in the political life of their country. They have no choice if they wish to leave to their children and their grandchildren a legacy of freedom and of hope for the future.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Devising Your Own Philosophy of Education**

Most parents, when they first think of homeschooling, have the idea that homeschooling is merely doing at home what is done in school. If they then proceed on this assumption, they usually wind up frustrated, overworked, confused, and in time burnt out. The simple fact is that homeschooling is a totally different kettle of fish. It is not a replication of the public school in the home. It is something else. Then what is it? Homeschooling is an opportunity to think about education, to think about what it is you want your children to learn and how best to accomplish this in your home. What it really requires is devising a philosophy of education--a set of principles that enables you to conduct education in a manner that helps you achieve your goal. An interesting example of how a philosophy of education can be summed up to provide a guide to the educator was given by Father John A. Hardon, S.J., at a conference of the Separation of School and State Alliance in 1996. He said: "The true purpose of education is to teach people of the purpose of their life on earth, to know why they exist, and why the rest of the world exists." Such a profound yet succinct statement will definitely set you to think of a curriculum that will enable you to instill such understanding in a child.

Most homeschoolers accept the philosophy of education implicit in the home-education program they have purchased, and most of these programs are based on pretty traditional views on education. They put a heavy emphasis on the teaching of the basic academic skills and the kind of subject matter associated with a good general education. Thus, if one is not inclined to think of devising one's own

philosophy of education, one can easily accept what is being offered by the major suppliers and be satisfied that their programs are based on sound, traditional ideas about education.

The point I am making is that homeschooling provides the parent with the opportunity, the freedom, to think all of this over and do something other than what is standard practice. Once you have thought this out and actually come up with a philosophy of education, you will have established guidelines that will help you choose the program that best reflects your views of how you want your children to be educated, what kind of adults you want them to be when you have completed your child-rearing mission.

Most parents would say: "I want my child to become independent, be able to earn a good living, develop a career or profession, be able to make his or her way in this competitive world, find a good mate, find happiness, become a good human being. I don't want my child to be ignorant, apathetic, lazy, forever dependent on his parents, afraid to venture out in the world, mediocre, a potential couch potato."

So, in a sense, most parents have had a kind of unspoken and undefined philosophy of education which they expected others to articulate in the form of a school curriculum. But now they realize that the school is not giving them what they want. It is giving them what they don't want: ignorant, apathetic, rebellious, drug-addicted, semi-literate kids.

Devising a philosophy of education will enable the parent not only to choose a course of study for the child but determine what the parent's role will be in the actual education process. Sometimes that philosophy can be summed up in pretty simple terms. For example, Mary Foley, a homeschooling mother on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, when required by the local superintendent to submit for approval her education plan for her nine-year-old son Christian, wrote:

"The priorities of our curriculum are daydreaming, natural and social sciences,

self discipline, respect of self and others and making mistakes. I encourage an acceptance of failure so that he will be comfortable taking risks. By the time he is ten he will be competent in life, if I have done my job, and if he chooses he can spend his life in school. But, for now, he is not ready to make that decision and I must do what I believe is best. My curriculum was best expressed by Blake: "To see a world in a grain of sand, And Heaven in a wild flower, To hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour."

This mother's other children had all achieved honors in academics, and her daughter had received a full scholarship to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The superintendent took Mary Foley to court, but the judge decided in favor of this homeschooling mother. The beauty of homeschooling is that you can apply your own philosophy of education to your own children and need not accept someone else's or the state's. Mary Foley's philosophy has helped her choose the kind of learning she intends to impart to her son. She wants her son to be "competent in life," and she believes that daydreaming is an important part of that learning process.

My own view is that the purpose of education is to transfer to the younger generation the skills, knowledge, wisdom, and moral and spiritual values of the previous generation. And that transfer can be made lovingly, patiently, and enthusiastically. I also believe that the purpose of education is to enable an individual to control his or her own life and not become the victim of prevailing forces. We live at a time when survival requires an astute intelligence that enables us not only to read books and magazines, but also the handwriting on the wall. There is more misinformation and disinformation being diffused throughout the world today than ever before, and a well educated person should be able to dig out the truth under a mountain of lies. One might even say that the ultimate aim of education should not be only to enable an individual to discern the truth, but to make the individual *want* to know the truth and dig for it when necessary.

## Chapter Four:

### How to Teach and What to Teach

Once we've established our educational goal then we must start thinking about what to teach and how to teach it. A good first step is to look at how children learn. As we all know, children are great self-teachers. They teach themselves how to speak their own language with amazing mental agility and effectiveness. Sometimes, if a family is bilingual, children will learn to speak both languages pretty well. This is because all normal children are born with an innate language faculty, the power of speech and the ability to develop speech logically. That is why children quickly learn to speak with great grammatical accuracy without any formal lessons in grammar. Children are programmed to think logically, because that's what grammar is: logic applied to the structure of language.

So we begin with the premise that children are very effective self-teachers who use logic and trial and error in learning language and making sense of the world around them. This makes children feel very intelligent. Why? Because at that early age their brains are growing in cognitive power at an incredible pace, much faster than any adult brain, and anyone interested in good education will understand and take advantage of this marvelous period of rapid growth. That is why some children as early as three and four can learn to read. But as every parent knows, each child is different. Little Elizabeth at three may be able to learn to read while her brother Willy won't hack it until he is six or seven. Should that alarm a parent? No. It simply means

that each child is different, and that this has to be taken into consideration. It doesn't imply inferiority or superiority, for as we all know some child prodigies, as adults, do not live up to their early promise, while many so-called average children develop into productive, inventive, creative adults.

But if you keep in mind what your ultimate goal is in educating your children, you will recognize that the differences among them will sometimes require different timing or approaches. The beauty of homeschooling is that you have the flexibility and the time to do whatever it is that has to be done and you don't have to measure your child against a roomful of other kids. Schools pay much lip service to the idea that children have different learning styles, but the school is rarely able to act effectively on that idea. The flexibility and time and one-on-one interaction that parents have is something the school, public or private, cannot duplicate.

Any sound educational program should begin with teaching the three basic academic skills which we all know as the three Rs--reading, writing, and arithmetic. The very word education implies teaching children these basic skills. Since children are dynamos of language learning in these early years they usually can learn the three Rs without any great difficulty provided that the teaching is logical and adapted to the child's own idiosyncracies. Today's public schools use such illogical and irrational teaching methods that perfectly normal, intelligent children have their brains severely damaged in the first two years of schooling. As we noted, the child is born with an innate language-based logic which, when confronted with the illogic of classroom teaching, results in the same kind of damage that occurs when gears don't mesh. Sometimes this damage can be undone if caught early enough, but the tragedy is that most children who suffer such damage must live with it throughout the rest of their lives.

## **DYSLEXIA**

One of the most prevalent results of such damage is the condition known as dyslexia. Most parents have been led to believe that dyslexia is the result of some genetic defect in their child which can only be cured by prolonged, expensive remediation. Actually, true dyslexia is limited to a very small number of retarded individuals with serious language learning problems easily detected in preschool years, or persons who have suffered brain injuries through strokes, accidents or oxygen deprivation. However, the kind of dyslexia that afflicts perfectly normal children is the result of faulty teaching in the classroom. It is a fact that the present whole-word method of teaching reading does cause the symptoms of dyslexia among many children and we shall explain how this happens. (By the way, this artificial cause of dyslexia has been known since 1929 when Dr. Samuel T. Orton wrote about it in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* under the title "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability.")

Dyslexia is caused when the teaching method requires that the child develop a holistic reflex when looking at our printed words. A holistic reflex is developed when the child is taught to look at each printed word as a whole configuration, like a Chinese character. The child is expected to look at the word and see a picture. This is done in the classroom before the child has been taught any phonics. Children are taught to read by using such strategies as looking at pictures on the page, guessing the word on the basis of its configuration or context, skipping the word, and substituting words. For example, if the word says "horse" and the child reads it as "pony" the teacher will be quite satisfied. Unbelievable, you say? Then here's a quote from a book about teaching reading in the whole-language style. The book, *Evaluation: Whole Language, Whole Child*, states on page 19:

The way you interpret what the child does will reflect what you understand reading to be. For

instance, if she reads the word *feather* for *father*, a phonics-oriented teacher might be pleased because she's come close to sounding the word out. However, if you believe that reading is a meaning-seeking process, you may be concerned that she's overly dependent on phonics at the expense of meaning. You'd be happier with a miscue such as *daddy*, even though it doesn't look or sound anything like the word in the text. At least the meaning would be intact.

Does anyone in his right mind believe that a child who reads the word "father" as "daddy" knows how to read? The child who reads "daddy" for "father" is looking at a picture, not a sequence of letters that stands for a specific sequence of speech sounds. This child is being taught to develop a holistic reflex, that is, a habit of automatically looking at all words as whole configurations. Once the child has developed this holistic reflex, he or she has also acquired a block against seeing the phonetic structure of our alphabetically written words. This *block* is what causes "dyslexia."

In other words, the kind of dyslexia which afflicts millions of perfectly normal children is induced by the whole-word teaching method, and the only way to avoid creating this form of dyslexia is to make sure that your child develops a phonetic reflex, that is, an automatic ability to associate letters with speech sounds. How does one accomplish this? First, by teaching the child to recognize the letters of the alphabet, which is not difficult to do, and second, by drilling the child in the sounds the letters stand for. For hundreds of years this was done by drilling the child in consonant-vowel combinations, such as *ba, be, bi, bo, bu, ma, me, mi, mo, mu*, etc. The purpose of the drill was to enable the child to develop a phonetic reflex, the ability to automatically associate letters with sounds. When that was achieved then the child was given words to read, short sentences, and then little stories. Once a child develops this phonetic reflex, he or she cannot become dyslexic.

## TEACHING READING AND THE ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE

In my own reading program, *Alpha-Phonics*, I basically repeat this ancient but highly effective methodology with some variation. The English alphabetic system has some anomalies or irregularities that creates some teaching problems. Much of this has to do with the fact that the English language has 44 irreducible speech sounds while our alphabet has only 26 letters. A little historical background is necessary if one is to understand what all of this means.

The alphabet was invented some 2,500 years before the birth of Christ. Prior to that invention, the earliest form of writing was pictorial. That is, the earliest scribes drew pictures on the walls of their caves or on other surfaces. We call that form of writing, pictography. In pictography, the symbols look like the things they represent. The symbol for a human being looks pretty much like a human being, the symbol for an animal looks pretty much like an animal, etc. But as civilization became more complex the scribes had to begin drawing things that did not lend themselves to depiction. For example, how do you draw pictures of such ideas or words as good and evil, now and eternity, success and failure? You can't. So what the scribes did was create symbols--we call them ideographs or logographs--which stood for these ideas or words but which had no pictorial resemblance to them. Whereas with pictographs, nobody had to teach you what the symbols stood for, with ideographs, somebody did. And the scribes created thousands of such symbols, which were very difficult to learn and easy to forget. In fact, learning them became the lifelong profession of scribes and scholars and priests, and the governing rulers were completely dependent on this literate class for their information. All in all, literacy was restricted to a small literate elite that had enormous power and influence in the culture.

But things changed radically, when about 4,500 years ago, someone invented the alphabet, someone who lived in the area today known as southern Lebanon or northern Israel. By then, some scribes had begun to use some of the logographs, or

characters, as sound indicators as an aid to memorization. But the inventor of the alphabet decided to discard the enormously complex ideographic-logographic system in its entirety, and replace it with a very simple set of symbols to stand for the irreducible speech sounds of the language. Obviously he had made a remarkable discovery: that all of human language is composed of a small number of irreducible speech sounds and that by creating a set of symbols to stand for those speech sounds, all of human language could be transcribed as a permanent record on some sort of surface.

The use of the alphabet spread throughout the ancient Western world. It did for the ancient world what the computer is doing for the modern world. With the alphabet you could do so much more with so much less. The Israelites wrote the holy Scriptures in alphabetic writing, the Greeks wrote philosophy, history and drama in alphabetic writing, and the Romans devised their own alphabet based originally on the Greek. Here's where we come to our modern-day problem with the English alphabet

When the Romans conquered the British islands, they imposed their own Latin alphabet on the people who lived there. English is composed of 44 sounds whereas the Latin alphabet has only 26 letters, hardly enough to go around. So what did the Brits do? They adapted the Latin alphabet to their language, and they did this by having some letters stand for more than one sound and having some sounds represented by more than one letter. For example, the letter *a* stands for the long *a* as in *apron* and *April*, it stands for the short *a* as in *cat* or *fan*, it stands for the *a* as in *father* or *car*, and it stands for the *a* as in *all* and *ball*. So how does a child learn which sound to articulate when he or she sees the letter *a*? If you teach the letter sounds in their spelling families, children learn them very well. That is the way we teach them in *Alpha-Phonics*.

As for some of our sounds being represented by more than one letter, our typically English "th" is represented by t-h, the "sh" is represented by s-h, and "ch" is

represented by c-h. And of course we have many irregularities in our spellings. Such simple words as *to, do, who, have, any, eye* are either at variance with the other words in their spelling families or are one of a kind. But children seem to learn the exceptions to the rules with no great difficulty since these words, if pronounced as they are spelled, would make no sense.

**MAKING LEARNING TO READ EASY**

In developing my Alpha-Phonics program I took all of these problems into consideration. Inasmuch as I wanted to make learning to read as easy and enjoyable as possible, I decided to start with the simplest and most regular aspects of our alphabetic system, introducing the irregular words as they came up in the context of regular spellings and pronunciations. I found that this system works quite effectively.

Thus, in seeking a reading program, I highly recommend my own. This doesn't mean that there aren't other good programs on the market. There are, and you can look them over at any homeschool convention or book fair. However, the most important thing to remember is that the child must develop a phonetic reflex in order to become a reader who enjoys reading and can read easily, accurately and fluently. At what age should you begin to teach a child to read? As we said earlier, each child is different. However, if your child has developed a decent speaking vocabulary and expresses a desire to learn to read, then you can start very simply by first teaching the child the alphabet letters and then teaching the letter sounds and letter combinations in as simple and direct a manner as possible.

Patience is the most important ingredient in home education. Patience and the ability to try something else if what one is doing is not working very well. If the child is having difficulty remembering a particular sound or can't seem to catch on to the idea that letters represent sounds, do not get impatient. You may be dealing with the matter

of intellectual growth and understanding. Our alphabetic system is an abstract system dealing with abstract graphic symbols. Spoken words in and of themselves are abstractions. For example, the word *table* is an utterance that represents a concrete object. Children learn such speech abstractions quite naturally. But the idea that letters stand for irreducible speech sounds may be difficult for a preschool child to grasp, since he or she would tend to look at the printed word as a total configuration, like a Chinese character. And that often happens when preschool children are "reading" preschool books by memorizing the words in the stories.

### THE DR. SEUSS TRAP

That is a danger that parents of preschoolers must be aware of when they give their children little readers like the Dr. Seuss books before the child has been taught the alphabet or the letter sounds. In fact, the Dr. Seuss books were written to enable the preschool child to develop a sight vocabulary as a prelude to being taught to read in the whole-word method. This was confirmed by Dr. Seuss himself in an interview in *Arizona* magazine in 1981. Because his books were so simple, many people assumed that they were easy to write. He said:

They think I did it in twenty minutes. That damned *Cat in the Hat* took nine months until I was satisfied. I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list. That was due to the Dewey revolt in the Twenties, in which they threw out phonic reading and went to word recognition, as if you're reading a Chinese pictograph instead of blending sounds of different letters. I think killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country. Anyway, they had it all worked out that a healthy child at the age of four can learn so many words in a week and that's all. So there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, "I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme that'll be the title of my book. (That's genius at work.) I found "cat" and "hat" and I said, "The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*."

The lesson to be learned is that when a parent reads to a child a Dr. Seuss book, or any other preschool reader, and points to each word as it is being read, the child may indeed develop a holistic reflex by simply memorizing the several hundred words in these books. And if the book comes with an audio cassette tape which the child can listen to while "reading" the words, that too may lead to the development of a holistic reflex. Converting that child into a phonetic reader will not be easy if the habit of looking at each word as a total configuration is strongly established.

Thus, if you are going to read to your preschool child, explain that the words are made up of letters that stand for sounds, and demonstrate that concept by sounding out the words in the story. In that way, the child will anticipate being taught to read in the proper phonetic way. However, if the child is too young for that, simply read the story and have the child look at the pictures instead of the words. If the child wants to know a word, then explain the phonetic structure of the word. Most preschool children will understand you when you say that the letter d in dog stands for "duh," etc. In that way you will prevent future problems, problems that will be costly to remediate.

There are special, very expensive, private schools that deal with dyslexic children. They are filled with children from professional homes. Simply because a father or mother is a professor or a lawyer or a chemist doesn't mean that he or she understands how children should be taught to read and how they develop reading problems. Professionals in other fields assume that the professional educators know what they are doing and that they would not be using teaching methods that cause learning problems. But the facts speak for themselves.

It was Rudolf Flesch who in 1955 revealed the cause of reading disability in his famous book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*. In that book Flesch made it quite clear that the cause of reading disability was the whole-word teaching method. Yet, over forty years later the problem persists because the educators have their own progressive agenda

and refuse to return to the tried and true methods of the past. I strongly recommend that parents read Dr. Flesch's book, which is still in print in paperback. It will give them an insight into the ongoing war between advocates of whole language and advocates of intensive, systematic phonics.

After reading Dr. Flesch's book, then read my book on the same subject, *The Whole Language/OBE Fraud*. It will round out your education on the matter of teaching reading and make you an expert on the subject, which is good to be when confronting the professional educators and district superintendents. It's good to be able to question them with the confidence that you have a knowledge and understanding of the problem which many of them don't even have. The most ignorant are usually the directors of reading instruction in your school district. Half of them probably never heard of Rudolf Flesch, let alone Sam Blumenfeld. But if you do your homework you will be able to let them know that they can't deceive you, and that you actually know more than they do. In fact, it is not at all difficult to know more than the professional educators for the simple reason that they will have been kept away from knowledge of the truth by their own biased professors of education.

On the other hand, you have the freedom to read the books that the educators shun, and that puts you at an advantage. Being able to tell the educators what's wrong with what they teach and how they teach it will hold you in good stead should you have to contend with an arrogant, condescending superintendent who thinks he knows it all. Nothing better will bring such a superintendent down to size than an awareness that you know more than he does. And it doesn't take much to become an expert in reading pedagogy. All you have to do is read the two books already mentioned. But don't be surprised if the knowledge you supply the superintendent doesn't result in any change in policy. He may decide, however, to avoid any further contact with you and thereby leave you alone.

## REMEDIATING A POOR READER

Meanwhile, if you are going to homeschool a youngster who has already been victimized by whole language, you will have a tough remedial job to do. First, listen to your child read aloud. You will notice that he or she leaves out words that are there, puts in words that aren't there, misreads words, substitutes words, mutilates words, guesses at words, and truncates words. For example, if the word says "newspaper" the child may read it as "paper," or if the word says "telephone" he or she may read it as "phone." To remediate this kind of sight reader, the first thing you must do is teach the youngster our entire English alphabetic system. That can easily be done with *Alpha-Phonics*. Even though the older child may already know many of the letter sounds, you will want to make sure that the student knows all of sounds and spelling forms in the system so that he or she can begin to develop a phonetic reflex.

Then you must show the learner how to apply this phonetic knowledge to his or her reading. The way you do that is to have the learner read some text aloud--it could be an article in the *Reader's Digest*--and you must stop the reader every time he or she makes an error. Ask the student to reread the sentence until he or she becomes aware of the error that was made. The problem with sight readers is that they are not aware of the errors they make since they were taught that it was okay to guess at words, substitute words, leave out words, put in words, etc. Thus, to be told that these are errors will be news to the sight reader. But explain to the sight reader that in order to become a phonetic reader, accuracy is more important than speed.

Also, keep a blank notebook at hand so that any new words the reader comes across can be written down, divided into syllables, and reread from time to time as the list of new words grows longer. Going over several pages of these words will help the reader recognize them quickly when seeing them later in print. Also, for purposes of comprehension, have the reader look up these words in the dictionary and write their

definitions. Don't even assume that the child knows the meaning of all the words he or she can read. Words that often seem simple to adults may be totally unknown to the learner.

Expanding vocabulary requires real work. It requires a lot of reading and writing, a lot of looking up of definitions. The stunted vocabularies of so many young people today is due to the fact that they don't read enough challenging material, they don't hear enough good vocabulary spoken in their everyday conversations. But you can help your child develop a good vocabulary by having him or her read stories and novels by Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Dickens and other 19th Century writers. In fact, the more 19th Century literature your child reads the more extensive his or her vocabulary will become. And it is generally recognized that the better your vocabulary, the better your chances of becoming a leader. This insight was gleaned from an interview of John Gaston, head of the Human Engineering Laboratory in Fort Worth, Texas, published in the *Dallas Morning News* of Aug. 26, 1971. Mr. Gaston said:

The one thing successful people have in common isn't high aptitudes -- it's high vocabulary, and it's within everybody's reach. Success actually correlates more with vocabulary than with the gifts we're born with.

Who do you think ranks at the top in vocabulary? It's executives. They beat everybody. A man of little education might own or head an enterprise or a well-educated man might head a big corporation, but both of them will know the hard words that stump other people. It's vocabulary that makes the boss the boss.

