

Home's Cool

Tricia Goyer

Summer ends and my three kids and I are preparing for our school year. While most kids are out buying new school clothes and supplies, we're scouring our bookshelves, installing programs on the computer, and looking forward to another year of learning together.

Our homeschooling journey began twelve years ago when my oldest son, Cory, was of kindergarten age. My husband and I had close friends who homeschooled their children, and we liked what we saw. Their kids seemed to enjoy being with their parents and each other. They were bright, intelligent, and fun to be around. We decided we wanted kids like