In other words, the smaller the vocabulary of your child, the lower the chances are that he or she will be able to attain the kind of position in life that he or she would like to have. And the best way to expand vocabulary early in life is to have your child read books written in the 19th Century with their more extensive vocabularies and complex sentences. Each new word your child learns increases his or her knowledge, for each

word represents additional knowledge.

Anthony Robbins, the well-known peak-performance coach and consultant, had these wise words to say about developing a good vocabulary:

People with impoverished vocabularies lead emotionally impoverished lives. People with rich vocabularies have a multihued palette of colors with which to paint their life's experience, not only for others, but for themselves as well.

Need more be said?

## Chapter Five:

# Teaching Writing

Teaching your child to write should be a very important part of your homeschooling program. The public schools have done such a terrible job in teaching students to write that we've seen an incredible decline not only in handwriting but also the ability of young Americans to write intelligent, grammatically correct sentences. Since children acquire a grammatic sense so early in life as they learn to speak their mother tongue, how is it that they lose this grammatical sense as they mature into young adults? The answer is quite simple. Schools no longer emphasize or even teach grammar, and the teaching of penmanship is a thing of the past. The result has been a national handwriting disaster.

In the previous chapter we emphasized the need to teach a child to read in the proper phonetic way, and we emphasized the need for your child to develop a good vocabulary. We feel equally strong about the need to teach a child to write well. In the first place, writing is the opposite side of the literacy coin. As Francis Bacon wrote many centuries ago: "Reading maketh a full man . . . and writing an exact man." In other words, the ability to express your thoughts on paper requires that you think out clearly what it is you want to say, and what it is you want to communicate to others.

The first step in helping your child develop a decent handwriting is to teach the physical and mechanical aspects of writing. In the last ten years or so, schools have been encouraging children to write even before they know how to read. They call this method "invented spelling" in which the child is told to write before he even knows how to hold the writing instrument or form the letters. It is alleged that this kind of writing

exercise encourages spontaneity and creativity. What it actually does, however, is produce poor spellers and poor handwriting. The idea that a child no longer has to be taught how to hold a writing instrument correctly has led to some of the worst writing habits that now afflict Americans.

All of that can be avoided by teaching your child how to hold the pen or pencil correctly and how to write in the correct traditional manner. First of all, as a homeschooling parent, it is assumed that you want your child to learn to write well. That assumption is based on my questioning of parents at my seminars on handwriting. I pose the question thus: "Educators now tell us that children no longer need to be taught handwriting because they now have typewriters, computers, word processors and laptops to do the writing for them. How many parents believe that the educators are correct and that we should therefore stop teaching children how to write?" The answer I invariably get is that parents still think that children should be taught how to write. Why? Because it is a skill that will be used by the child for the rest of his or her life, and no one can know or predict what needs the future adult will have for good handwriting twenty years down the line. Also, you can't carry a laptop or a word processor everywhere you go.

The question then becomes: "How should we teach children to write? Should we start with ball-and-stick and then in the third year switch over to cursive, or should we start with cursive first?" My answer is quite clear: teach your child to write a standard cursive script from the very beginning. Do not, I repeat, do not teach ball-and-stick! If you teach ball-and-stick first, your child may never develop a good cursive script. However, if you teach cursive first, your child will always be able to learn to print well later on and in a style much more pleasing than ball-and-stick.

The reason for this is simple. If you teach ball-and-stick first, the child develops habits of holding the writing instrument and forming the letters in ways that make a transition to cursive difficult if not impossible. That is why so many people keep

printing for the rest of their lives. Some learners develop a kind of hybrid script -- part print, part cursive. The only children who manage to develop a good cursive script are those who have been practising it secretly on their own or those willing to take the time and make the effort to develop a good cursive script. And, as we know, the latter are in the minority.

Another reason why the transition from ball-and-stick to cursive produces such poor results is that many children resent having to learn an entirely new way of writing after having spent two years perfecting their printing. Why should they change, they ask. Also, in the third grade, teachers do not have the time to supervise the development of good cursive penmanship and the students, already doing a lot of writing in class, are often unwilling to take the time and do the practice required to develop a good cursive script.

But apparently all of those schools that introduce cursive in the second and third grade must believe that it has some value, otherwise why would schools bother to even teach it at all? One good reason to teach cursive, of course, is that if you can't write cursive you may not be able to read it when others write it. However, the problem is that by requiring the students to learn ball-and-stick first, the schools create obstacles to the development of a good cursive handwriting.

The usual reason given for teaching ball-and-stick first in school is that first graders do not have the fine motor skills or muscular dexterity in their fingers to be able to write cursive at that age. But that, of course, is utter nonsense, since this author was taught cursive writing in the first grade back in the days when everyone was taught cursive in the first grade. At that time it was established practice to do so. We were all trained in penmanship and did the various exercises--the ovals, the rainbows, the ups and downs--that helped us develop good hand and arm movements that contributed to good handwriting. What most parents or teachers do not know is that cursive writing was taught in the first grade in all schools until about the late 1930s

when the changeover to ball-and-stick took place.

That changeover had a lot to do with the implementation of the progressive agenda which downplayed the development of the academic and intellectual skills in favor of developing the social skills and the affective domain, which deals with values, beliefs, and feelings. But homeschooling permits a parent to reinstate the primacy of developing the academic and intellectual skills, and the best time to start that process is in the first grade.

Many parents start that process in the preschool and kindergarten years when children are learning language so rapidly. They enjoy reading to their children, teaching them the alphabet and numbers. But as we have pointed out, each child is different and parents should not be disappointed if Johnny or Susie do not indicate being child prodigies. A prodigy by definition is someone with extraordinary talent or genius, and thus prodigies are rare.

However, when it comes to writing, you must start by teaching your child how to hold the writing instrument: cradled between thumb and forefinger (also known as the index finger) which is next to the thumb, with the tip of the instrument resting on the long finger next to the forefinger, in a relaxed position, enabling a writer to write for hours without tiring. In other words, the instrument is held lightly and comfortably by the three extended slightly bent fingers so that these fingers do all the work. I've seen some individuals holding a pen with the three fingers folded under, forming a fist. This is a very uncomfortable way of holding a pen and requires movement of the entire fist to form the letters. In the correctly held position, the three fingers meet and the pen pokes out from the small triangle formed by the fingertips. When the child is ready to write, the paper is tilted counter-clockwise so that the proper slant of the cursive letters can be made.

On the other hand, when children are taught to print first, the writing instrument is held straight up with three or four fingers in a tight grip with much pressure being

applied downward on the paper placed in a straight position. When these children are then taught cursive in the second or third grade they do not change the way they hold the writing instrument because a muscular habit has been established that is not easy to alter. That is why so many children develop poor cursive handwriting because of the way they hold their pens.

Children do not easily unlearn bad habits. That is why it is so important to teach the basics in the right manner from the very beginning. Which is why I advise parents that there are two very important no-no's in primary education: do not teach anything that later has to be unlearned, and do not let a child develop a bad habit. Instruct the learner to do it right from the start. It will require close supervision and diligence on the part of the parent, but it will all pay off in the future.

## **HOW CURSIVE WRITING HELPS READING**

A question most often asked by parents when the assertion is made that cursive should be taught first is: won't learning cursive interfere with learning to read words in print? The emphatic answer is: Not at all. Those of us who learned cursive first had no problem learning to read print. In fact, it helped us. How? Well, one of the biggest problems children have when learning to read primary-school print and write in ball-and-stick is that so many of the letters look alike--such as b's and d's; f's and t's; g's, q's and p's. This causes many children to become confused and make many errors. In cursive, however, there is a big difference between a b and a d. In writing cursive, a b starts like an l while a d begins like writing the letter a. In other words, in cursive, children do not confuse b's and d's because the movements of the hand--the muscular reflexes--make it impossible to confuse the two letters. And this knowledge is transferred to the reading process. Thus, by teaching children the distinctive differences between letters, learning to write cursive helps learning to read print.

Another aid to reading is that cursive requires children to write from left to right so that the letters will join with one another in proper sequence. The blending of the sounds is made more apparent by the joining of the letters. In ball-and-stick, some children write the letters backwards, and often the spacing is so erratic that you can't tell where one word ends and another begins. Cursive writing teaches spatial discipline and gives the writer greater control over the formation of letters and the spacing between words.

Another important benefit of cursive is that it helps the child learn to spell correctly since the hand acquires knowledge of spelling patterns through repeated hand movements. This is the same phenomenon that occurs when pianists or typists learn patterns of hand movements through continued repetition. These patterns of hand movement become so well learned, that a typist or pianist knows when he or she has made an error merely by an irregular hand movement, one that just doesn't feel right. Of course, the pianist also has the sound of the music to go by, but hand movement and sound go together. The typist, on the other hand, feels the error before he or she actually sees it on the paper in the machine or on the computer screen. And one is annoyed when an error slips by without being detected. But errors can be reduced to a minimum when hand and eye, cursive writing and printed text work in harmony.

Another question often asked by parents of six-year-olds is what will their children do when asked on a job application to "please print." My answer is that I don't advocate not teaching a child to print. I simply say teach cursive first, teach print later. Besides, that child will have plenty of time to learn to print between the first grade and applying for a job as a teenager.

The question is often asked: "Isn't cursive harder to learn than print?" No. It's just the opposite. It is difficult, if not unnatural, for children to draw straight lines and perfect circles, which is required in ball-and-stick, when they would much rather be

doing curves and curls. In fact, all of cursive consists of only three movements: the undercurve, the overcurve, and the up and down. That's all there is to it. In addition, in cursive the child writes a whole word before lifting the pen, while with ball-and-stick printing each separate letter can become a slow and laborious production.

Another important point is that it takes time and supervision to help a child develop a good cursive script, and one has the time in the first grade, not the third grade. That's why it seems like such a waste of time to have the child develop competency in ball-and-stick when all of that is going to be replaced by cursive. The time would be much better spent working on cursive to begin with. The first-grade child may start out writing in a large scrawl, but in only a matter of weeks, that scrawl will be controlled by those little fingers and become a very nice manageable script. Practice makes perfect, and children should be given plenty of practice writing cursive.

And so, if you've wondered why your grandparents usually had better handwriting than you do, well now you know the answer. They were taught cursive first at a time when penmanship was considered important since people in those days did much more writing than they do today. But even with our laptops and word processors, the need to write by hand will always be with us. As long as people want to jot down poetry in a notebook, keep private diaries, write love letters, send postcards, take notes at a meeting or seminar or press conference, compile shopping lists, send Christmas and birthday cards, sign autograph albums, write names and addresses in a date book, write a story or an article without a typewriter or computer, writing by hand will be one of the most useful skills anyone can have. As an author, I get many handwritten letters from readers who obviously don't have writing machines at their disposal. But if you can't write, you won't write.

Thus, if you concentrate on helping your child develop a good cursive handwriting, you eliminate the nonsense of first starting with ball-and-stick, then moving to slant ball-and-stick, or some other transitional script, finally ending up with a

horrible looking cursive, or having your child print for the rest of his or her life.

Children will only make the effort to learn one primary way of writing which they will use for the rest of their lives. They don't need to be taught three ways, two of which will be discarded.

Incidentally, one should not object to children drawing letters on their own when learning the alphabet. But once they start learning to read, then formal instruction in cursive should begin so that they can do the writing exercises that go with the reading.

### **TEACHING THE LEFT-HANDED**

Can left-handed children be taught cursive first? Yes. In fact, left-handed children gain special benefits from learning cursive first. When left-handed children are taught ball-and-stick first, their tendency is to use the hook position in writing since the writing instrument is held straight up and the paper is also positioned straight. This means that as the child proceeds printing from left to right, the child's arm will cover what has already been written. This can be avoided if the left-handed child learns to write from the bottom up, the way right-handed children write. But this is difficult, if not impossible, to do when printing ball-and-stick.

However, if a left-handed child is taught to write cursive first, he or she must then tilt the paper clockwise and must write from the bottom up, since it is impossible to use the hook position if the paper is turned clockwise. Right-handers, of course, turn the paper counter-clockwise. But left-handers are quite capable of developing as good a cursive handwriting as any right-hander by writing from the bottom up, provided they learn to hold the writing instrument in the same relaxed manner as the right-handed cursive writer. It is even possible that the secret of good handwriting may be in the way the pen is held and the proper tilt of the paper.

All of this must lead to one simple conclusion: teach cursive first and print later.

There are few things that help enhance a child's academic self-esteem more than the development of good handwriting. It helps reading, it helps spelling, and because writing is made easy, accurate, and esthetically pleasant, it helps thinking.

However, as in teaching anything, be patient with your child as he or she learns to write. There are some children for whom writing, no matter which style you teach, is a difficult art to master. Just as some children are physically inept but otherwise perfectly normal, one simply has to accept the idiosyncracies a child was born with. Aim for good performance, but if you see that your child is having inordinate difficulty in learning to write, relax and let the child work out the problem for himself. But give him plenty of opportunity to practice using the correct forms and encourage him to do the best he can.

I've been asked by some parents about the desirability of teaching a child to write D'Nealian or italic rather than cursive. There is no doubt that italic is esthetically nice to look at, but I believe that it is more a form of calligraphy than a standard cursive handwriting. The child may want to learn this form of writing later on when making greeting cards or posters. As for D'Nealian, it is too close to a print script to be considered as a desirable form of handwriting. It is mostly used as a transition script from ball-and-stick to cursive. As for teaching a basic handwriting that will be used for a lifetime, I recommend sticking to our standard, practical cursive script. Children are always free in later life to learn calligraphy, printing, or any other form of writing that pleases them.

## Chapter Six: Teaching Spelling

There is a movement among educators to denigrate the teaching of spelling as an unnecessary waste of time. In this day and age of computers, we are told that we no longer have to learn to spell but can now rely on "Spellcheck" to do the spelling for us. But when a vice president can be ridiculed into political oblivion for having misspelled "potato," it is obvious that the ability to spell still remains something of importance in the minds of average Americans. Poor Dan Quayle, no matter what else he does in life, he will be remembered for his spelling gaffe. He will be the butt of comedians' jokes for as long as he lives and, because of that, many people will never take him seriously. Even those who consider him to be a competent politician will tend to regard him as damaged goods. So no matter what the educators say about wasting time learning to spell, Americans, particularly employers, now and forever, will rightly or wrongly judge the intelligence and education of individuals by their ability to spell correctly. All of which means that homeschoolers have no choice but to teach their children the importance of learning to spell correctly.

Learning to spell, like learning anything else, requires diligence, repetitive work, and above all, an interest in, if not a love of, learning language. And learning to spell English requires particular effort because we have so many irregular spellings, that is, spellings that do not conform to a regularly phonetic system of writing. The reasons for this are quite compelling. First of all, as we explained in an earlier chapter, we have an alphabet of 26 letters to stand for 44 language sounds. Some of our letters, particularly the vowels, stand for more than one sound, and some sounds are represented by more than one letter. So learning to spell requires a thorough

knowledge of our alphabetic system with its many spelling forms. In addition, we have many archaic spellings in English that go back to the way these words were pronounced centuries ago. The pronunciations may have changed, but not the spellings.

Also, English has incorporated many foreign words with their foreign spellings, such as *bureau*, *facade*, *lieutenant*, and *rendezvous*. Another problem is that English is pronounced differently in different English-speaking countries and often in different parts of the same country. But the spellings remain essentially the same except for such words as *honor-honour*, *center-centre*, *theater-theatre* -- the first version being American, the second British. Otherwise, anyone who can read English will be able to read an English-language newspaper or magazine published in the U.S., England, South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong, India, Israel, New Zealand, or elsewhere.

Once we've decided that spelling is important, how do we go about teaching it? First, we teach a child to read phonetically, that is, we teach the child our English alphabetic system. Then we teach the child how to spell all of the single-syllable words that conform to that system. We also teach all of those frequently used single-syllable words that have irregular spellings, such as: *to*, *do*, *two*, *who*, *the*, *are*, *eye*, *were*, *there*, *their*, *four*, etc. These spellings are best learned by writing them in simple sentences. Then we learn to spell those words with archaic spellings and silent letters, such as: *should*, *would*, *ought*, *caught*, *cough*, *eight*, *light*, *high*, *write*, *hour*, *ghost*, *know*, etc.

We then teach the spelling of two-syllable words. We start with the simplest combinations of two regular short-vowel syllables, such as: *hotdog*, *boxtop*, *hatbox*, *jacket*, *rocket*, *napkin*, *picnic*, *cabin*, *topic*, *traffic*, etc. Then we teach two-syllable words with short vowels and consonant blends, such as: *chopstick*, *plastic*, *strictness*, *Franklin*, *bashful*, *singing*, *craftsman*, *draftsman*, etc. Next, we teach two-syllable words with short, long, and other vowel spellings with and without consonant blends,

such as: *carport, viewpoint, eyeful, triumph, phantom, earful, telltale, goodbye, thinker, welcome, token, report, contact, etc.*

When you teach the spelling of a word like *contact*, you can also teach the spelling of *contract, attract, subtract, tractor, retract, distract*, etc. Likewise, with a word like *strict*, you can also teach the spelling of *district, restrict, strictly, strictness, constrict*, etc. In other words, we teach spelling in word families, so that the child can learn to spell a whole group of words rather than one word at a time. In fact, this was the methodology used by Noah Webster in his famous spelling books that sold millions of copies to the parents and teachers of the young scholars of early America.

From two-syllable words, we go to three-, four-, and five-syllable words. Again, wherever possible, teach groups of words, such as: *emphasis, emphasize, emphasizing, emphatic, emphatically; temper, temperate, temperance, temperment, tempermental, tempermentally*. Of course, there are many one-of-a-kind words that must be learned individually, such as: *chocolate, vertigo, licorice, Mississippi*, etc.

One of the most frequent questions asked by parents of older children who can't spell is how can such a youngster be taught to improve his or her spelling. The problem with such children is that they were obviously not taught our English alphabetic system in primary school and therefore tend to spell everything as they hear it or say it. Thus, *write* or *right* is spelled *rite*, *honest* is spelled *onist*, *rough* is spelled *ruff*, *have to* is spelled *hafta*, *going to* is spelled *gonna*, etc.

The only way to correct this kind of situation is to first teach the youngster our English alphabetic system with all of its idiosyncrasies. Then have the student copy good text into a notebook. By correctly copying interesting text, the student will become accustomed to spelling the words correctly, for when the muscles of the hand repeatedly perform the same sequence of movements, the hand gains the same kind of knowledge that the hands of a touch typist or a pianist acquire. Professional skaters and dancers apply the same principle in training their muscles to perform certain

movements in a specifically desired sequence. In other words, the student must write the words frequently in order to acquire that muscular knowledge. Therefore, the more copying of good text the student does, the better he or she will learn to spell.

Let the student choose the texts to be copied, so that he or she will be interested in the content of the text. An article from an encyclopedia, a short piece from a magazine, a column from a newspaper, a poem, the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address would provide suitable copy material. To see how well the student is improving in spelling, test him or her using words from the texts the student has copied. If the student complains, just remind him or her of what happened to Dan Quayle when he misspelled a simple word like potato.

Also, learning to spell will give the student many opportunities to use the dictionary, the greatest language source book at the student's command. And, inasmuch as the student will be learning to spell words the meanings of which he or she may not have yet learned, this will be an excellent occasion to expand vocabulary by defining the words being spelled. Reading the dictionary itself can be entertaining as well as educational. Also, games such as Scrabble can be useful in helping a child develop an interest in language. Remember, language was what the child learned first because he or she had a compelling interest in being able to understand the words of others and being able to communicate with others by using words. Therefore, new words should be as intrinsically interesting as the first words learned as an infant.

Concerning vocabulary, Mark Twain once said: "A powerful agent is the right word. Whenever we come upon one of those intensely right words . . . the resulting effect is physical as well as spiritual, and electrically prompt." This is the kind of experience with words that a child should be taught to enjoy. As we pointed out in the previous chapter, mastery of one's language and its expansive vocabulary is the key to success. Learning to spell can be an adventurous challenge on the high road to success.

## Chapter Seven: Teaching Arithmetic

*Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them.*

-- Alfred North Whitehead

Anyone looking over a primary school curriculum these days will notice that the word arithmetic is no longer used. Everything having to do with numbers is now called math. But by doing away with the word arithmetic, the educators have also managed to erase the substantial difference that exists between arithmetic and mathematics. Indeed, the difference between arithmetic and mathematics is so substantial that not knowing the nature of this difference can substantially handicap a student.

First, it is important to know that arithmetic is a counting system pure and simple. It basically answers the question of "how many" or "how much." It deals with quantity in four ways or four functions. In *addition* we count forward. In *subtraction* we count backward. In *multiplication* we count forward in multiples. In *division* we count backward in multiples. Mathematics, on the other hand, deals with relationships. It uses arithmetic calculations as well as a host of other symbols in carrying out its various functions. But before anyone can become proficient in mathematics, he or she must first master arithmetic.

Whenever I give a seminar on arithmetic to homeschooling parents, I ask the audience how many of them use algebra frequently. Maybe a hand or two go up. There are always a couple of engineers in the audience. I then ask how many of them use geometry frequently. Again maybe a hand or two go up. Then I ask how many

use trigonometry frequently. Again, a hand or two go up. I then ask how many use calculus frequently, and I get the same sparse response. Finally I ask how many in the audience use arithmetic frequently, and every hand goes up. "So why don't they teach arithmetic anymore," I ask.

The point is that everyone uses arithmetic everyday: buying groceries, making change, balancing checkbooks, calculating income tax, measuring floor space, calculating mortgage interest, etc. In other words, while learning math may lead to good technical careers in science and industry, you need arithmetic for common everyday use. Indeed, you need arithmetic in order to survive! So why don't they teach arithmetic anymore? Most educators would reply that they do teach arithmetic, but not in the way that it used to be taught. Now they teach "problem solving," and they don't mind if the students work together in cooperative groups, or count on their fingers. It's the new new math that we're in!

But the homeschooler need not be bound by the dysfunctional theories of educators. Any parent knows why his or her child should be taught arithmetic. This does not mean that the child should not, at some later date, be introduced to higher math. In fact, a good grounding in basic arithmetic provides the student with an essential introduction to mathematics. But it is obvious that most people will never make use of higher math even though they will have been taught some of its basic elements in high school or college. But they will, of necessity, be using arithmetic every day for the rest of their lives.

The challenge then becomes how do we go about teaching arithmetic most effectively in the primary grades. When I was writing my book, *How to Tutor*, back in the 1970's, I became fascinated with the subject of arithmetic. What was its origins? Who invented it? How has it been taught over the centuries? Like so many Americans, I had been taught arithmetic in public school in simple rote fashion with no understanding whatever of what arithmetic was. The teacher taught the arithmetic

functions in a perfunctory way, and we all learned them -- some better than others. But we were never given any insight into the marvels of the system itself.

We all learn to count pretty early in life and we take for granted the symbols that stand for numbers and functions. But where did these symbols come from? Who invented them and when were they invented? According to an article in *The World of Mathematics* (Vol. 1, p. 453).

[A]lthough our European and American numerals are often spoken of as Arabic, they have never been used by the Arabs. They came to us by means of a book on arithmetic which apparently was written in India about twelve hundred years ago, and was translated into Arabic soon afterward. By chance this book was carried by merchants to Europe and there was translated from the Arabic into Latin. This was hundreds of years before books were first printed in Europe, and this arithmetic book was known only in manuscript form. Since it had been translated from Arabic, the numerals were supposed to be those used by the Arabs, but this was not the case. They might be called Hindu-Arabic, but since they took their present shapes in Europe they may better be called European or Modern numerals.

Prior to the invention of our modern number symbols, the earliest form of number notation were simple unit lines, which later gave way to alphabet letters. The Roman numerals were a combination of unit lines and letters. Homeschoolers could help their children understand the nature of modern arithmetic by studying the number notation systems of the ancient world including Roman numerals which are still used today. This should be done well after the student has memorized the arithmetic facts.

Most children begin learning to count soon after they have begun learning to speak the language. As they learn the letters of the alphabet, they should also be learning the number symbols. Since a number is merely a symbol for a specific quantity, you can use any kind of convenient concrete units to first demonstrate this. Pennies are an excellent way to introduce counting and the number symbols which represent specific quantities. Rather than using pictures of monkeys or candy canes to

represent concrete units, pennies are far more appropriate since much of what we use arithmetic for has to do with money. When the child has firmly understood the meaning of the symbols in terms of the quantities they stand for, then the use of these symbols will be well understood. They save time and make life easier. The number symbols are also used to designate age, time, days in the calendar, baseball innings, etc.

The transition from the use of ancient quantity notations to modern numerals provided mankind with a new, highly efficient way of mental calculation. Man no longer needed concrete units such as beads, or sticks, or abacuses with which to do calculations. He could now use his brain and paper and pencil. But in order to do this he had to memorize the basic arithmetic facts.

At age five and six children can learn the arithmetic facts by rote. But before having the child memorize an arithmetic fact, first demonstrate it with concretes. For example, to demonstrate that 3 plus 4 equal 7, line up three pennies and four pennies and have the child count them to get the total. Then write the fact in numerals,  $3+4=7$ , and tell the child that this is what he must memorize in order to be able to use this fact in the most convenient way. After you've demonstrated all of the addition and subtraction facts, then demonstrate the multiplication facts. You can demonstrate 9 times 8 by setting eight rows of nine pennies each. Have the child count them out until he gets the total of 72. After this laborious task, he will realize that the symbolic representation of  $8 \times 9 = 72$  is a much easier and faster way to state this fact which he must now commit to memory by rote. Also show how nine rows of eight pennies each produce the same total with the symbolic representation of  $9 \times 8 = 72$ .

Rote learning is the easiest form of learning. All it requires is repetition. The best way to teach anyone to learn anything by rote is to have the learner see the fact over and over again until it is indelibly imprinted on the mind. Flash cards and tables can be used most effectively. But if a learner can't remember a particular fact, do not ask him or her to "figure it out," because the learner will then start counting by ones or by

using fingers. Once that becomes habitual, the learner will not bother to memorize the fact, and this will become a handicap to effective mental calculation. Flash the correct answer to the learner until he or she learns it cold and no longer has to "figure it out."

When the youngster has mastered the arithmetic facts, he or she should be taught about another important feature of our modern arithmetic system: the idea of place value. Place value is derived from a device used by the Hindus in India to organize counting. The device was a counting board divided into columns. The column to the furthest right was for units, the next column to the left was for tens, the next column to the left was for hundreds, the next to the left for thousands, etc. Concretes, such as pebbles or beads, were placed in each column. The ten number symbols -- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 -- were used to designate totals at the bottom of each column. The zero was invented to designate an empty column. Thus, the number 4,506 meant that there were, from right to left, six units, no tens, 5 hundreds, and 4 thousands. The invention of zero, by the way, is considered one of the great inventions of mankind even though the inventor is unknown. The idea that you can have a symbol for nothing sort of boggles the imagination.

Thus it was the combining of the Hindu counting board and the ten number symbols that gave us our magnificent base-ten, place-value counting system. It is a system that relies on memorization of the basic arithmetic facts for its most effective use. That is why it is so ridiculous for modern educators to denigrate rote learning when our arithmetic system requires it. That is why children must be taught the arithmetic facts by rote memorization. Rote memorization can be fun if taught in the proper way. It need not be tedious or tiresome or boring if the teacher or parent comes to the subject with as much excitement and wonder as it deserves. Memorizing the arithmetic facts will give the child a power virtually as great as his or her power to use language.

The alphabet and the base-ten, place-value arithmetic system are mankind's

two greatest intellectual inventions. They represent the basic intellectual technology without which the computer age could never have come into existence. And they remain the basic intellectual technology that every child must master if he or she is not only to survive but to thrive in the new information age. When you come to that realization, you understand why it is so important for your child to acquire this intellectual technology, and you are inclined to teach it with genuine reverence and excitement.

Believe it or not, our arithmetic system is less than 500 years old. First, our number symbols, including the symbol for zero, had to evolve from their ancient notations to their present forms and be universally accepted. Second, our place-value system, derived from the counting board, had to be perfected and standardized. All of this took hundreds of years. But it required the invention of the printing press in the 15th century and the development of paper before standardization could take place. The multiplication table itself was not invented until the late 15th century, and the present method of long division first appeared in an arithmetic book published in Italy in 1491, a year before Columbus discovered America.

All of the standardized methods used to carry out a variety of arithmetic calculations, called algorithms, also took years of development. But once these calculating tools are learned by a student, they will be used for the rest of one's life. It is usually after the mastery of our arithmetic system that a student can become interested in the mysterious, baffling, and wonderful world of numbers and number patterns that has fascinated mathematicians for centuries. But most of us will be content to be able to use arithmetic for the practical, mundane, everyday purposes it was devised.

Which arithmetic curriculum should you use in your home education? There are many on the market, and they can be inspected at any book fair held at any homeschool convention. The Saxon math books have achieved a rather good

reputation among homeschoolers. Better still, talk to other homeschoolers and ask them how they taught their children arithmetic and whether or not they were pleased with the curriculum they used. You might as well take advantage of the experiences of other homeschoolers. Also, consult the various publications that now evaluate homeschool products and curricula. Incidentally, my own book, *How to Tutor*, has a complete section on arithmetic with a history of how the system was developed.

Also, since you will want your child to understand the practical uses to which arithmetic can be applied, open a savings account for your child and teach him or her how to calculate the interest earned. Have your child purchase shares in a mutual fund or stock in a company whose products he or she likes. That will introduce the student to the stock market and the ups and downs of which are reported daily in the newspaper. A child who gets into the habit of saving and investing early in life will have a considerable nest egg for retirement.

Now you know how interesting arithmetic can be, not only for the child but for the parents as well. Best of all, you have the freedom at home to teach the subject in the manner that makes sense to you, and your child who will be spared the damage that is being done to millions of children in public schools by educators who lack the appreciation of our wonderful arithmetic system and are required to teach the latest version of the new math. Recently, I watched one of our esteemed nightly news programs do a story on the new new math as practiced in a public school classroom. The children were diligently at work problem solving, and as the camera zeroed in on one child at work, one could see that she was counting on her fingers. That's the way counting was done before the invention of the abacus! And people wonder why so many children can't make change or do simple calculations in their heads these days. Clearly, it is not the children's fault, but the fault of an education system that refuses to teach what children have to learn.

## Chapter Eight: Choosing a Curriculum

Now that you've taught your child to read phonetically, write in a good cursive script, spell words correctly, and perform the four basic arithmetic functions with ease, what do you do next? Here, you have a great deal of flexibility. You can purchase one of the very well prepared curricula available to homeschoolers or you can devise your own curriculum and choose your own books.

But first it's best to get back <sup>A</sup> your philosophy of education which should guide you in your choices. What do you want your child to know? What do you want your child to be able to do? What kind of a person would you like your child to be when he or she is twenty years old? So much of what is learned and experienced in those early years can have an impact on what we later become as adults. For example, when I was in the third grade in public school in New York City, we had a very simple weekly lesson in class called Music Appreciation. Our teacher placed a crank-operated portable phonograph on her desk and played a number of short classical pieces of music some of which I remember to this day, sixty years later. The selections included "Marche Slav" by Tchaikovsky and "The Swan" by Saint-Saens. We all listened quietly and attentively to the music and were required to remember the names of the selections and their composers. I believe that it was this simple introduction to classical music that opened that entire world of beauty to me and, in the years that followed, provided so much pleasure and emotional enjoyment.

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That's the sort of thing a parent can easily provide for one's own children. Today, the resources available are so much more plentiful and the technical equipment so

much better than anything we had in the 1930's. Thus, if you want your child to develop an appreciation of classical music, you can get the cassettes and the tape player and do the job at your convenience. In this day and age of trying to find ways to reduce stress, classical music provides an excellent source of serene, soothing, emotionally beautiful and uplifting musical sound.

What do you want your child to know? An awful lot! But you have a good many years in which to accomplish this task. The first two years of education are devoted to learning the academic skills, but in the process of teaching reading you can use books with interesting content. In teaching writing, you can have your child copy text that is worth reading. And in teaching arithmetic you can also teach about money, coinage, savings that will be useful for the rest of the child's life.

By the third year you will want your child to begin knowing something about the history and geography of the country he or she lives in. American history is an exciting story that teaches us who we are and why we are a country that so many people want to become part of. But you start first with local history, visiting local historical sites, reading about the first settlers, the local Indian tribes, the first form of government, etc. You then teach local geography, the cities and towns you live in, their location on the map, the rivers, the mountains, the harbors, the local climate, etc. The child will be doing a lot of reading and learning many new words.

The child will also be learning grammar, how our language is put together so that one develops good speech and can write coherent sentences and paragraphs. This is also a good time to introduce poetry at an elementary level and some of the children's classics. Trips to the library should become a regular part of your weekly or monthly schedule.

In arithmetic, the child will learn about fractions, decimals, and percentages and be able to expand his or her knowledge of banking and storekeeping. Trips to the supermarket can provide plenty of opportunities to practice what one has learned in

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terms of prices, weights, measures, change making, etc. In other words, learning takes place everywhere, all of the time. One can practice reading in the supermarket by reading labels, signs, circulars, coupons, advertisements. The written word is all around us wherever we go providing lots of opportunities to practice sounding out.

Then there are the housekeeping chores that children should become involved with. I know a homeschooling family in which the young daughter has become the family's chief cookie maker. Children should also be taught how to organize their own books and materials and to try to be as neat as possible. But don't worry if your homeschool becomes a little messy. Just don't let it become too messy.

Should you purchase a prepared curriculum and, if so, which one? The advantage of using a prepared curriculum is that it will make the job of homeschooling easier and provide the assurance that you and your child are covering the subjects you want to cover and are not wasting valuable time. For example, a workbook on grammar will ensure that your child covers the entire subject in an organized way over a specified period of time. However, one is free to be as flexible as possible in using any workbook. But the curriculum specifications provide helpful guidelines. Also, if you have several children, it will free you to devote attention to the younger child who still needs one-on-one instruction in the three R's, while the older child can be left to concentrate on his or her workbook. Prepared curricula usually come with children's workbooks and parents' guides so that the parent can check the child's work.

Many parents have found the prepared curricula to be much more intensive and demanding of effort than one would like. The reason why these programs are indeed as thorough and demanding as they are is because the program makers want homeschoolers to perform better and know more than their public school counterparts so that homeschoolers cannot be accused of not educating their children above and beyond what is theoretically required by the state.

I once accompanied a homeschooling mom and dad to a meeting with local

school officials who wanted to make sure that the children were being adequately educated at home. The parents brought with them several boxes of books plus the children's workbooks as evidence that indeed education was taking place at the home. Not only were the school officials impressed, but they seemed speechless as they went through the children's workbooks, realizing that the pupils in their own public schools were getting a far less thorough and demanding education. Apparently, parents have far more leeway than school teachers in prescribing how their children are to be educated. If one has precocious children with a great deal of native curiosity about the world, such children may want to devote a great deal of time to a particular project and a parent is free to encourage that kind of endeavor. While individual education plans are difficult to implement in a classroom of 30 kids, they are easy to implement at home.

An interesting case comes to mind. Some years ago at a homeschool conference, I was approached by a father who wanted my advice about his son who couldn't buckle down to the strict curriculum the father wanted to impose on the lad. He had already gone to a guidance counselor who advised drugging the boy with Ritalin. He wanted to know ~~my~~ if that was the only recourse available. The father strongly believed that discipline and obedience were most important in education, and the child's rambunctious behavior had to be curtailed. I asked the father if his son had any interests that could command his attention and concentration. The father replied affirmatively. I then suggested that he loosen his demand for discipline and obedience and try a regimen of freedom for the lad. "Maybe that's what he needs," I said. The father was somewhat taken aback. Freedom? Let the boy do what he wanted? It never occurred to him that that was a possible alternative. I asked, what would the boy do if he were given the freedom to do what he wanted? Would he just play all day in a sandpile or run amuck? No, the father replied. He was a serious boy. He'd probably work on whatever it was that interested him. Obviously, he needs freedom, I said.

The father thanked me for my advice. He was probably relieved to know that he didn't have to beat the boy into submission. That's the kind of advice he might have gotten from someone else. Incidentally, the father had a second younger son who very much wanted structure and was thriving under his father's strict supervision. But the older boy was clearly different. At the time it never occurred to me to get the man's address and follow up on the story, but I felt intuitively that I had given the man the right advice. The idea of drugging a child with Ritalin so that he would buckle down to a homeschool regimen just seemed to negate what homeschooling was truly all about. Homeschooling is about freedom! Freedom from the state, freedom from miseducation, freedom from ridiculous rules and regulations, and above all, freedom to educate your children in a manner that conforms with your values and how your children learn best.

Another important freedom that homeschooling provides is the freedom to use time for the benefit of the entire family. No more time is wasted on long bus rides to and from school. No more time is wasted in study halls and recess periods and waiting for others to catch up. Usually, homeschoolers can complete their academic work by noon, after which they are then free to pursue whatever extracurricular activity they wish. Time can now be spent visiting museums, the state legislature, the city council, historical sites, zoos, county courthouses, local industries, radio and television stations, the local newspaper, university libraries, conventions and exhibitions, taking long walks, exercising by skating, cycling, sledding, swimming at the local Y, shopping for educational supplies, making videos, visiting retirement homes and meeting interesting people, taking one's pets to the vet, visiting farms, attending concerts, going to the theater, the ballet, the opera, and visiting other homeschoolers.

When do public schoolers have time for such things? They come home so exhausted that all they want to do is play computer games or watch TV. And before they know it, it's time for dinner, some homework, more TV, maybe an argument with

mom or dad or sister or brother, and then to bed so that they can get up at the crack of dawn in order to stand out in the cold and wait for the yellow bus to chaos.

The homeschooling family makes much better use of the best hours of the day. The hours are theirs to fill with whatever they enjoy doing. Add up those hours over a twelve-year period and what one has is a richness of family life that the public schooler can never experience. Of course, there are many families in which both parents work, therefore making homeschooling just about impossible. But there are also many families in which at least one parent is at home and can homeschool if he or she wants to. Those are the families that are missing out on the great homeschooling experience. And if the homeschool movement continues to grow, it's because more and more of those parents are beginning to see the light.

Back to the matter of purchasing a curriculum. There are prepared programs for just about every kind of family, religious and secular. Christian-oriented programs rely heavily on Biblical principles in their approach to any subject. Thus, while explanations of what the theory of evolution is all about will be found in Christian-oriented science programs, a strong case for Creationism will also be made in the same text. If a parent wants a more secular approach, books can be found at bookstores and libraries to fill that need. In the Appendix, we list the best-known curricula and programs available with a note about their orientation.

However, the best way to become acquainted with the variety and quality of what is available is to attend a homeschool convention with its hall of vendor exhibits. One will be amazed at what is now available to homeschoolers. Most of the large homeschool conventions cover two days. Many parents spend the first day looking over the various competing programs, inspecting, browsing, gathering brochures and literature, listening to salesmen, attending vendors' workshops, asking advice of other homeschoolers, and finally deciding what to buy on the second day. Also, most homeschool conventions now feature a hall with used books that homeschoolers no

longer need and now want to sell. Great bargains are available at such book fairs.

The beauty of such conventions is that they prove that there are lots of parents who are truly interested in the education of their children and are willing to spend the time and money to get the right materials. Such intense parental interest can only accrue to the benefit of our country.

## Chapter Nine:

### Subject Matter

At this point, we might as well discuss what it is we want to teach and why we ought to teach it. Mary Foley, in our chapter on developing a philosophy of education, spoke of her curriculum including "natural and social sciences." I'm not sure exactly what subject matter would be included under those rubrics. I prefer to use the terms that were used when I was going to school: history, geography, English, French, Spanish, Russian, composition, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, biology, chemistry, physics, science, touch typing, drawing, etc. At least you knew what you were studying. There was a body of knowledge arranged in a rational, chronological way, so that you could learn basic principles and facts that helped you develop a pretty good view of the world, how it worked in the past, how it works now, and how it may work in the future.

The fact that knowledge has come down to us arranged in these particular categories is a revelation of man's need to organize knowledge so that it can be retained and passed on to future generations in an orderly, integrated manner. This manner of organization not only permits one to understand what is already known, but permits us to gather additional knowledge in each field of endeavor. And then it permits us to continue the process of passing it on to future generations. In other words, this wise and highly efficient organization of knowledge, which uses the alphabet as one of its organizing tools, is a kind of bridge, a marvelous intellectual continuum, between generations. It permits us to effectively use the accumulated power of the greatest brains that have come before us. The results of all their labors,

experiments, and cogitations are at our disposal. What an incredible treasure they have bequeathed us, and what a sin it is for an education system to deny American children the benefits of this priceless heritage.

What has happened is that our progressive educators, discarding several thousand years of useful educational experience, decided early in this century to reorganize knowledge to serve their own social purposes. So instead of history, geography, psychology, anthropology and sociology, we get "social science" or "social studies," so that knowledge which is rationally organized and makes sense, is reorganized or disorganized so that it doesn't make sense but feeds a prejudice or a perversion or an aberration or an agenda which has nothing to do with the pursuit of true knowledge.

Therefore, if you are going to homeschool your children, teach them a subject so that it enhances their understanding of the world and rather than serves the interests of a group with an agenda. There are many such groups: Marxists, socialists, communists, deconstructionists, feminists, etc., all of whom have social and political agendas and use bits and pieces of knowledge and information to enhance their drive to gain power over society.

It is not easy in this day and age of rampant disinformation to pursue knowledge and truth for their own sake, for the simple reason that there are not very many people in the academic world interested in knowledge and truth for their own sake. If you, as a parent, belong to one of these groups, then obviously you will have the power to indoctrinate your children anyway you wish. But then you must grant other parents, not interested in your agenda, the right to educate their children in the love and pursuit of knowledge and understanding because such a pursuit brings us closer to what reality is. The closer one is to reality, the saner one is.

Let us consider the subjects we may want to teach and why we may want to teach them. A good subject to start with is History, the story of mankind. Why should

anyone study history? Because history has many lessons to teach us. History, which includes biographies and autobiographies, teaches us about the lives of nations and the lives of individuals. It teaches us about the lives of whole civilizations. It permits us to review the completed lives of others so that we can compare the productive and virtuous against the destructive and criminal and we can learn from them what we ought and ought not to do. It gives us insight into how men succeed and how they fail.

History is no doubt the greatest depository of wisdom available to us. And it should be taught chronologically, so that we can see how the accumulated wisdom and disasters of the past ~~has~~ affected succeeding generations. The philosopher George Santayana wrote that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. It has also been said that the one thing we have learned from history is that we do not learn from history, that each generation seems determined to learn everything the hard way, by experience.

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How can we teach our children to learn from history? The only way to do that is to first teach history and hope that exposure to it will develop in the child a fascination with the past and a philosophical attitude toward life. I was first introduced to history in the third grade where I was taught of the Dutch origins of New York City. It was fascinating to learn all about Hendrick Hudson who discovered the Hudson River, Peter Minuet who bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for 24 dollars worth of trinkets, and Peter Stuyvesant, the autocratic Dutch governor with a wooden leg who was forced to surrender New Netherland to the English in 1664. New Amsterdam then became New York. Knowing that history enabled me to know why so many of the geographical names in the region were Dutch. It was a wonderful way to introduce history to a child so that I could see that history in the names and places all around me.

The Bible is the oldest history book we have, giving us a chronological history of man since the creation in the Garden of Eden. Whether you believe in the Bible or not, history is organized in the same chronological manner so that we can see cause and

effect, discovery and growth, progress and destruction. The order in which things happen is very important in establishing truth, and the more detail we have the closer we can get to the truth. Truth, as Noah Webster defined it in his dictionary, is "conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be. The truth of history constitutes its whole value."

So a study of history inculcates an understanding of what truth is and why it is so valuable. The history of America is an incredibly inspiring story of men and women trying to create a society based on individual freedom and responsibility, a society based on moral principles derived from religious belief. Despite its past failings and some ominous trends as to its future, America still remains the only country where the full possibilities of a truly free society exist. Preserving this society should be the business of every American who loves what America stands for.

Homeschooling parents will find a plethora of materials which teach children our history from the early settlements to our present age. What a story it is! Begin at the beginning and methodically work your way to the present. It will take years, but you have as many years as you want to do the job. Biographies and autobiographies are a wonderful source of historical knowledge. They make fascinating reading for young people. G. A. Henty's wonderful historical novels for young readers remain a vastly entertaining way to get to know history. One need not rely merely on dry textbooks. Great story tellers have found history to be a tremendous source of materials for their books. Also, visits to historical sights can enhance the study of history.

Study our wars, what caused them, how they started, and how they ended. Study the history of American economic development, the freedom of inventors to invent, the transformation of an agricultural society into an industrial society and then into a high-tech society of computers, jumbo jets, satellite communications, etc. Is there a more fascinating story to be told than the history of America? What a great opportunity to teach it in as exciting a way as it can be taught, as it ought to be taught.

Geography. Here, history and exploration can combine to teach us about oceans and continents and the courageous men and women who built settlements and cities so that modern civilization could thrive. Start with one's immediate region, then expand to the state, the nation, the continent, other continents, other nations, the world. So few young people today can tell you the capitals of other nations, let alone the capitals of our states. I tutored a teenager for a short time who could not name a single country on the continent of Africa. I was astonished at such basic ignorance. So I assigned the youngster the task of listing alphabetically every country in Africa, its capital, its population, its language, its form of government, its major exports, etc. He started the project quite diligently, even drawing a picture of the country's flag in full color. But after I left, I was told by his parents that he gradually lost interest in the project. Unfortunately, his parents were not that much interested in geography themselves and therefore did not see to it that the youngster completed the assignment. Apparently, they could not see the value of expanding the youngster's geographical knowledge of a part of the world in which they had little interest. And so they did not put pressure on the youngster to complete the project.

I doubt that I would have bothered to study much of chemistry, or physics, or trigonometry if I had not been forced to do so by the schools I attended. And I suspect that that is why so many homeschooling parents rely on prepared curricula. They dare not merely rely on their own interests as the spur to get their children to study subjects that require real mental effort.

The advantage of homeschooling is that you need not use dry textbooks to do the instructing. For example, I learned more about atomic physics from a popular book by a journalist on the history of the atomic bomb than from any textbook. Seek out these books about pioneers in science whose work is better explained by writers who want to reach millions of readers than by textbook writers who are compelled to write in the <sup>^</sup>dullest style possible. Make use of the computerized catalogs in your libraries to

find the best written and most popular books on the subjects you want to cover. These will be the kind of books your children will eagerly devour. You'll find such books covering virtually every subject: economics, mathematics, psychology, chemistry, physics, art history, astronomy, invention, anthropology, geology, botany, zoology, biology, etc. There are also various organizations and associations which publish magazines on particular subject areas which may be helpful to the homeschooler. And then there is the Internet! We shall talk more about that in our chapter on homeschooling and technology.

If your child is having difficulty finding a subject that really interests him or her, provide an academic smorgasbord so that he or she can get a good taste of each subject matter. It is hard to know offhand what a youngster will become interested in. Sometimes a book about a particular area of activity will awaken an interest. I remember listening to a popular TV interviewer describe how he became interested in getting into radio. When he was about 13 he read a book in which the hero was a radio announcer, and that's when he decided that that was what he wanted to be. He was willing to accept the most menial position available as long as it got him his first job in radio, and he succeeded. That's how people in a free society find out what interests them so that they can then pursue the career of their dreams. It's the freedom to be what you want to be, to do what you want to do, that is the basis of the American dream.

## Chapter Ten:

# Homeschooling High Schoolers

Can one homeschool a high schooler? Yes, of course. Thousands of parents are doing it every day quite successfully, and there are excellent materials for high-school homeschooling. Many homeschooling families consider middle and high schools to be dangerous places for their children. The public school curriculum puts great emphasis on the affective domain in middle and high schools. The affective domain is that part of the curriculum dealing with beliefs, values, attitudes, emotions, sexuality, etc. It's also a time when peer pressure to do drugs and engage in sexual experimentation is greatest and it's a time when teenage rebellion begins to emerge as the most serious threat to family harmony. And so, many homeschooling parents decide to educate their high schoolers at home right through the twelfth grade.

However, some parents, usually at the insistence of their children, will permit them to attend a public or private high school, particularly if the youngster is very sports-minded and wants to play on the football team or is musically inclined and wants to play in the school orchestra. Some school districts permit part-time attendance for homeschoolers. Sometimes the kids enjoy the novelty and social life of the school. But then there are kids who don't find the experience as enjoyable as they thought and opt to return to schooling at home.

Then, there are parents who become concerned with what their kids are being exposed to in the middle or high school and hear the alarm signals. They then decide to get their kids out and start homeschooling. Sometimes the teenagers object. At other times, the kids are delighted at the prospect of not having to go back to the "zoo,"

as they call it. These are the teenagers who can't stand school and would like to get out in the worst way. In the case of those kids who resist being homeschooled, there is always a difficult period of transition and adjustment. But in many cases, after six months to a year, the children begin to understand and appreciate the wisdom of their parents' action and discover in homeschooling a whole new dimension to learning. It can be quite an experience for a teenager to find himself or herself free from the regulations and routines of the school where bells determine when to switch from one subject to another. I remember a story a homeschooling mom told me about her son. They were driving by the school her son had attended, and she asked him if he missed it. He replied that he did miss some of his friends. When she asked if he would like to return to the school, he replied, "I don't miss them that much!"

How does one take a son or daughter out of high school and educate the child at home? It depends on the educational state the youngster is in. If he or she was badly damaged by educational malpractice and is dyslexic or functionally illiterate or can't spell or has a math phobia or attention deficit disorder, you'll have to deal with these problems before you can do anything else. You may also have to deal with an attitudinal or motivational problem that older children with a history of academic failure often acquire. They may really think they're stupid or that they have something physically wrong with their brain. In order to disabuse them of such attitudes, you must start from the beginning and teach them what they were never taught: our phonetic alphabet system, basic spelling, basic arithmetic, etc. Many kids get through high school without ever having ~~been taught~~ these basics, and the result is that their *learned* education is a mess.

Colleges are now supposed to take care of these deficits in the freshman year. But more and more colleges are balking at the idea of having to do in the freshman year what should have been done in the primary, middle, and high school years. For the homeschooler, that first year at home will have to be one of intensive remediation

and reeducation. Parents embarking on such a difficult course should consult with remedial experts among homeschoolers. They can be found by talking with other homeschoolers who have had similar problems. A homeschooling network will include all kinds of experts who may be able to help you or refer you to someone who can help you. Homeschoolers, you will find, are usually more than happy to share their knowledge or experiences with other homeschoolers, for there is a kind of collegial feeling among homeschoolers that they must help each other succeed, for the success of others is a reflection on the movement as a whole.

My own method of remediation consists of the following: first test the student on his or her ability to read. This can be done by having the youngster read some appropriate text to you aloud. If the reader leaves out words that are there, puts in words that aren't there, mutilates or truncates words, substitutes words, and stops cold because he or she cannot sound out a new word, then you know the reader is a victim of the whole-word teaching method. You can also administer a very simple reading test which I've devised which tells you at what grade level your child is reading and where the problems are. It is called the *Blumenfeld Oral Reading Assessment Test* and consists of 38 columns of words, ten words to each column, proceeding from the simplest single-syllable words to complex multisyllabic words. The purpose of the test is first to see if the reader knows our phonetic system, second, how he or she handles multisyllabic words, and third, at what grade level the learner is reading. The test takes about ten minutes.

I devised the test because, as a tutor, I wanted a simple and quick way of finding out what the student's reading problem was. I discovered that students who lack basic phonetic knowledge will make errors reading some of the simplest words. I also discovered that students who knew their phonics would often have trouble reading the multisyllabic words, indicating that they were basically phonetic readers but had had very little vocabulary development.

When a student is deficient in basic phonics, I will first teach him or her our alphabetic system using the *Alpha-Phonics* program. I start at the beginning and go through the entire program to make sure that nothing is missed and that the student grasps the entire system. When that is done then the job becomes one of seeing to it that the youngster knows how to apply this new phonetic knowledge to his or her reading. This is done by having the student read aloud some appropriate text and being made aware of his or her bad reading habits. For example, if the student has left out a word that is in the sentence, you have the student reread the sentence until he or she notices that a word has been left out. When the student reads a word that isn't there, you have him or her reread the sentence until the student sees that he or she has put in a word that isn't there. In other words, you stress the need for accuracy over speed in reading. When the student comes across a new multisyllabic word, you get the student to break it up into syllables and sound it out. You also keep a notebook in which all the new words are written and gone over every so often. Eventually, the student will become a phonetic reader.

Thus, if you have a high schooler who needs such remediation, you can probably do the remediating yourself. It can be very expensive to hire someone else to do it for you. You may be able to find a good tutor through the homeschool network. But make sure that the tutor understands the difference between a sight reader and a phonetic reader and knows how to turn a bumbling sight reader into an accurate phonetic reader.

I tutored one senior high schooler who was entering college, but was a nonreader. He was your typical sight reader making all of the errors that sight readers make. He had never read a book outside of what he had to read in school, and in general he disliked reading because it was so difficult for him. I used the remediation program outlined above, and after many months of tutoring him twice a week he finally became a phonetic reader. What was especially important was his high motivation to

succeed. He was ambitious, and so I gave him Napoleon Hill's books to read. Learning that there was extremely valuable and inspirational information in books, he made excellent progress. When finally the tutoring ended he had become hooked on books. But even though he had become a good phonetic reader, he would occasionally make a sight reader's error. Which meant that the sight-reading habits acquired in the first and second grades sometimes cannot be completely eradicated. But as long as the reader has the means to see his or her errors, such errors will be minimal.

Assuming that your child is now ready to do high school work, the question becomes: what kind of subjects should the child study? It is in the high-school years that young people generally get to know what they are really interested in, what kind of careers they would like to pursue, what they want to do with their lives. It is also the time to prepare for college if the student's career goals, such as medicine or law, require a university education. If that is the case, the student must also prepare to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the ACT Assessment. Check with the college of your son's or daughter's choice since some colleges no longer require taking these tests. The SAT is divided into Verbal and Mathematical parts. The ACT includes four tests: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. If the homeschooler intends to apply for a scholarship of some kind, taking one or both tests may be necessary.

Of course, not all homeschoolers intend to go to college. For them, high school should provide the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the working world. For example, the skill of touch typing should be taught in the middle-school period or, if possible, earlier since today's youngsters will be using computer keyboards in the elementary grades. We shall deal with the matter of computers and technology in a later chapter.

Since many homeschoolers will be starting their own businesses and services, it

is obvious that they will keep on learning and gaining in experience as they advance in their chosen endeavors. The homeschooler has been so well imbued with the spirit of self-teaching that he or she does not stop learning just because one has reached that age beyond compulsory school attendance. In fact, advances in technology and the increasing costs of tuition now strongly suggest that homeschooling can continue into the college years. Indeed, technology will make it possible to bring the best of professors and their courses into the homes of thousands of students.

Since high school is a time when students can discover their true interests, the curriculum should offer a wide range of courses. Since we live in America, where basic principles of government and economy determine the kind of lives we shall live, knowledge of these basic principles is absolutely essential if we are to defend and maintain our inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Therefore, an intensive course in the history and structure of our governmental and political system should be included in the curriculum.

And so, what kind of courses would help us fulfill this basic American ideal of individual freedom? We must start, of course, with what has already been learned in grades 1 through 8. We assume that the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, touch-typing, computer technology have been mastered in varying degrees, and that such subjects as American history, geography, science, economics, foreign language have been studied to the extent that a 14-year-old can handle them.

We assume also that the youngster has been engaged in a variety of hobbies, sports, and activities such as drawing, acting, singing, swimming, skiing, tennis, soccer, softball, and other sports, stamp or coin collecting, caring for pets, horseback riding, learning a musical instrument, hunting and target practice, running a small business, cooking, baking, helping parents, etc. We also assume that if the child is being reared in a Christian home that he or she will have acquired a good knowledge

of the Bible and how the values of the Christian religion guide his or her family's life. The enhancement of the family's spiritual life has become part and parcel of the new lifestyle created by homeschooling, where the family is free to make religious values and religious teaching part of the curriculum.

High school simply continues to build on what has already been learned in the earlier years. It continues growth in such subjects as English, composition, mathematics, history, geography, science, economics, and foreign language. It should particularly emphasize the expansion of vocabulary and the ability to write clearly and logically. The student must also study those subjects required for college entrance. College catalogs generally list these requirements. However, before settling on a definite curriculum, the homeschooler should write to the colleges and even speak to admissions officers for their advice and find out if they require taking the SAT and/or ACT test. Many colleges now seek out homeschoolers as potential students and are more than willing to help them prepare for entry.

## Chapter Eleven: Learning Languages

The learning of a foreign language has always been accepted as an important part of becoming educated. Of course, the word educated means different things to different people. To some "educated" means "cultured," to others it means the gaining of practical knowledge with which to build a career. But virtually all agree that the most important part of education is the mastery of one's own language, for obvious reasons. The ability to think is a direct outgrowth of language facility, and the ability to express oneself clearly, persuasively, and forcefully is a direct consequence of our ability to use language.

It is obvious why we would want to study another language. First of all, from the viewpoint of communication, it permits us to understand other people from other nations. It permits us to conduct business and diplomacy with other peoples. It creates a bridge between different cultures. It enhances our understanding of language in general as we compare our language to other languages and learn to translate from one language to another by learning how different thought patterns emerge from the sentence structure and grammar of another language. So there are many benefits to be obtained from the study of a foreign language, not the least of which is having entry to the literature and culture of an entirely different group of people.

In my own case, I was introduced to French in junior high school by a lovely middle-aged woman of impeccable taste. To me, learning French was the epitome of becoming cultured, even though I lived in a tenement in the Bronx and my parents spoke Yiddish, the German dialect spoken by the Jews of Eastern Europe. I loved the

sound of French and was determined to learn to speak it. And so, with great effort I did in time learn to speak French as my second language. As a result I can make my way easily in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec, and other countries in which French is the dominant language. Knowing French opened a whole new world and permitted me to learn all of the French words in the English language and how to spell them correctly. And so I have always felt that it was one of the best things I learned in school.

In my opinion, I do not believe that you can be truly literate unless you have learned a second language. Being able to juxtapose or translate one language with another gives you an insight into how language is structured and how words are developed. I also studied Latin in college, which was a very great help in understanding so many of our multisyllabic words derived from Latin. Incidentally, knowing French and Latin can be very useful in doing crossword puzzles!

If I were a middle school student today, I do not know if I would take up French or some other language like Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or Spanish. Today's world is quite different from the world of fifty years ago. That's a half century. With a growing Latino population in the United States, it might make sense studying Spanish. Incidentally, I've heard that some of our not-too-well educated kids think that Latinos from Latin America speak Latin! So maybe we ought to refer to Latinos as Hispanics. Spanish, of course, is spoken throughout Central and South America with the exception of Brazil where Portuguese is the dominant language. And we have large Spanish-speaking populations not only in the American Southwest, but in all of the large cities of the North. French may have more cultural prestige, but Spanish may have more practical uses for Americans.

Make your decision on a foreign language early so that you can begin teaching your homeschooler at an age when language learning seems to be easier. You can start by teaching a simple vocabulary, simple sentences, and simple grammatical

rules. The best way to have your child develop a good accent is to have him or her listen to the language on cassette tapes and repeat the words as they are spoken. At that early age, the vocal chords are still flexible enough to be able to articulate the sounds of another language. If we haven't developed the ability to articulate a wide range of language sounds in those early years, we will probably not be able to do so later after the vocal chords have stopped their growth and solidified their limited range.

Children who come from bilingual families are usually able to speak other languages with less of a foreign accent because of the wider range of their vocal chords. Perhaps this phenomenon can be compared with the ability of individuals to sing within a range of tones. But probably the vocal chords are much more flexible in the earlier years. We certainly know that singers are limited in their ranges. Sopranos cannot sing like baritones, and some people cannot sing at all. In other words, I have not spoken the last word on why and how people develop good accents in learning a foreign language. Maybe some people are born with a wider range. But we do know that a child learns to speak his own language with the local accent without any difficulty. Which means that a child is capable of learning to speak in any accent, provided that it is his first language. In fact, he is even capable of speaking more than one language without a foreign accent if they are all learned at the same time and the child's vocal chords are required to articulate all of the sounds of the several languages.

If you would like to stretch your child's vocal chords, you might use simple songs in the foreign language which would give him or her practice in articulating the sounds of that language. Audio and video cassettes are now available to help you acquaint your child with the language being learned. And there are books, magazines, and newspapers available in the foreign language. But as you progress, teach your child to speak the foreign language as grammatically correct as possible. We all know what pigeon English sounds like!

Some languages use different alphabets which have to be learned at the outset. Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Hindi, Armenian all use their own alphabets. The Chinese use characters, or logographs, to stand for their words. Some of these logographs are also used as phonetic indicators. The Japanese use Chinese characters (called *kanji*) as well as two sets of phonetic syllabaries or *kana* (known as *hiragana* and *katakana*). Spanish and French will seem like a lark, compared to Russian, Chinese, or Japanese.

There is also the option of learning Latin and Greek as ancient languages which have become the sources of so many of our modern words with their spellings. Latin, of course, is the favorite of classicists who truly believe in the development of expertise in the ancient classics and a knowledge of vocabulary development. Choosing the foreign language to learn can be difficult because of the many options available. If you have Japanese friends who can help, or if you yourself learned French or Russian when you were in school, or if you are of an ethnic background which you would like your child to learn more about by learning the language, then any of these factors may help you make your choice. If you are an Afro-American parent, rather than consider ebonics as a second language, why not teach your child a real African language like Swahili? But then, after your child has learned Swahili, will he or she ever use it?

Back in the days when I was in school, you learned French because that was the foreign language taught to everybody. The public schools were limited in what they could offer the students. But in homeschooling, the world is your oyster. You can make your decision on the basis of a number of factors: the availability of a good program, the existence of a group of homeschoolers all learning the same language, the preferences of your child, your own knowledge of a foreign language, or your desire to acquaint your child with an ethnic heritage.

Some of the best aids to teaching your child a foreign language is knowledge of friends, neighbors or relatives who speak that language, trips to countries where the

language is spoken, foreign films in that language, student exchanges, visits to cultural centers or departments at universities that specialize in the language, foreign language bookstores and libraries, local restaurants associated with that language group, ethnic fairs, etc.

Knowing a foreign language will greatly impress the admissions officers of colleges and universities, and it will certainly be a plus in looking for a job or developing a career that includes foreign travel or communication with foreigners. Journalism, diplomacy, publishing, advertising, criminal justice, intelligence work, teaching, multinational corporations all require individuals who can read and speak foreign languages. We've been told until we're numb that we live in a global economy and that we must be competitive if we are to survive. What better way to meet the challenges of that global economy than by learning a foreign language that will give our future young adults an edge in the job market.

## Chapter Twelve:

# Homeschooling and the New Technology

Nothing has been a greater boon to homeschooling than the development of computer technology. In fact, it is being said that the new technology is making the schoolhouse obsolete. Lewis J. Perelman, in his landmark book, *School's Out*, writes:

This book . . . is about an economic transformation that is being driven by an implacable technological revolution. It is not about saving schools, or improving schools, or reforming schools, or even reinventing schools--it's about removing altogether the increasingly costly barrier that schooling poses to economic and social progress. . . .

Learning was an activity thought to be confined to the box of a school classroom. Now learning permeates every form of social activity--work, entertainment, home life--outside of school. For what piano lessons would cost, you now can buy an electronic piano that will teach you to play it. . . . Of the more than sixty million Americans who learned how to use personal computers since 1980, most learned from vendors, books, other users, and the computers themselves, not in schools. . . .

The very power of modern technology to liberate learning leaves no role for the sprawling empire of academic bureaucracy but self-serving protectionism.

And so, according to Perelman, the schoolhouse is going to go the way of the horse and buggy, but it doesn't know it yet. But homeschoolers seem to know it as they fill their homes with computers, camcorders, cellular phones, VCRs, fax machines, copiers, tape recorders, CD-ROMs, printers, modems, word processors, laptops, video and audio cassettes, calculators, electronic musical instruments, and other new gadgets of the technological revolution.

But homeschoolers must never lose sight of the basic technology of alphabetic

reading, cursive writing, and arithmetic, all of which must be mastered before one can make maximum use of the new technology. The purpose of the new technology is to enhance life, not distort it. It may make the school obsolete but it doesn't make learning obsolete. The basics must still be mastered.

How should the new technology be used? In the beginning, it should not be used at all by the children. They should be learning to read and getting to know books and writing by hand, not machine. They should be learning their arithmetic facts by memorization and practicing them with paper and pencil, not calculators.

Thus, the first three years of homeschooling should find minimal use of the new technology. Some good video and audio cassette tapes can be used in instruction where it makes sense. But where it comes to learning reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, there is no substitute for direct practice. The book is still the most ingenious way to pack the greatest amount of information in a portable format. And the ability to accurately and easily decode the words in that book is still the most important skill to be mastered by an individual. In other words, high literacy is a prerequisite to being able to make the greatest use of the new technology.

Most children are introduced to the use of the computer through the playing of video games. Whether or not you want your children to indulge in this kind of mindless activity is up to you. Ask yourself, "What skills are my children learning by playing such games? Are the games just an exciting way of killing time? Should not that time be spent reading a good book?" Games, of course, are a part of a child's life. There are all sorts of board games available, from checkers to Monopoly. Games which require thought and strategy are good exercises for the mind. And games like Monopoly can be played by the entire family.

Before using CD-ROMs, first show your child where that same information can be obtained in an encyclopedia or world atlas. Make your child feel at home in the world of books before showing how the contents of books have been put into CDs. There

are now encyclopedias on CD-ROMs. All sorts of reference books are being put into CD-ROMs. In fact, an entire law library has been put on a few CD-ROMs, thus permitting a lawyer to carry his entire library on a plane which he can access with a laptop. But these are the conveniences the new technology affords adults. Children must still go through the process of learning the basics before they can make use of this marvelous new technology.

As we pointed out in an earlier chapter, teach your child touch typing before letting him or her use a word processor with its keyboard. Otherwise, your child will be hobbled by hunting and pecking for the rest of his or her life. Prior to learning to touch type, the child can use the keyboard to find information on the computer if all he or she has to do is press the "enter" key or some other instructional key, or move and click a mouse.

Surfing the Internet is something parents should learn to do first before setting their children loose. The Internet permits immediate world-wide access to incredible amounts of information on just about any subject one can think of. However, the various moral dangers of the Net have been well publicized by the media, and so it is up to parents to decide whether or not to make the Internet available to their children. My view is that neither computers nor Internet access are desirable or necessary in the elementary years of homeschooling. Professional parents who already have computers in their home may want to make use of them for their children. But most of the homeschoolers I know do not rely much on the new technology in teaching their children the traditional subjects. Some homeschoolers have even eliminated the television set from their lives.

## **TV OR NOT TV, THAT'S THE QUESTION**

Back in 1993, the *Boston Globe* reported the story of a Maine family with two

elementary school kids that decided to eliminate television in their home for a year. Pretty soon they were all reading books for entertainment, and at dinner, they had lively family discussions that extended well beyond the meal's end. The transition from TV to no TV was not as difficult as they thought it would be. They all adjusted nicely to their new way of life. To make the situation more palatable, the parents decided to pay their children \$1 for every day they stayed away from the tube. According to the parents, the expense was well worth it. They saw wonderful changes in their kids' behavior. There was a decrease in aggression, a deeper friendship between the two children, more leisure time spent in imaginative play, an increase in book reading from almost zero to three or four books a week, an increase in family time.

Prior to the experiment, one of the children, who had been a good reader until the third grade, was spending seven or more hours a week watching TV and only five or 10 minutes reading. But once the TV was turned off, things began to change. The kids began to play together, to seek out each other's company. They played card games, Legos, and read lots of books. In fact, the parents had to ban book reading at the dinner table.

The TV ban was for only a year. But the parents noticed that the children did not OD on TV when it was restored. They became more discriminant watchers. But this was not a homeschooling family, and so we can imagine how much more salutary turning off the TV might be for the homeschooling family. One thing, however, is certain. Homeschooling parents are in a much better position to control what goes on in the home and how their kids are to be brought up than those parents who send their kids to school to be "educated."

Getting back to the new technology and its uses, it is the homeschooled high schooler who stands to benefit most from having all of the new high-tech equipment at home. In school, the computer is not always available when one wants it. It must be

shared with many other students, and after school hours, it is locked away. The homeschooler, on the other hand, has the computer available whenever he or she wants to use it. He or she may have to share the equipment with other members of the family, but because the computer is at home, it is much more readily available. Thus, homeschoolers can spend many more hours learning how to use the computer and developing overall computer competency. The student may also want to develop his or her own web page and start communicating via e-mail with others around the world.

If, as a parent, you don't know much about computers, you will find many excellent articles in homeschool magazines about computers and how to make the best use of them. Also, you will find that many homeschooling dads are programmers and, by now, many teenage homeschoolers have become computer experts. They will help you choose a good computer and show you how to use it. For example, many libraries now have their card catalogs on computers which are "on line" and therefore accessible through a modem. A modem is simply a gadget that hooks up your computer to the phone system so that you can have access to other computers on line. That's how one gets onto the Internet or gets into the computerized card catalog of a library. Check with your local library to see if its catalog is on line. If it is, it can save you the bother of going to the library to get a book that is out on loan and it can help your children find the books that are of interest to them.

Another great instrument of the new technology is the camcorder. Playing with a camcorder will introduce the homeschooler to the art of movie making. The student may produce a documentary video about the history of his or her home town, or produce a video of how mother prepares her famous recipe for whatever it is mother is famous for. Why not video mother as a homegrown Julia Child and get it shown on your local public access television? Also, a good video about one's grandparents may not only serve to preserve some family history for future generations, but may also provide needed practice in making good videos, thus preparing the child for a possible

career in television production.

After the student has learned to write compositions by hand and has also learned how to touch type, then you can introduce him or her to the word processor. Here the child will find the most convenient way to write letters, compositions, articles, and stories. With word processing, it is as easy as pie to correct a wrong spelling, to revise the text, to insert or delete a word, to capitalize, italicize, use different fonts, different type sizes, etc. The student can create his or her own letterhead, publish a family newsletter which can be sent out at Christmas time to far off relatives and friends.

There is also computer software that permits one to do artwork on the computer. New ways of using the computer are being invented daily by ingenious programmers and software engineers. Any perusal of the many magazines now devoted to computer technology will tend to overwhelm the average individual with what is going on in the field. Like the invention of the alphabet, the computer is permitting man to do so much more with so much less. While we of the older generation got along pretty well without computers, the younger generation will have little choice but to make computers an integral part of their lives. The self-employed will find computers providing them with a power hitherto unavailable to those who wished to work at home or in their own small companies. And homeschooling will encourage more and more young people to become entrepreneurs using computers to give them as much economic freedom and power as possible.

While governments are building and using larger computers to keep better track of the citizens of a country, desktop computers are also enhancing the freedom of individuals by providing them with the means of obtaining and distributing information, and of reaching the public with products that people will want. It seems as if a race is now going on between the bureaucrats who want to use the computer as a means of controlling people, and individuals who are using the computer to free themselves from government control.

Homeschoolers are avidly using computer networks to inform other homeschoolers of legislative and bureaucratic threats to their freedom. The result is that legislators in state capitals and in Washington are periodically inundated by phone calls and faxes from concerned constituents. These constituents are letting their representatives know what they want and what they do not want. And so, the computer is enhancing democratic activism among citizens who have learned that their freedoms can be taken away from them if they are not vigilant in defending them.

All in all, the new technology is not only making the school obsolete, it is providing the homeschooler with a variety of ingenious learning tools that can best be used in the home. In other words, in the new information age, the home has become the most convenient place in which to learn and communicate with the world. And with parents sharing in the learning experience with their children, everyone is getting educated.

## Chapter Thirteen: What About Socialization?

Yes, what about socialization? That's the question most frequently asked by people skeptical of homeschooling. When the litany of public school failures and risks is recited as reasons why parents choose to homeschool, the skeptics will ignore all of that and ask what is supposed to be the stumping question of all questions: what about socialization? The answer, believe it or not, is that homeschoolers are far better socialized than public schoolers. That's enough to send the skeptics into a blue funk.

Several highly sophisticated research studies confirm that homeschooled kids are better socially adjusted than their public school counterparts. Two such studies were published in 1992 in the *Home School Researcher* edited by Dr. Brian D. Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute. The studies followed the guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and are therefore considered highly professional and reliable in their methodology.

Perhaps the most interesting study done thus far on socialization is one by Dr. Larry E. Shyers in central Florida with 70 homeschooled kids and 70 traditionally schooled kids aged 8, 9, and 10. The 70 kids from each group--35 boys and 35 girls--were of the same socio-economic group, were also involved in the same outside activities and, in general, were as similar as possible. The only significant difference was that one group was being homeschooled while the other group was in school outside the home.

When Dr. Shyers started the study in 1981, he believed that the social adjustment of the homeschoolers would be far worse than that of the traditionally schooled, and he expected that his research would confirm that. But the results

proved him wrong. From every standpoint the homeschoolers proved to be much better socially adjusted than the traditionally schooled kids. Even Dr. Shyers was surprised at the degree of difference in social adjustment he found between the two groups.

How does one go about measuring socialization? Social scientists do it by first defining social skills and then providing a framework for classifying social skills difficulties. Dr. Shyers writes:

Their definition of social skills includes peer acceptance, socially acceptable behavior, and validation of behavior by significant people in the child's life. . . . For a child to be socially well adjusted, therefore, he or she must meet several conditions. First, he or she must possess a knowledge of the skill to be performed. Second, he or she must feel comfortable enough to both learn and perform the skill acceptably. And thirdly, he or she must be able to perform the skill appropriately at levels deemed acceptable by others.

Dr. Shyers used three assessment instruments to measure the children's socialization skills: the *Children's Assertive Behavior Scale (CABS)*, the *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale (PHCSCS)*, and the *Direct Observation Form (DOF)* of the *Child Behavior Checklist*. In other words, the study was about as scientific as one could make it. The results, according to Dr. Shyers, were as follows:

The results of the data analysis indicated that both groups of children received scores on the *PHCSCS* that were above the national average. This suggests that how children view themselves may be independent of where they obtain their academic training. . . .

Both groups of children received raw scores on the *CABS* that were indications that they choose slightly passive responses to social situations. This indicates that the children in this study were not aggressive, but rather somewhat passive in their understanding of social situations. . . .

The most significant results of this study were found in actual observed behaviors. The *DOF* records

problem behaviors by type and frequency. Home schooled students received significantly lower problem behavior scores than did their agemates from traditional program. . . .

Bandura (1977) suggested that children learn to behave from observing and imitating others. It is reasonable to expect that children will imitate the behaviors that they observe most often. Traditionally schooled children spend an average of seven hours per week day over a nine month period in the presence of other children and few adults. It would seem then, that their behaviors would most often reflect those of the majority of the children with whom they associate. In the case of this study, it was observed that traditionally schooled children tended to be considerably more aggressive, loud, and competitive than were the home schooled children of the same age.

In the case of the home schooled children, most of their day is spent with their parents and very few children. The primary models for behavior, therefore, are adults. Based on the social learning theory that children learn by imitating the behaviors of people whom they observe, home schooled children would thus most likely imitate the behaviors of their parents. The home schooled children in this study tended to be quiet, nonaggressive, and noncompetitive. Each child appeared to make up his or her own mind on how to behave.

The results of this study, therefore, draw into question the conclusions made by many educators and courts that traditionally educated children are more socially well adjusted than are those who are home schooled. . . . Although the traditionally educated children participating in this study achieved high mean self-concept and acceptable assertiveness scores, their mean problem behavior scores were well above the normal range . . . indicating a lack of appropriate social behaviors. This finding supports many parents', educators', and researchers' suggestions that traditionally schooled children may not be socially well adjusted.

In contrast, the home schooled children in this study received mean problem behaviors scores well within the normal range on the *DOF*. This finding supports the belief held by home school proponents that home schooled children are socially well adjusted.

What could be plainer than that. Traditionally schooled kids tend to be socially maladjusted because they learn their social skills from other kids. All you have to do is observe students emerging from a public school. The noise, rowdiness, and foul language are pretty awful. A good number of the kids light up cigarettes as soon as

they get out of the school building. They behave badly on buses and subways, rattling the nerves of adults who must travel with them. The schools themselves have become violent places. John Holt, the pioneer founder of *Growing Without Schooling*, observed in letters to a friend written in 1980:

Since I last wrote a man in Boston called me up. . . . What he has to say was that one of his boys was in the second grade at school in Roxbury, which is known for being one of the best elementary schools in the city, and that there was so much racially organized group violence in the second grade . . . that his son couldn't think about anything but whether he would be beaten up that day. Finally the father decided that he had no choice but to take him out of school.

This may not be a bad place to say that, from the reports I get, which means hundreds of letters from all parts of the country, children in schools are noticeably more violent, among each other, than they were ten or fifteen years ago. This is equally true in small towns and big cities, and in all parts of the country, and among all income classes. . . .

I see that in my previous letter I referred to the many letters I get about the brutal treatment of children in our elementary schools. These letters continue. I don't print them in *GWS [Growing Without Schooling]*, for many reasons: we don't have enough space, most of our readers already know that schools are bad, we are more interested in how to get out and what to do instead. But these letters, about stupid, brutal, and cruel treatment of even very young children in schools, continue to come in, from all parts of the country.

And so, if you are asked, "What about socialization?" Just reply: "Yes, I am concerned about socialization, and that's why I'm getting my kids out of the public school and have decided to homeschool." The only kind of socialization the schools can provide these days are the negative kind. Even in the good old days socialization was a problem. I was beaten up by a fellow classmate in kindergarten. I was terrorized by a group of kids in junior high school. But that was nothing compared to what students must put up with today. Kids now bring weapons to school to protect

themselves from assault and even murder. Many kids won't even go into a school bathroom because of fear of being robbed or beaten up.

There is also another kind of negative socialization that Lewis Perelman talks about in *School's Out*. He calls it social polarization. He writes:

Penelope Eckert, an anthropologist at the Institute for Research on Learning, has found in her studies that a major social impact produced by the normal schooling context, culminating in high school, is to divide youth into lifelong cultures of winners and losers. "While curricular tracking has come and gone in the American public schools, adolescent social categories remain as an enduring and uncontrolled social tracking system," Eckert observes. "It is largely as a result of the polarization between the Jocks and the Burnouts that people are thrown into a choice between two set patterns of behavior on the basis of a variety of unrelated interests and needs. . . ."

Moreover, this pernicious form of socialization is the result not of school quality or administration or location but of the inherent structure of the institution itself. In particular, Eckert finds that "the segregation of adolescents in an age-graded institution, isolated from the surrounding community, focuses their attention on the population, the activities and the roles that are available within the school," instead of those of what we commonly call *the real world*.

In homeschooling there is no social polarization. There are no losers. There are only winners. Another pernicious form of negative socialization is that suffered by girls who must compete with boys in coed schools. According to Perelman, there is "a growing body of research showing that girls in all-female schools maintain high levels of self-esteem and accomplishment in all fields including math and science, while the confidence and performance of girls in coed schools take a steep and steady nosedive after about grade seven or eight." Why does this happen? Perelman explains:

Detailed analyses of video records of classroom behavior show that teachers or professors, both male and female, persistently call on, praise, and encourage males several times more frequently than

they do females. The teachers rarely realize they are being biased; they are reflexively acting out rituals deeply embedded in the culture of schooling.

No such bias would be found in a homeschooling mom or dad who would want all of their kids to do the best, regardless of gender. Homeschooling eliminates school manufactured failure, social polarization, and gender bias. Perelman writes (p. 163):

These are just a few facets of the dark side of the force that school passes off as socialization. "[B]y the time students reach high school," Eckert observes, "the Jocks and the Burnouts are all too generally perceived as representing good and bad, cooperation and rebelliousness, success and failure, intelligence and stupidity." For the losers, the lessons of socialization become articles of surrender-- Eckert finds that "[r]ather than asking themselves how they can succeed in spite of the school, Burnouts discard goals along with the means to achieve them."

The myth of the decline of schooling is that our students are failing to learn. The real outrage of schooling is that our students are learning to fail.

It's enough to make a grown man weep! There are so many good kids, with so much potential, going down the drain in a system that can only guarantee failure.

Another fascinating study on socialization was conducted by Thomas C. Smedley and published in the *Home School Researcher* in 1992 (Vol. 8, No. 3). Mr. Smedley writes:

The insights and tools of communication study enable us to operationalize and test the variable "socialization." This paper borrows from the concepts of the "interactional" school of thought, which holds that communication is the means by which people create social reality. Socialization and communication are seen as inseparable components of life experience. A well-socialized child, from this perspective, can ably navigate the social and communications environment.

The survey instrument used to measure socialization was the *Vineland Adaptive*

*Behavior Scales (VABS)*. The data were collated and processed using the *Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS)*. The children studied in this project consisted of 33 homeschooled children of white, middle class, Protestant families, 16 females, 17 males, recruited mainly from a homeschool support group in Virginia, the Greater Roanoke Home Educator's Association (GRHEA). An equal number of public schoolers from similar white, middle class, Protestant families were chosen for the control group. All in all, only 33 forms were adequately completed by parents under field conditions. Twenty of the cases were homeschoolers, 13 were public schoolers. The results were quite dramatic. Mr. Smedley writes:

The findings of this study indicate that children kept home are more mature and better socialized than those who are sent to school. . . . The public school students surveyed attend well-funded and well-staffed middle class schools. The public school students even share the religious values of the home school children. Yet, the socialization difference is there.

What, then, is the best mechanism for socializing children? . . . If good socialization is synonymous with communication excellence, is the classroom an enriched or impoverished *communication* environment?

The classroom is mostly one-way communication, along stereotyped and rote channels. Information flows at the pace dictated by the teacher. Given the size of classes, few meaningful interchanges are possible on a given day between teacher and individual student.

This contrasts to the home education communication environment. Ten children is small for a class, but large for a family. Each child at home has immediate access to the attention of a significant adult. Home educators stress the initiative and responsibility of the individual student, and build community through voluntary cooperation rooted in a common faith, a common perception of duties. . . .

An unnatural aspect of the public school environment is the age segregation. Learning to get along with peers does not necessarily prepare the student for interactions with older and younger people in real life.

In the home school family, on the other hand, people of various ages and generations mix easily together in a variety that more accurately mirrors the outside society. . . . Younger siblings are best friends,

not embarrassments. When 100+ home school kids roller skate together, it is often reported that the crowd is noteworthy for its orderliness and pleasantness. . . .

[P]arental availability means that, during the course of an average day, home school adults and children likely have hundreds of interactions.

And that's the key to the better social adjustment of homeschooled kids: the availability of parents. How often do we hear adults lamenting the lack of parental interest and availability they experienced as children. It's a constant theme in the lives of drug addicts or delinquents or alcoholics. It's the "where-were-you-when-I-needed-you" syndrome.

Finally, when I was in Australia in 1991, I visited James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland, where I was able to spend a couple of hours reading the Ph.D. dissertation of Brian Cambourne, head of the Centre for Studies in Literacy at Wollongong University. Dr. Cambourne is one of Australia's leading advocates of Whole Language instruction, not a particular friend of homeschooling. The aim of his thesis was to determine in which environmental setting first-grade children learned language best: in school, on the playground, or at home. His findings were quite startling. He wrote:

[O]f the three settings in which spontaneous speech was recorded, it would appear that the home setting is the most nurturant and the classroom setting is the least nurturant in terms of the development of the skills of sentence-combining. The results obtained in this study would suggest that the agents and conditions experienced by the child in the home setting interact in such a way as to predispose him to a more extensive application of embedding transformations than either of the other two settings. In terms of the way in which Moffett (1968) conceptualises the relationship between language and thinking, the home environments sampled in this study appear to be ones in which the child is most constrained to "specify" and "relate," which in turn helps move him toward mature thought and speech. . . .

On the basis of sociolinguistic theory, it is reasonable to generalise these findings to other aspects of

language-use. That is, from the point of view of, say, arguing, giving directions, explaining, defining, describing and even increasing vocabulary skills, the same relationship ought to hold--i.e. one-to-one dialogue with older, more skillful users of the language, is a basic requirement. It is also interesting to note that, from the point of view of spontaneously produced speech, the home setting appeared to be the one in which the higher levels of sentence-combining occurred. This suggests that a secure, warm, parental-like relationship between interlocutors is one of the factors which is conducive to higher levels of performance.

I think that Professor Cambourne just about makes the case for homeschooling. As far as socialization is concerned, the public school variety means violence, drugs, sex, alcohol, foul language and a dumbed-down, impaired intellect.

## Chapter Fourteen: Homeschooling and Religion

For the first twenty years of the homeschool movement, religion has clearly been the strongest motive for parents to remove their children from the public schools. The increasingly hostile attitude of the schools toward Biblical religion apparently has disturbed Christian parents more than any other school deficiency. The result is that today the homeschool movement is largely Christian in character with strong state homeschooling associations promoting a distinctly Christian approach to parental responsibility and education in general.

The doctrine of the separation of church and state, which originally was intended to forbid the government from establishing an official state religion, has been reinterpreted by some judges and educators to mean the separation of state from religion or a belief in God, particularly the God of the Bible. This has led to such extreme measures that in one county in Kentucky, school-bus drivers were warned not to say Merry Christmas to any of the children. Presumably, they could say "Happy holidays," but not Merry Christmas for the obvious reason that pronouncing the name Christ in Christmas violated the now sacred separation of church and state.

John Leo, who writes for *U.S. News & World Report* (12/30/96) reported that the principal of Loudoun High School in Virginia told student editors to keep the school newspaper as secular as possible and "to be careful that they don't associate the upcoming holiday with any particular religion." Leo further reported that some schools allow only instrumental versions of traditional Christmas carols for fear that the words might contaminate the students' minds with religious sentiments. Schools in Scarsdale, N.Y., actually forbade the singing of "Jingle Bells" and "Frosty," which is an

indication to what length some public schools will go to keep out of their classrooms any reference to Biblical religion, although it can hardly be said that Jingle Bells or Frosty have any serious religious connotations.

Yet, these same schools have elevated the theory of evolution from theory to fact even though it is still only theory. The fact is that the theory of evolution is under attack not only from religionists, but from scientists as well. Nevertheless, children are being taught in the government schools that they are the descendants of the lower animals and that they must look downward toward the animal kingdom for their origin rather than upward toward the God who created them. Merely from the point of view of self-esteem, of which the public schools seem to be so concerned, it would seem that looking upward toward a benevolent God who gave these children life would bolster their sense of self-worth far more than looking down toward the apes as the source of their being. It is very important for children to know that each one of them has a soul, and that they are responsible toward God on how they use the life they were given. Every life is unique, every child is unique. It is this personal relationship with one's Maker that will give children a sense of responsibility when it comes to their speech and behavior.

Whatever one might think of the theory of evolution, its impact on student behavior must be viewed as negative. That's why so many public schools are called "zoos." The children believe they are animals, and therefore they act like animals, although animals are much more subject to genetically programmed behavior than human beings. One of the evidences one can cite of mankind's divine origin is the fact that human beings are not as subject to genetically programmed behavior as are animals. Human beings can plan their lives, restrain their impulses, control their emotional responses, and delay gratification. Human beings can also communicate with one another through language and other ways totally beyond the capability of any other living species. This too is seen by religionists as evidence that man was

specially created by God for God's purposes.

Many Jewish and Muslim parents are also beginning to realize that homeschooling is now a viable alternative to the present anti-religious public schools. The secular curriculum has tended to undermine the religious beliefs of all children, Christian and non-Christian. Even some Unitarian parents, who have traditionally supported public education, have joined the homeschool movement and created their own support association. When even Unitarians begin to express dismay at the way the public schools are educating their children, one can believe that homeschooling is bound to grow among the more secularized among of our population.

In other words, whether or not you believe in God, there are plenty of other reasons why parents should remove their children from the public schools and teach them at home. One of the oldest homeschooling groups is John Holt's "Growing Without Schooling" which approaches homeschooling from a secular viewpoint. Holt was deeply concerned with how the bureaucratically run state education machine was destroying the minds of countless children. He felt that the school, as a kind of self-serving institution, had become an actual obstacle to learning and that it thrived on failure because failure got it more money. He wrote in *A Life Worth Living*:

I hardly think any more that it's possible to be a full-time teacher, I don't care [in] what kind of school or institutional setting, without somehow corrupting the relationships between oneself and other people . . . In the last year or two I have found myself really *hating* schools with an intensity that seemed to me almost irrational, and that I could hardly explain even to people who agree with me a lot. . . . (p. 216)

My deep and long-range concern is not just to get children out of schools but to help knock down all the barriers we have put up between children and the world of serious adults . . . . (p. 230)

It is *extremely* difficult to talk to people in education--and most difficult of all at the college or university level--without getting into an unpleasant kind of verbal battle. . . . (p. 231)

A school is a place that exists only to take care of kids, and *as such* is more likely than not to be more

bad than good for kids, no matter who is running it . . . . (p. 233)

Most of the people in teaching, and I mean something like 90% or more, are incurious, unintelligent, mentally lazy people who distrust, dislike, fear, and even hate kids. . . . In most schools the kids don't like or trust any adult. Their unspoken and perfectly justified question to you would be, "If you're such a good person, what are you doing in this stinking place?" (p. 250)

Holt had come to the homeschool movement through a purely secular process. His teaching experience, in which he saw how bored and frightened the children were, led him to believe that the schools had to be reformed. He argued that the school's big mistake was in thinking that it had to make children do what they naturally wanted to do, and knew how to do, namely learn about the world around them. Consequently, he became active in the free-school, or alternative-school, movement of the 1960's in which it was thought that schools could become places where children could be independent, self-directing learners. But by the mid 1970's many of the alternative schools had closed, and the basic ideas behind them had been absorbed into the mainstream school establishment. But none of this was enough to reform the system. ^

With the failure of the free-school movement, Holt was attracted to the deschooling movement sparked by the sociologist Ivan Illich, whose book *Deschooling Society* was published in 1970. To Illich deschooling society not only meant doing away with the physical school but also doing away with society's schooling mentality, which gave schools their credentialing power. Thus, it was this schooling mentality or mindset that maintained these self-serving, debilitating institutions in which children unlearned their natural desire to learn.

Once Holt had decided that the schools could not be adequately reformed because of their intrinsic bureaucratic, anti-human nature and that deschooling was the only way to restore sanity to education in America, he began to think of how this radical change could be brought about. He decided that home education was the best

way to go, because parents would not have to wait for others to do the reforming for them, and home education would demonstrate that parents and children could teach and learn and make their way in the working world without the need of an institution called a school. And so, in 1977 Holt launched *Growing Without Schooling* magazine which has become one of the world's leading publications promoting the liberation of children from state schooling. When John Holt died in 1985, homeschooling was already well established as a viable alternative to the ever unreformable public school.

Meanwhile, on the Christian front, the Rev. Rousas J. Rushdoony, founder of the Christian Reconstruction movement, had been persuading parents through his writings and lectures to abandon the state schools and put their children in good Christian schools or educate them at home. Although mainline Christian churches still supported the public schools, young Christian parents were being attracted to more fundamentalist churches which generally advocated a Biblical approach to education. Many of these parents decided to homeschool as they found that only through home education could a new Christian family lifestyle be achieved. In such a family, father assumed spiritual leadership, there were daily devotions and prayers, a suitable division of labor in which everyone had something useful to do, and children absorbed the values of their parents. And because in such a family, the parents lived in obedience to God's law as taught in the Bible, disciplining children was not at all difficult. When children saw their parents living in obedience to God's law, it served as a model whereby the children could see their own need to submit to the authority of their parents.

Therefore, religion has become the backbone of the Christian homeschool movement and given it an ideological cohesion and purpose that parents need when they decide to defy common practice and make a clean break with society's statist institutions. But this is the kind of quiet revolutionary action that is required if the American Christian family is to be restored to its full purpose as a carrier of Christianity

to own children. People often wonder how it was possible for the Jewish people to survive and maintain their religion through the centuries, deprived of their own land, and forced to live among other nations with other religions. It was done by one generation transferring its values to the next generation through daily, consistent family practice and education. Ironically, in America, where Jews have had the greatest freedom to exist as human beings, secular education has done more to destroy religious belief among young Jews than any other influence, proving that once the religious bridge between generations is destroyed, the next generation is unlikely to inherit its parents' values.

Homeschooling has done much to restore religion to family life. It has also restored spiritual values to education. As long as the doctrine of separation of church and state is upheld, it will make it impossible for public education to transfer the spiritual values of one generation to the next. Which suggests that the only way to restore spiritual values to schools, is to get the government out of the education business. In other words, the separation of school and state should be as desirable as the separation of church and state if the American people wish to maintain the religious character of our nation.

But by the time the American people are willing to accept that separation, technology and homeschooling will have made the school as a teaching institution totally obsolete. It is unlikely that those who have been homeschooled will choose schools for their own children, for they will have learned first hand how much better a family is that educates its own children, and how much better off are the children when they are educated at home by loving parents in the context of a happy family life. There is no better preparation for adulthood than that.

## Chapter Fifteen:

# Homeschooling and the Community

Although the number of children being homeschooled is still quite small compared to the 45 million in public schools, most people are unaware of how influential the homeschoolers are becoming as a social and political force as their movement grows larger and stronger. Most homeschooling parents merely want to be left alone so that they can carry out their parental responsibilities with as little interference from the government as possible. But it is the tendency of bureaucrats not to want to leave people alone, especially if there is a regulation to be enforced.

Compulsory school attendance laws give some bureaucrats a kind of license to enforce regulations as if they were laws. Nor have the courts been very helpful in this matter. In fact, one of the things that homeschoolers have learned in their dealings with the courts is how ignorant judges can be not only of education laws but of the U.S. Constitution to which many homeschoolers turn for protection from unwarranted violations of family privacy and parental rights.

All of which means that homeschoolers have been forced to become interested in politics because it is now evident that educational policies are not made by bureaucrats or truant officers but by legislators who pass laws which affect parents and children. The National Education Association, the largest and most powerful labor union in the United States, has been hostile toward homeschooling ever since educators began to fear it as a future threat to the government's virtual monopoly on education. The N.E.A. would like nothing better than to get state legislatures and the Congress to put homeschoolers out of business. And because they have professional

lobbyists working full-time to get their legislative agendas passed, homeschoolers have had to start worrying about the men who are elected to state legislatures and the Congress. Several years ago, this writer asked a legislator in Alaska what his stand was on parental rights. He confessed that he had none and didn't even know that parental rights might become an issue. Thus, the need to educate legislators.

Meanwhile, networks of activists, concerned with the ongoing crisis in American education, have begun to monitor what is going on in the state legislatures and Congress and are using phones, faxes, and letters to contact their representatives and let their views be known. That's how it became possible for a small group of activists to alert the network when an amendment was added to an education bill in Congress that would have required homeschoolers to be certified teachers. The Congress received so many phone calls and faxes from homeschoolers across the nation that the telephone system shut down due to overload. And believe it or not, the entire alert was initiated by an activist in New Jersey who had phoned her Congressman and asked if such an amendment had been put in the bill.

The phone and fax barrage was enough to force the Congressmen to reconsider the amendment and delete it from the bill. That's the kind of strength and political power the homeschool movement has quietly built up and which only now is beginning to be felt in state capitals and the halls of Congress. In other words, out of necessity, many homeschoolers have become political activists because they have come to realize that their freedom is not guaranteed by a Constitution which is so routinely ignored and violated by judges, bureaucrats, educators, and legislators.

Thus, the homeschool movement is gradually beginning to change our political and educational culture. Christian homeschoolers now rely more on the Bible than civil law for their ultimate protection from the state. They believe that the state, through compulsory education laws and child-protection agencies, has invaded the realm of the family and, in many cases, deprived families of their fundamental rights to bring up

their own children in accordance with their own values. That is why the Home School Legal Defense Association has become active in trying to limit what the state can do to affect family life.

And so, if you intend to become a homeschooler, be prepared to get involved, through a state association or a local support group, in political and community activities. This is necessary if homeschoolers are to make their neighbors sympathetic toward homeschoolers and politicians aware that homeschoolers are a force to be reckoned with. Of late, more and more newspapers and magazines are publishing sympathetic stories about homeschooling. But because homeschooling "is not for everyone," it is still considered by many as more of a curiosity than a viable alternative to public education. The establishment still promotes the idea that the schools can be reformed and improved, and that is why the vast majority of Americans still go along with that notion, and almost every state legislature in the Union has passed expensive, radical education reform programs that are supposed to end the education crisis but won't.

Yet, while homeschooling, as we are constantly reminded by its detractors, "is not for everyone," there are thousands if not millions of parents who would be willing to try it if they knew more about it. That's where home educators can help by spreading the word about the benefits of home education. Some state associations have gotten their governors to proclaim a Home Education Week, during which homeschoolers can set up tables in public libraries and elsewhere to inform the public about homeschooling, distribute literature, do workshops, have student recitals, etc. The public should also be made aware that homeschoolers, by educating their children at home at their own expense, are saving the community lots of money. If it costs the state \$5,000 to educate a child in a public school, 5,000 homeschoolers would be saving the state 25-million dollars! That's the kind of information that would make the taxpayer appreciate what homeschoolers are doing.

In addition, homeschoolers are producing competent, literate young adults who will be less inclined to rely on government help and subsidies for their advancement. Homeschoolers tend to be entrepreneurs because of their sense of responsibility and self-reliance which home education by its very nature inculcates. They tend to be active self-starters and participants rather than passive watchers of the game. They are high on morality and practically zero on delinquency. Thus, the homeschooling movement is contributing productive, honest, generally ambitious young adults who will be a credit to any community.

There are many things homeschoolers can do to make the community aware of the home education movement. Take your child to the state legislature and let him or her watch the lawmakers at their business. Afterwards, have your kids meet their representative. A homemade pie, or cookies presented to the representative and his staff will make a lasting, favorable impression. Everyone loves wholesome, well-behaved kids. In fact, the best advertisement for homeschooling are homeschooled kids. Take a group of homeschoolers to visit the mayor or the governor. Politicians understand the need to appear benevolent toward children if they want to be reelected.

Also, do not be afraid to take your children to the supermarket or mall during hours when other kids are in school. If anyone asks how come your kids aren't in school, just tell them that you are a homeschooling family and that you make your own schedule. This may surprise or even shock some citizens. But actually one finds that more and more people have heard about homeschooling and that some of them may even know of a family that is homeschooling. You might hand the questioner a little brochure describing the benefits of homeschooling, prepared by your support group. And you might inform an interested parent about when the next homeschooling convention or workshop is taking place in your area. In other words, become a proselytizer for home education. It will get Americans to start questioning their

assumptions about education, particularly the notion that education can't take place without school and that parents are not qualified to educate their own children. It is this public school mentality that keeps so many parents from enjoying the benefits and pleasures of home education.

One of the great pleasures of parenthood is the sheer delight in transferring to one's own children the knowledge and values that one holds dear. But when parents put their children in public and sometimes even private schools, strangers impart their own values to the children under their care, and children generally accept them even though they may conflict with the values of their parents. That's how teenage rebellion often gets started.

In any case, the contribution that homeschoolers will be making to our country in the decades ahead can only be seen as positive. Some of them will become legislators or lawyers or judges, and that's when we shall see some really significant social and cultural changes taking place in America.

## **Chapter Sixteen: Bureaucrats and Legislators**

In the previous chapter we touched on the need for homeschoolers to get involved politically because educational policies are not merely determined by district superintendents of schools and local judges but by legislators enacting laws in state capitals and Washington D.C. The very existence of the U.S. Department of Education, with its multi-billion-dollar budget and federal programs affecting education in every school district, makes it imperative for homeschoolers to monitor everything being done by the Congress and the bureaucrats that will affect their freedom in the future to educate their children at home without government interference.

In 1994 more bills concerning education were introduced in Congress than in all previous sessions. While most of these bills never got out of committee, some of them were enacted and have had an enormous impact on state education reform programs. These include the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and the Improving America's School Act which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It was this latter act which contained the amendment requiring all teachers to be certified which was later deleted from the bill because of the phone and fax blitz initiated by homeschoolers.

Both the School-to-Work Opportunities Act and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act are potentially dangerous to the future health of the homeschool movement. Both acts, crafted by individuals who think that the government ought to be planning the lives of all of its future adults, call for changing traditional liberal education into a kind of glorified vocational training that will begin in elementary school. An important component of these reforms is a massive computerized data-gathering system in the

National Center for Education Statistics -- a part of the Department of Education -- in which highly personal, intimate, and sensitive information about every aspect of an individual's life will be stored. This information will be made available to just about anyone who wants it. The questions we must ask are, first: Does the government of a free people maintain detailed and extensive dossiers on the private lives of all of its citizens? Second: Who will own this information? And third: To what use will it be put?

Where do such unAmerican, totalitarian ideas come from? They come from such think tanks as the Carnegie Corporation of New York or the National Center for Education and the Economy. The president of the latter organization, Marc Tucker, has described his school reform scheme, funded by the School-to-Work Act, as a "Human Resources Development System" which will "create a seamless web of opportunities to develop one's skills that literally extends from cradle to grave and is the same system for everyone -- young and old, poor and rich, worker and full-time student." When he says that it's a system for everyone he means it. In other words, homeschoolers will be brought into the system through some means. This all-inclusive idea was reiterated by J. D. Hoye, the White House director of the National School-to-Work Office, who said in 1994: "Our issue is it's for all kids. And all means all--all does not mean some."

Perhaps now you see why homeschoolers must become politically active. The legislators who enacted these laws which, if uncontested, will put an end to educational freedom in America must be made aware of what they are doing. The sad fact is that many of the legislators do not even read the bills they enact. They simply take their cue from the party leadership. But the homeschool activist network makes it a point to read all of the education bills that come before Congress. And therefore they are able to discuss these bills intelligently with their representatives and their aides and state why they oppose them.

Once you decide to become an activist, find an activist network in your local area.

There are literally hundreds of such groups across America, with all sorts of newsletters monitoring the legislative scene. There are also national conferences being held which deal with education issues. One of the handiest tools you can get is a U.S. Congress handbook which contains the names and phone and fax numbers of all the members of Congress. The handbook will give party affiliation, committee membership, staff names, and other useful information. Thus, you'll be able to send your Congressman or woman a fax urging him or her to vote for or oppose a particular bill. Politicians who want to be reelected pay attention to the letters they get from voters back home. You can even create a committee of one or several activists and produce a letterhead which will get even more attention from the legislator.

You may wonder how so small a group can wield so much clout when it comes to influencing legislators. The reason is simple. Homeschoolers may be small in number, but virtually all of them tend to be activists and vote in elections, while the vast majority of those who send their children to public schools have little or no interest in getting involved politically. Besides, they don't have to, with the powerful teachers unions doing the politicking for them.

Another important area for homeschoolers to monitor is their state legislature. The state teachers organizations will be quite active in trying to expand their power and, if possible, get the legislature to enact laws requiring homeschoolers to register with the state, or require homeschooling parents to be certified, or require homeschooled kids to be tested, or require home visits by local superintendents, or require supervision of the homeschool by a state-certified teacher. The public educators have been able to get such regulations passed because they've been able to convince the legislators that homeschooling parents cannot be trusted.

Many homeschoolers have been quite willing to have their children tested because they know how much better educated their children are compared to the public schoolers. But many of these testing regulations state that if a homeschooled

child does not score at his grade level, he or she may be forced to attend a public school. The irony here is that millions of public school children score below their grade level on achievement tests, yet the schools are not punished for their poor jobs of educating. In other words, homeschoolers are held up to a much higher teaching standard than the teachers in the public schools.

Sometimes, superintendents, armed by some state-mandated regulation, will try to intimidate homeschoolers. A letter to the superintendent from the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) will usually be enough to get the superintendent to back down. If not, lawyers from the Association will contest the superintendent in court. That's why it is worthwhile for homeschoolers to join the HSLDA. It provides the kind of legal protection that is sometimes necessary in dealing with the state or school district.

Also, join your state homeschool association if it is a membership organization. The homeschool movement in America is now very well organized, and there is power in numbers. You may even want to become an officer of the association. Most of the state associations are about ten years old, and many of the original founders are beginning to pass on the baton of leadership to others. What were once small organizations with mimeographed bulletins are now larger, more sophisticated, with glossy monthly magazines, big conventions, homeschooling handbooks, and all sorts of services for members. And they will become even larger in the years ahead.

All in all, it is important to remind superintendents and legislators that they are your public servants. They are not your masters, since it is your taxes that pay their salaries. So many bureaucrats and politicians seem to have forgotten that the taxpaying, law-abiding public is their master. And so, it is sometimes necessary to gently remind them of the facts of American political life. Only by such constant vigilance will we be able to preserve the free system of government handed down to us by the preceding generation. It is up to us to see to it that this free system of

government will be handed down intact to the next generation. What would they think of us if they inherited a system of diminished freedom in which the public servants had indeed become the public's masters. We have a sacred obligation to preserve freedom, no matter what the think tanks come up with, no matter what the judges rule, no matter what the legislators enact into law, no matter what the bureaucrats and educators would have us do. Preserving freedom is the added burden of the homeschooler. But it is a burden one should be proud to bear.

## **Chapter Seventeen: A New Family Lifestyle**

During the past few years much has been written about the breakdown of the American family. Unwed motherhood, single-parent families on welfare, rampant divorce, child abuse and spouse abuse have just about put the American family on the endangered species list. Even the word family itself is undergoing searching redefinition. But in the midst of all of this gloom about the increase in dysfunctional families, a brand new model of a happy family is emerging in America. In fact, one of the most positive developments of the homeschool movement is the emergence of a new family lifestyle centered on child rearing and education.

In the homeschooling family, education becomes the cement of family togetherness, a dynamic kind of togetherness that adds a new intellectual, spiritual, and cultural dimension to family life. Because the emphasis is on knowledge and the development of creative and productive skills, the family becomes a rich source of intellectual discussion and experience.

In homeschooling, the family becomes a place of learning where everyone learns. The younger children learn by hearing and seeing the older children being taught. And parents learn by teaching their own children subject matter that they may have forgotten or may never have had. In a way, homeschooling parents learn more than the children because they are in a position to expand their knowledge from a broader base which includes life's experiences.

The new family lifestyle is shaped by the fact that parents and children get to know one another very well. They spend more time together, they do more things together, they become aware of each family member's idiosyncracies, talents, and

difficulties. The children, because of all the direct attention they get from their parents, develop a greater sense of emotional security and a knowledge that they are especially loved and appreciated because mom and dad are willing to devote so much time to them. Thus, family bonding is stronger and deeper than in the non-homeschooling family.

And when the children grow up and leave home, family ties remain as strong as ever, because they are based on the special bonding that produces rich lifelong friendships among siblings. And when homeschooled children get married, they have a model of family life that permits them to duplicate what they enjoyed as children and want their own children to have.

The importance of family ties cannot be overestimated. We all know of adopted children who spend years trying to find their biological parents. And we've seen on television some of these emotional reunions in which mother and child who haven't known or seen one another in twenty or thirty years embrace each other in a way that seems uncanny. The yearning to be connected with one's blood relatives is the same yearning that connects us to the human race. Some children, abandoned at birth on a church doorstep or in a garbage can, will in adult life go to great lengths to find some knowledge of the mother who abandoned them. What a scar such abandonment leaves on the psyche of the child who becomes, as an adult, so obsessed with his or her origin.

And that is why the homeschool family lifestyle is so wonderful, for it is a family lifestyle that is child-centered and child loving. Bringing up kids becomes the focal point of family life, and that is why the children are so well adjusted and emotionally secure. Homeschoolers tend to enjoy kids and want to have many of them, because each act of creation produces a new human being who adds joy to the family. When a new son or daughter or sister or brother enters the family, that gives each family member an additional blood relative with whom to bond and share life's experiences.

One is reminded of the sad only child who longs to have a sister or brother, if only to play with.

Homeschooling families do not experience the traumas of teenage rebellion which occur when children develop values that conflict with the values of their parents. In homeschooling, parents transfer their values to their children. In public schools, the values of that institution tend to replace the values taught at home, and today's public schools place great emphasis on changing children's values to conform with the values of the school. Social scientist Prof. Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago, made that objective very clear in his book, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, first published in 1958. He wrote:

By educational objectives, we mean explicit formulations of the ways in which students are expected to be changed by the educative process. That is, the ways in which they will change in their thinking, their feelings, and their actions.

The evidence points out convincingly to the fact that age is a factor operating against attempts to effect a complete or thorough-going reorganization of attitudes and values.

The evidence collected thus far suggests that a single hour of classroom activity under certain conditions may bring about a major reorganization in cognitive as well as affective behaviors. We are of the opinion that this will prove to be a most fruitful area of research in connection with the affective domain.

In other words, the educators have made it very clear that their goal is to "effect a complete and thorough-going reorganization of attitudes and values" that the kids bring from home. Apparently, the educators disapprove of the attitudes and values that children acquire from their parents. And so, what the educators do is sow the seeds of rebellion and familial conflict.

Fortunately, the homeschooling family need not worry about conflicting values which lead to teenage rebellion. The new family lifestyle is one of harmony and basic agreement between parents and children when it comes to values. This is particularly

true among religious families where daily devotions and Bible reading create a strong spiritual unity among parents and children alike. In such families, where the father is the spiritual leader of the family, his authority is respected because it relies on God for its source.

Obviously, therefore, the kind of lifestyle a homeschooling family will have will depend greatly on its philosophical foundations. But all homeschooling families have several things in common. The most important thing of all is that the homeschooling family is master of its own time. The children of the family are no longer prisoners of the state, confined in the school during the best hours of the day, requiring the family to plan its activities in accordance with the school's schedule. And that time in school is spent being dumbed down, not educated.

Being free to determine how one is going to spend the day, gives homeschoolers an exhilarating sense of freedom and independence. The family, not the state, decides how to spend its time. It can actually be spent learning instead of being wasted. It can be spent developing one's intellect instead of succumbing to boredom and psychological manipulation by educators with a hidden agenda. Thus, the emotional and psychological benefits of declaring one's own independence from the state school gives the family an understanding of what freedom is all about. Freedom means being free of government coercion. That is the freedom that the founding fathers fought to obtain for all Americans. To them, the purpose of government was to secure the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all Americans. And there are many economic benefits to this.

Freedom also provides economic benefits for the family. For example, homeschoolers can take advantage of the off-hours at skating rinks, or will get a better rate from a music teacher who might otherwise not have students until they get home from school. In addition, the homeschooled children have more energy for these activities. They are not exhausted and listless because of a day of confinement in the

suffocating atmosphere of the public school. On the other hand, public schoolers, if they are involved in extracurricular activities, ~~they~~ must do the work in the late afternoon when their energies and enthusiasm are not at their highest. The best hours of the day are spent in the drudgery of the classroom, and the worst hours of the day are given over to what children really like doing. A

All of that is changed in homeschooling. The academic work is usually completed by noon and the rest of the day can be spent at whatever activities the family wants to engage in. Sometimes, if a morning field trip has been planned, the academics can be done at some other time. Also, the family can take advantage of off-season vacations or travel, thus avoiding crowds and saving money. The family goes on vacation or takes trips when Dad is free, not when school is closed. The calendar revolves around the family's needs, not the school's schedule.

Another important aspect of the homeschooling family's lifestyle is its social life. In the family committed to public schooling, parents tend to develop their own social lives, and the kids through school friendships and activities tend to develop social lives of their own. And so, this divides the family in a way that can cause serious problems. Kids get into a great deal of trouble because of peer pressure in the school, and parents are often kept in the dark about what their children are really up to with their friends. The children begin to develop intense friendships, creating their own secret language in order to hide from their parents what they are doing with their friends, particularly of the opposite sex. Dating leads to premarital sex, which may lead to unwanted pregnancies, abortions, unwed teenage motherhood, emotional traumas, jealousies, physical abuse, even murder. The parents are the last to know that their son or daughter is in deep trouble. Sons may get involved with drugs or gangs, which is the kind of desperate social life that has claimed the lives and souls of many youngsters.

In contrast, the social life of the homeschooling family is positive and delightful. It

is not a divided social life, but one built around a united family. Homeschooling parents join support groups or develop friendships with other homeschooling parents, and the kids are always there unless they are engaged in some activity with other homeschoolers. The kids have no secrets to hide from their parents, and the parents lives are pretty open to the kids. Family members are not outside the family each going in his or her own direction. Dating is discouraged as an open invitation to dangerous temptation. Courtship is encouraged and parents try to match up their kids with other homeschooled kids. Innocence is maintained for as long as the children are under their parents' care and protection. The public schooler, on the other hand, is introduced to sex education as early as kindergarten and will start experimenting with sex in the preteen years. And when one examines the dysfunctional family, it becomes obvious that premarital sex is the premier cause of social trauma.

This doesn't mean that homeschooled children never get into trouble. What it does mean is that homeschoolers get into much less trouble than their public school counterparts because of the strong moral teaching at home. Homeschoolers tend to be busy, creative, productive, independent self-starters with little interest in the kind of temptations that public schoolers are confronted with everyday in school or on the bus. Public schoolers, being among a couple of hundred kids daily, away from parental supervision, and without any moral guidance from the educators, easily fall prey to the seductive pressures of their friends.

Thus, in the lifestyle of the homeschool family is a sense of security and togetherness that keeps the corruption, temptations, and evils of the greater culture at bay. Parents decide what the children will watch on television, and usually the less TV the better. There are plenty of good videos that parents can get for their kids. This produces a healthy moral environment in which parents enjoy their responsibilities as parents, and children enjoy the safety and warmth of a truly rich and fulfilling family life.

Homeschooling also encourages the development of family enterprises in which

all members can take part. Many homeschooling families have built businesses and home enterprises that have helped make their families economically self-sufficient. This is important during a time of dynamic economic change in America. Homeschoolers are in a good position to take advantage of all the new opportunities that are being created by the new technology. They can use their time to develop whatever interests them. Many pioneering homeschool families have become successful booksellers, magazine publishers, curriculum developers, clothing designers, software developers, etc.

All in all, the new family lifestyle that homeschooling has created is the most positive social development in America today. The rest of America can learn much from this healthy phenomenon which a family can enjoy only when it rejects government schooling and discovers the great moral, spiritual, and psychological benefits of freedom.

## Chapter Eighteen

### Support Groups

One of the great sources of moral support available to homeschoolers are the local support groups which have grown up like mushrooms across America. Wherever there are a few homeschooling families, one is likely to find a support group providing these families with mutual help, a place to exchange information and experiences, a sounding board, and plain old neighborly socializing. Support groups provide homeschoolers a means to reach the community at large through open meetings and community projects. The support group can project a very positive image of what homeschooling is all about since it brings together parents who have achieved educational freedom for their families.

At support group gatherings parents can discuss the problems they all have in common: choosing the right curriculum, restricting television, home discipline, testing, relations with local superintendents, experiences in teaching -- what works, what doesn't work, finding good books, finding good educational materials and supplies, organizing sports, and most sensitive of all, how to handle their children's socializing with the opposite sex. In a culture awash with sexual stimuli, how does one make sure that one's children are not caught up in the vortex of modern trends? These are matters that parents can discuss in support groups.

The support groups also provide opportunities for homeschooled children to get to know one another, to play together, to go on field trips together. Some support groups organize all sorts of extracurricular clubs for the children. They also provide the means to exchange expertise in particular areas of study. For example, a parent

who is an engineer can help students with math. A parent who speaks French or Spanish or any other foreign language can start a club for that study group. A parent or child who is a computer buff can help others learn to use a computer, get on the internet, or recommend specific equipment to buy. Parents with older children who no longer need certain books or curricula, can pass them on to parents with younger kids. In other words, in support groups parents help parents do a better job at homeschooling.

Some support groups organize drama clubs so that the kids can act in plays. They organize team sports, visits to museums and historical sights, and visits to skating rinks at off-hours when the rinks are empty and the price of admission is lower. Thus, the support group is a kind of extension of the family in that it can provide socialization, recreation, expertise and friendship all at the same time.

The point is that homeschooling families do not live in isolation from one another or the community. They are eager to join others of like mind to provide their children and themselves with healthful, enjoyable socialization. And, of course, the support groups vary in outlook. Christian homeschoolers will usually join support groups comprised of parents who share their religious values. Jewish homeschoolers have created their own groups for mutual support. In eastern Massachusetts, for example, where there are more than 8,000 children being homeschooled, the support networks include a theater group that meets in Cambridge, a problem-solving group based in Malden, a ski group in Marlborough, a play group for children that meets at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, a campfire group for boys and girls that meets at the Museum of Science, a chess club, a math study group, and a history club.

Some of the groups organize spelling bees, geography bees, science fairs, craft shows, and musical and dance recitals. Some groups meet in churches, or public libraries, or in the larger homes of the families. Potluck dinners are a staple of support group meetings. Sometimes the children themselves organize an activity, such as

reading poems the children have written, putting on a play, baking cookies and bread, reading a favorite book out loud in a circle, publishing a newsletter which includes children's drawings, family biographies, and event calendars. The telephone, the modem, the fax keep everyone in touch.

Support groups can also have some impact on local politics. Visits to the offices of state legislators, or inviting state legislators to attend a support group gathering can be a good way to introduce legislators to the homeschooling phenomenon and also to acquaint homeschoolers with the political leaders of their communities. Discussions about the political makeup of the community might inspire some homeschooling parents to run for office and inspire some of the children to become politically active when they get older. A study of the history of our form of government would be an excellent project for any support group. Visits to the legislature, to county courthouses, to the Governor's office, to fire and police stations, to prisons would no doubt be enlightening experiences for the parents as well as the children.

Getting to know how your community is governed would make a great, useful learning project. Have your support group read aloud the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Constitution of your state. Read the writings of the Founding Fathers to acquaint yourself with their ideas and intentions. I can think of no better activity for a support group than learning about and discussing the philosophical basis of our American form of government. Deciding to homeschool is a political as well as an educational decision. The act of homeschooling is an indication that you believe that America is still a free country in which parents still have the right to determine how their children are to be educated. That act, in and of itself, indicates a very serious and profound understanding of what it means to be an American.

New homeschoolers who are testing the waters of freedom are relieved of their anxieties when meeting experienced homeschoolers in the group who can answer

their myriad questions. The first year is always the hardest because it requires such a radical change in educational philosophy and attitude, and it does take courage to make such a change in a society that puts heavy emphasis on conformity and political correctness. But getting to know other courageous parents who have successfully made the transition from public schooler to homeschooler can be greatly encouraging.

How does one go about finding a support group? You won't find them in the phone book. The easiest way is to ask a homeschooling family. They will know a support group, tell you how to get in touch with it, or invite you to the next meeting. Another way is to contact the state homeschool association which usually can direct you to a local support group. In the Appendix is a list of state homeschool associations with their phone numbers. The state organizations are usually the best source of information about what is going on in the state. Once you get involved with a support group, be creative. Think of all the wonderful ways that you and your family can enjoy the freedom that comes with homeschooling, and think of ways in which you can bring that message of freedom to others.

## Chapter Nineteen: Dating Versus Courtship

One of the most interesting developments among homeschoolers is the shift from dating to courtship as the means of getting their children to establish a relationship with the opposite sex. Dating is probably one of the worst forms of social activity in the United States. Who among adults today can forget the emotional roller coaster associated with the ups and downs, the highs and lows of dating? Who can forget the pain of being snubbed or rejected by the opposite sex in a kind of teenage rat race, better known as a popularity contest?

And then there is the business of going steady, that is, dating the same person over a period of weeks or months, the growing possessiveness and jealousies, the pain of being dumped for someone else. Teenage magazines are full of letters from adolescents suffering the anxieties and insecurities of the dating game. Falling in and out of love can create some very painful emotional experiences. And getting involved in premarital sex can ruin a life before a teenager is even out of school.

In fact, premarital sex is probably the cause of more social problems and tragedies in America today than any other social activity. When boys persuade girls to give up their virginity, and the girls say yes because they want to feel loved or wanted, a horrible degradation takes place. Word will get around school that so-and-so has been had. In a society where virginity has lost its value, the girls nevertheless know that something bad has happened to them. They are emotionally and morally confused, and don't know how to say "no," or even why they should say "no."

Fathers and mothers accept the dating game and suspect that their children are

engaging in sex but dare not interfere, since the dating game is the sacred ritual of the public school adolescent. The result is that parents keep their fingers crossed and hope for the best and are shocked out of their minds when their daughter comes home pregnant, or find out that she has had a secret abortion with the help of a boyfriend, or find out that her boyfriend has turned her into a drug addict.

Sometimes dating means nothing more than having sex, and going steady is little more than having steady sex with one partner. Occasionally, a girl will dump a boy with whom she has been having steady sex, and this can create a serious problem of jealousy leading to physical abuse and even murder. And if it is the boy who dumps the girl for someone else, the girl can wind up in a mental hospital, especially if she aborted a child which they accidentally conceived. Girls probably suffer more than boys in the dating game, but the whole sordid ritual is an adolescent exercise in depravity.

According to *Parade Magazine* of Feb. 2, 1997, an estimated half-million teens in the U.S. gave birth in 1995. Why are so many teens having so much irresponsible sex? The girls identified drinking as a major factor leading to sex. Also, some of the girls think they will lose their boyfriends unless they have sex. In other words, girls often trade sex for love, and apparently that is the kind of naive, emotionally driven thinking that pervades so many teen girls in the dating game.

There is no doubt that explicit sex education and condom distribution has contributed to the increase in premarital sex among school children. The cry of the educators is that you cannot successfully teach kids abstinence because they're going to do it anyway. So why not protect them from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases by giving them condoms and encouraging them to use them. Of course, it is quite possible to appeal to the rationality of the young as to why they should postpone sex until marriage. But since the educators consider their students to be animals in conformity with their teachings about evolution, kids are not to be

appealed to rationally. After all, animals are not rational!

The *Boston Globe* of Feb. 1, 1997 published an article about a much-heralded sex education course being given to public school students in Newton, Massachusetts, an affluent suburb of Boston. The article is worth quoting to give the reader an idea of how explicit the course is:

No, they're not nervous, insist the ninth graders in Norman Hyett's classroom, as they shuffle, twitch and fidget. They learned about ejaculation eons ago when they took reproductive anatomy, or "plumbing" as it's called around here, back in sixth grade. [Sixth graders, incidentally, are 12 years old!]

But the giggles start as soon as Hyett utters the 's' word: "Let's start our first day together by going over what we will cover in this sexuality course."

Dating and love, contraception, herpes. When Hyett says the phrase "breast self-exam," several girls blush a hot shade of pink. When he mentions "homosexuality," two boys in the back of the room point frantically at each other.

Asked to write why everyone's eyes are suddenly glued to the floor, one girl scribbles the headline, "Why it's Uncomfortable to Talk About Sex." Her top reasons: "We're in a co-ed group; it's embarrassing, this is school!!!"

Hyett takes such answers seriously, but his goal is to squelch the squirming. Six months from now, these same Newton South High School students, for a homework assignment, will browse local pharmacies for condoms and diaphragm jelly and turn down sexual advances in classroom skits entitled "Careful on the Couch."

Here, no one utters euphemisms like hanky-panky. Instead, students devote their second class to listing every slang word they can think of for sex and sexual organs. [How much more degrading can you get?] Once they master the more scientific terms -- and learn to roll condoms onto their index fingers -- it's on to the other graphic topics, such as gonorrhea and date rape.

If ever there were a course to destroy the innocence and natural modesty of youth and arouse dormant, latent sexual interest this would be it. But then America's popular culture is saturated with sex and violence. So what the school does is make

sure that the child, who may have missed some of that on TV or not gone to any X-rated movies, gets his or her full dose of cultural depravity in the classroom. Believe it or not, only 10 out of 375 ninth-graders had parents sane enough to keep their children out of the course. Perhaps by now these sane parents have had enough of public education and are homeschooling.

When kids are forced to attend amoral schools in which they are age-segregated and regimented for twelve years, serving in a kind of low-security prison run by the state, they become irresponsible and rebellious in their social habits--especially when the schools teach explicit sex in all its perversions. Back in the days of single-sex schools, there was no need for sex education. Girls got intimate knowledge from their mothers, and boys either got some advice from their fathers or picked up sexual knowledge from their friends. But now, with co-ed schools, a kind of pressure cooker dating culture is created in which romantic emotion and unrelenting lust are elevated over reason and further promoted by a degenerate entertainment industry.

While premarital sex can lead to all sorts of problems and tragedies, one should not ignore the emotional damage that is done by serial attachments and break ups that are part and parcel of the dating game. The worst thing a parent can do is encourage a young child to pair off in a romantic relationship with a "girlfriend" or "boyfriend" a decade before either of them are ready to marry. Children are not capable of sustaining a romantic relationship so early in life. They do not have the life experience or the emotional maturity. Parents may think of such pairing as "cute," but they inevitably lead to crushes, infatuations, and love affairs that will rarely result in marriage but will leave permanent emotional scars.

In a book I wrote some years ago on the subject of feminism, I listed the reasons why a girl should not engage in premarital sex: the loss of virginity could have a devastating effect on a girl's self-esteem; the possibility of becoming infected with a life-long venereal disease like herpes or AIDS; an unwanted pregnancy and the

prospect of becoming an unwed teenage mother, or giving up the child for adoption, or having an abortion; the awakening of a sexual appetite which might make sexual loyalty to a husband difficult if not impossible; the high probability of a devastating emotional breakdown if the boyfriend dumps her for some other girl; conflict with her parents since she will be engaged in an affair her parents would no doubt disapprove of. Does it make sense for any girl to engage in premarital sex when the consequences could ruin her life? When teenagers engage in premarital sex, they are playing with fire, and all too often they get severely burned.

And that is why so many homeschooling parents are turning to courtship as the proper way to lead their young adults toward a happy life. If marriage is the goal of a relationship with the opposite sex, then teen dating is the worst way to get there. An excellent explanation of what courtship is all about is given by Michael Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, in his informative little book, *The Homeschooling Father*. Farris and his wife Vickie have nine children, all but the youngest homeschooled. He writes:

We now have two teenaged daughters--one is in her late teens. They are clearly and objectively attractive girls. But neither has ever been on a date. . . . Our older daughters . . . have committed themselves to the idea that they will pursue a relationship with a boy only when it is consistent with these three principles:

1. Both the young man and I are prepared for marriage.
2. I am investigating this particular young man because he appears to meet the spiritual standards my parents and I have agreed upon for a husband.
3. I find him to be personally interesting and attractive.

Farris urges homeschooling fathers to secure their children's commitments to the above three principles and to raise them with the understanding that the entire area of boy-girl relationships is to be reserved for the time of life just before marriage. In other

words, if your children are not ready for marriage, they ought not to be getting romantically involved with the opposite sex. Thus, courtship should start when one is prepared to get married. And that goes for both sons and daughters. Farris writes:

Men who are not ready to work are not ready for marriage. . . . It is clear to me now that a man is not ready for marriage until he is ready to care for his family . . . . Marriage and fatherhood go together. . . . If a man marries unprepared for fatherhood, there is a possibility that he will become an unprepared father.

As for daughters, Farris believes that teaching, homemaking, and motherhood are the practical abilities a daughter must develop. He does not rule out a daughter developing a career, for not all women marry. But since most do, the homemaking and mothering skills must get high priority. He writes:

I believe in home schooling. I will not consider my home schooling a success until I see my daughters and sons home schooling their own children.

Obviously, the homeschooling situation makes courtship quite practical. The children can be brought up to understand the principles involved. Since they are not in the public school, they can avoid all of the emotional chaos and confusion that is an integral part of public school socialization. The homeschooling situation permits parents, and particularly fathers, to assert a benign, well-reasoned authority over their children in matters pertaining to boy-girl relations. This is virtually impossible in the public school situation. And perhaps nowhere better than in the contest between dating and courtship is the revolutionary nature of homeschooling demonstrated. And nowhere better than in the dating-versus-courtship contest are the different views of socialization dramatically demonstrated. In homeschooling, boys are raised to be gentlemen and responsible husbands and fathers, and girls are raised to be devoted

wives, homemakers and mothers. The prospects of a happy, productive, healthy life are thus assured.

Of course, this is the ideal. It would be foolish to believe that some homeschooled children will not get into trouble. Human nature being what it is, we can expect some children to go astray. But what is almost astounding is how well homeschooled children have turned out thus far. Perhaps the movement is still too young and it's too early to tell, but this writer has been in many homeschooling homes, and met many of the children, and it is refreshing to see how different they are from the public schoolers. This is particularly true of Christian homeschoolers who have the advantage of a strong moral and spiritual foundation on which to build their family. But it is obvious that the principles that guide Christian homeschooling parents are universal in their application. Thus, non-Christian homeschoolers can learn much from the religious pioneers who have made homeschooling a new way of life.

## Chapter Twenty:

# Special Needs and Homeschooling

One of the questions often asked by parents is whether or not a special needs child can be homeschooled. The answer, of course, is yes. How you do it depends on the nature of the child's disability. Obviously, if the child is either hearing or sight impaired very special methods will have to be used in educating such a child. If the child is physically disabled and confined to a wheel chair but is otherwise mentally normal, academic homeschooling would not be any different from that of an unimpaired child.

If the child has a learning disability which appears to have had its genesis in a school's faulty teaching practices, then the best thing a parent can do is remove the child from the school and teach that child correctly at home. If the child remains in school and is put in a special-ed class, that child will suffer not only a loss of self-esteem but may wind up permanently disabled by the school's faulty remediation program. A school that creates learning problems is hardly the place to get them cured.

Of late, many parents of special needs kids have wanted to have their children mainstreamed in the public schools where, it is thought, they will get healthful socialization and good teachers if they are taught in the same classrooms with normal kids. The reality, however, is quite different. Many parents of normal children resent the fact that their kids are being shortchanged by the greater attention that must be given to the impaired children. Some of the special needs children require the full-time attention of a teacher, and in fact in some states there are publicly funded private schools which specialize in educating severely disabled children at a cost of \$35,000

a year. But if the child is in a public school, it is unlikely that a teacher who is miseducating normal children will not also be miseducating the special needs children.

So what is a parent to do? In the past, kids with special needs were educated in private schools created by dedicated individuals to deal with such problems. But this meant that only those parents who could afford the tuition could get their special needs children educated. The states that now mandate that the public schools must educate special needs children relieves parents of the need to pay for such education in private schools. But it doesn't save their children from all the other problems that afflict the public schools. Also, the publicly funded private schools that were created to relieve the public schools of the burden of educating the severely disabled are required to be certified and conform to state-mandated standards.

In addition, when a special needs child is rejected by the public school, and parents are given the option of putting their child in one of the approved publicly funded private schools, the atmosphere of that school might be worse than anything the child would encounter elsewhere. For example, at the private Helden School in Charlestown, Massachusetts, director Janice Brenner observed to a reporter from the *Boston Globe* that the students the Boston public schools used to send her were noncompliant, mouthy, and disrespectful. Now the behavioral problems the school must deal with involve violent crimes, sex offenses, guns and knives. Putting a special needs child in such an environment would do more harm than good.

The simple truth is that special needs children need what all children need: the care and nurture of a loving family. One suspects that the reason why many parents put their special needs children in public or private school is because they want to be relieved of those children for some hours of the day. They may sincerely believe that the child will be better served in a public or private school, especially if the normal children in the family are in school. But as the failures of public education become

increasingly obvious, more and more parents are turning to homeschooling as the best means of educating and raising all of their children, including those with special needs.

We know this to be the case from reports in NATHHAN NEWS, the quarterly publication of the National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network. This organization, which was founded in 1990 by several homeschooling moms, now has a membership of over 5,500 families with special needs kids. Many of these families adopted children with special needs ranging from learning disabilities to multi-physical handicaps. Their love of these children and their love of family life has made homeschooling the natural way to go.

The result of this growing interest in special needs homeschooling has been the development of all sorts of services and small businesses to help such families. For example, one mother in Minnesota, Tammy McMannus, designs attractive, stylish clothing for special needs kids who must wear body jackets, leg braces, knee braces, body braces, sanitary undergarments, and feeding/drainage tubes. In her ad in NATHHAN NEWS Tammy writes:

I decided to open my company after listening to some of my friends' tearful description of long shopping expeditions that all too often resulted in poor fitting clothes. These kids have a right to clothing that suit their individual needs, and yet is attractive, stylish, well made, and actually fits!! They deserve to have clothes that make them feel good about themselves! When a special needs child can look in the mirror and exclaim, "MY CLOTHES ARE SUPER!!", I get a tingle from a job well done.

Another company, Love and Learning, founded by parents of a child with Down Syndrome in Michigan, offers books and audio and video tapes to help parents teach reading and conversational skills to special needs kids. There is also a round-robin style newsletter for parents with autistic children called PREACCH, an acronym for

Parents Rearing and Educating Autistic Children in Christian Homes. A common theme which runs through NATHHAN is the need for God's help when seeking the best ways to educate special needs children.

Obviously, it takes a great deal of courage, patience, and love to homeschool a special needs child. But these children seem to thrive in homeschooling because the parents and siblings who live with them and know them best are willing to seek the best teaching programs for their children. For example, in an article about educating her deaf child, Rhonda Robinson writes in NATHHAN NEWS (Summer, 1994):

We have hacked our way through the jungle of philosophies of deaf education (to sign or not to sign, ASL, SEE . . . ). After wading deep into their philosophies we found that there are so many opinions concerning teaching the deaf and each camp has their own success stories and horror stories of the neighboring camp. Our conclusion: there is no magic formula. Nothing they could do would make her a "normal hearing" child. So we set out to find what would work best for Chelsea. . . .

I am so thankful we kept her home. I can't imagine what she would be like if she was not homeschooled.

All parents of special needs children go through the same process of trying to determine what is the best way to educate their children. The constant experimentation and discussions that go on among special needs educators suggest that the field is fraught with confusion and uncertainty. But what is probably the most certain thing that can be said of special needs children is that each one of them is unique and requires a one-on-one approach. Obviously, the success that homeschooled special needs children experience is due to the fact that their teacher, their parent, knows them better than anyone else. Putting such a child in a school where the teacher has never known the child is sort of like playing educational Russian roulette. The parent who has seen the child develop from day one, and has

lived with the child, is probably more qualified to educate that child than the professional who obtained his or her knowledge from books. And that is why it can be disastrous to put a special needs child in the hands of a teacher right out of college. It takes the professional years of hands-on experience before he or she has seen enough deaf or blind or disabled children to know how best to serve them.

One of the areas of concern among parents in general and homeschooling parents in particular is that of infant inoculations, vaccinations, and immunizations. There is no doubt that some of these shots can cause permanent neurological damage in some children. This is another case of playing Russian roulette with a child's health by way of inoculations. There is even talk now of adding shots for Hepatitis B for children. One begins to wonder how many children have developed health problems because of the many shots administered to them so early in life before anything is known about their allergies.

Are we now in a situation of inoculation overkill? Obviously, the time has come for a thorough examination and review of this whole area of health care. We read more and more about contaminated sera and the severe reactions that some children have to these inoculations. Are we placing too many children at serious risk by administering shot after shot with no knowledge of what the child may be allergic to? Are more children permanently damaged by DPT shots than the disease the shots are supposed to prevent?

In January 1997, about one hundred scientists met in Washington, D. C. to discuss whether or not a monkey virus known as SV 40 contained in early doses of the polio vaccine, and injected into 98 million Americans forty years ago, may now be causing cancer. Although government officials and manufacturers found out about this SV 40 contamination back in 1960, it was decided not to tell the public about it and to continue using the tainted vaccine until 1963. But now new research is linking the virus to human brain, bone and lung cancers. What's more, it is now believed that the

virus can be transmitted from infected mothers and fathers to their infants, some of whom have developed brain cancers in infancy.

Howard Urnovitz, an independent microbiologist in Berkeley, California, was quoted in the *Boston Globe* of Jan. 26, 1997 as saying, "Here is a known cancer-causing virus that almost a hundred million Americans were exposed to through a government-sponsored vaccine program. But for over 30 years, there's been virtually no government effort to see if anyone's been harmed by the exposure."

Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder and president of the National Vaccine Information Center in Vienna, Virginia, shares Urnovitz's concern. She has served as the consumer member on the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine vaccine safety forum. Her organization has long pushed for more government research into and disclosure of the little-studied harmful effects of vaccines upon some recipients. According to the *Globe* article:

Fisher argues that government agencies like the FDA have an inherent conflict of interest because of their mandate to promote universal vaccination on the one hand and regulate vaccine safety on the other.

Nowhere is this more obvious than with polio vaccine whose revered status, she says, has kept the government from carefully scrutinizing its potential hazards. "Why haven't they been willing to investigate this whole issue of cross-species transfer of potentially dangerous animal viruses into humans through contaminated vaccines? Whose minding the store when the FDA has allowed drug companies to produce vaccines grown on contaminated monkey kidneys," Fisher asks. "What happened to protecting the public health?"

What happened, indeed! What all of this really means is that neither the government nor the drug manufacturers can be completely trusted by the public and particularly by parents of newborn children when it comes to vaccines and mandated inoculations. Americans better start thinking twice about passing laws requiring everyone to be inoculated against everything. No one in a free society should be

forced to accept the injection of any foreign substance in one's body by a government that has made too many mistakes to be trusted.

## Chapter Twenty-One: Homeschoolers and College

Ever since 1982, when Grant Colfax, the homeschooled "goat-boy" from California, was accepted by Harvard--and subsequently his two homeschooled brothers were also accepted by that venerable institution--homeschoolers have been looked at by many colleges and universities as bright prospects for higher education. One should never forget that a college or university is a business which must fill its classroom seats with students if the trustees and professors are to continue enjoying the lifestyle to which they've become accustomed. In fact, one will now find at many homeschool conventions, colleges and universities renting booths and dispensing glossy brochures about their wonderful campuses.

For all practical purposes, the Colfax family paved the way for homeschoolers to achieve a kind of special reputation among college admissions offices for independence and academic excellence. In 1973, Micki and David Colfax had bought forty-seven acres of undeveloped land in the mountains of Mendocino County, California, where they intended to homestead. Their saga is described in their book, *Hard Times in Paradise*, published in 1992 -- and hard times they were. David Colfax, a college professor, had been blacklisted for his radical political activism on campus.

And so, after considering different options, the Colfaxes, with the enthusiastic urging of their sons, decided to build a life for themselves on a remote mountain. Trying to subsist in raw nature required all the ingenuity and physical strength they could muster. After all sorts of trials and errors, young Grant Colfax finally found raising and breeding high-quality goats to be the best way to earn money, and the other two boys, Drew and Reed, did as well in their own endeavors. It was an

education for all of them that no money could buy.

Their homeschooling came as naturally as everything else they did. Since their parents were college educated, they knew what had to be learned. The Colfaxes write:

There was never any doubt in our minds that the boys were *learning*, right alongside us much of the time, questioning, exploring alternatives, working out solutions as we worked on one and then another project and confronted one challenge after another. The *World Book Encyclopedia* was there when, in the process of working on a clogged carburetor on the generator, one of the boys asked what, exactly, a carburetor did, and when, as we were thinning out redwood groves for poles for the garden, somebody asked if redwoods grew only in this part of California. Now that all three of them could read, and as their questions became more difficult, the encyclopedia and dozens of science and nature reference books came to occupy a central place in our lives.

What was truly wonderful about the Colfaxes is how they enjoyed doing things together as a family. Their time was their own, and everything they did was to help one another succeed in making their lives happy and fulfilling despite the physical hardships. Their lifestyle was even reflected in the Christmas gifts they gave the boys. They write:

Drew, who never became anywhere near as engrossed in sheep raising as Grant did with his dairy goats, didn't take long to develop an interest of his own: astronomy. It had begun the Christmas when he was thirteen. It had become a tradition that our gifts to the boys had to be educational or immediately practical. There were always books, of course--favorite authors, books relating to their special interests, reference volumes, and, one year, a new encyclopedia set--and starkly utilitarian items such as stainless-steel milk buckets for Grant, wood-carding brushes and woodworking tools for Drew and Reed, a set of rabbit watering bowls for Garth. That year . . . we thought we would get them all a good telescope, only to discover that they were so expensive as to be out of reach.

So what did the Colfaxes do? With the help of an optical shop owner, they bought at much less cost all of the components needed to build a telescope. Over the next year Drew spent hours grinding the telescope mirror. And finally the boys built a sliding roof observatory. Drew spent hours scanning the sky and even discovered a comet which he reported to a major observatory which confirmed his sighting. That's homeschooling at its best. Here's how the Colfaxes describe their home education philosophy:

From the outset it was apparent that the boys' natural curiosity provided the motivation to learn and that our job was to be there to provide support, materials, and, when it was requested, direction. We seldom *taught* the boys in the conventional sense of the term. We learned together, and we *talked*--about politics, literature, religion, and economics, about breeds of cattle and brands of feeds, about arts and crafts. Initially, when they were younger, they relied upon us for information and direction, but as they grew older they'd turn more and more to each other as they carved out their different areas of special competence, Grant becoming our livestock expert, Drew the botanist and astronomer, Reed the athlete and musician, and Garth the naturalist-artist.

And, as usually occurs among homeschoolers, the older child helped the younger ones. Sometimes the materials they used didn't work. They write:

We all recalled the year that [Grant] had used the "new math" text we had selected only because it was assigned in a University of California correspondence course and had come perilously close to becoming convinced that he was "bad at math." (We switched to another series that guided him--and, subsequently, his brothers--almost painlessly through precalculus.)

Eventually the Colfaxes had to begin considering the future. They write:

It wasn't until Grant was sixteen that we began to think seriously about his--and the other boys'--off-

the-land future. We didn't have any reason to worry about how well they might do in college. . . . Because they were self-directed and enjoyed learning--whether it was building a house or solving a math problem--we were confident that they would have no trouble managing whatever they might encounter in a college setting

Grant took the SAT and scored in the ninety-ninth percentile. In 1982 the family drove to the east coast so that Grant could be interviewed by Haverford, Princeton, Yale, Brown, and Harvard. In place of a school transcript Grant had written a letter describing his "unique educational background," his course work and a list of text books used during the past four years. He provided a half dozen letters of recommendation from fellow dairy goat breeders, 4-H project leaders, etc. He had also been doing volunteer work at a health center and had decided that he wanted to become a doctor.

Soon after Grant had been accepted by Harvard, the *San Francisco Examiner* got wind of the story and sent two reporters up to the mountain to interview the "backwood scholar" heading for Harvard. In a short time the young goat-breeder and his family became national news. Grant was talked about by Paul Harvey and invited to appear on the Today Show and on Johnny Carson, and for the first time Americans were hearing about something called homeschooling.

Grant graduated from Harvard with high honors in biology, got an award for his senior thesis and won a Fulbright Fellowship to spend a year in New Zealand and then entered Harvard Medical School. His brothers Drew and Reed followed him into Harvard.

So, not only do homeschoolers get into college, but they usually do very well in an environment where independence, self-direction, and self-motivation are rewarded with success. And so, if you are a parent intending to homeschool, you can start planning your child's college education anytime you want. Of course, much has

changed since Grant Colfax entered Harvard in 1983. As college tuition fees have risen and computer technology has developed to the point where professors can bring their courses to anyone who has a computer, a modem or a CD-ROM, it soon may no longer be necessary to live on a campus or sit in a classroom to get a college degree.

Why should anyone travel long distances, pay over \$20,000 a year plus the cost of room and board, merely to be able to sit in a classroom in an old ivy-covered building and listen to an assistant instructor tell you what you can read in a book or get off the Internet at home? Rarely do any of the great professors teach classes any more. At one time, before computer technology, you had to physically attend a college to get the instruction needed to get a degree. But that's no longer the case when it comes to your typical liberal arts education. Medicine, law, engineering still require attendance at a university. But if one is not going to pursue the kind of career or profession that requires this kind of postgraduate study, then one should think twice about shelling out \$80,000 over four years for the college experience and the possible long-term debt of a college loan.

However, if a homeschooler is going to pursue a profession requiring a college degree and attendance at a campus, then he or she must start thinking about and planning for it as early as the freshman year of high school so that in the next four years he or she can complete the courses required for admission. Have your son or daughter start making inquiries, get college catalogs, write to admissions officers, talk to the alumni of the college that he or she wants to attend. Find out what scholarships are available and if the college provides opportunities for part-time work.

If you are a Christian parent who thinks that college is a good place for your son or daughter to find a future mate, there are two excellent Christian colleges that provide very healthful socialization, Pensacola Christian College in Pensacola, Florida, and Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. A more secular college, but with high Judeo-Christian standards, is Hillsdale College in Hillsdale,

Michigan. There are also guides like Peterson's "Choose a Christian College" which contain information about lesser known colleges. In the Appendix of this book you will find a list of colleges and universities to consider.

High school is also the appropriate time to start thinking about what one is truly interested in. Note that Grant Colfax became interested in medicine after working as a volunteer at a health center. His brother Drew became interested in botany and astronomy. Reed took to music, and Garth to art. Each child, if sufficiently stimulated by all that is fascinating in the world, will find areas of interest. This is particularly true of homeschoolers who are encouraged to become self-motivators.

Have your homeschooler keep track of all the courses taken and the books read during high school so that when it comes time to present his or her qualifications for college, all of that information is readily at hand. An easy way to keep tabs on what has been studied and read is to keep a file folder for each year with the pertinent information. Also, have the homeschooler start saving money as early as possible for college tuition. Part-time and summer jobs are obvious ways to earn money.

Taking achievement tests is an important part of the college preparatory process. The ACT or SAT are required for college admission. The maximum score on the ACT Assessment (American College Testing Program) is 36. The ACT includes four tests: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. Testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes. More information about the ACT and the other tests is in the Appendix.

The maximum score on the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) is 1600. It is comprised of two parts: Verbal and Mathematics. The SAT was recently renormed and revised. Multiple choice has been replaced by "Student-produced responses," and the use of calculators is now permitted in the math section. Some colleges require homeschoolers to take the GED (General Education Diploma). Find out from your local school board when and where the GED can be taken. The PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) is a sort of practice run for the SAT. The maximum score is

160. It is combined with the NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). The National Merit Scholarship Corporation and colleges and universities use the scores on the PSAT/NMSQT to determine eligibility and qualifications for scholarships. There are books and courses about how to take these tests. They are generally available in your local public library.

Have your homeschooler carefully read the various college catalogs to see what is required in the way of tests and how to qualify for scholarships. More and more colleges and universities have come to recognize homeschoolers as a sizable group of students requiring special attention. When a student identifies himself or herself as a homeschooler when applying for admission, he or she will get that special attention.

Not every homeschooled child has to or ought to attend college. Basic liberal arts subjects can be studied at home. Home businesses provide plenty of opportunities to develop work and entrepreneurial skills. Apprenticeships can be sought out for valuable work experience. Also, there are plenty of jobs for highly competent homeschooled high-school graduates whose knowledge is certainly equal to if not better than that of many of today's college graduates. Most liberal arts colleges have simply become arenas of mindless social activities that boil down to drinking and partying and experimental recreational sex interspersed with boring classes taught by faculty promoting their own political and social agendas. Most of the students are there simply to get a credential known as a college diploma. Some of them will remain in academia for the rest of their lives, becoming part of the vast educational establishment.

A homeschooler who enters the world of work after high school will have a great headstart in learning about the working world, while the average college student may face great disappointment as he or she seeks a job with diploma in hand. Unless you are an outstanding student at an Ivy League university with corporate, establishment, or good family connections, finding a good job will require all of the skills one can

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muster. There are many self-made entrepreneurs in America. But their success is due more to their love of the challenges they face and their inner need to deal with them than what they learned in college. Many of them are so eager to get started that they often drop out of college in order to take advantage of the opportunities that the real world of work and creativity have to offer.

The average public schooler sees college as a way of delaying the day when he or she will have to face the real world. They are attracted by a collegiate social life which includes fraternities and sororities, football games, dances, parties, drinking and drugs, which then can lead to date rape. It is said that bulimia and anorexia are now common disorders among young women in college and public high schools because of the enormous pressures to be attractive and popular in the dating game on campus. However, it is believed that the homeschooler does well in college because he or she has greater self-discipline and moral convictions which make it possible to resist the temptations and depravities of college social life.

In any case, technology will undoubtedly change the way higher education is conducted in America. Futurist Lewis Perelman writes:

[S]ome people may still speak in the twenty-first century about "schools" and "colleges" and "students" and "teachers." But the hyperlearning systems of the imminent future in reality will bear less resemblance to old-fashioned classrooms than the MIA Abrams tank bears to a Roman chariot.

What will life be like in a society without schools, without what we would recognize as an institution of education? The cultural details of that coming society are as unpredictable as fuzzy dice, tail fins, low-riders, drive-in movies, Levittown, and a host of other features of automotive culture would have been in the 1890s.

However, as of now, the great universities and colleges that dot the American landscape will probably be around for as long as it takes the new technology to change the education habits of a nation.

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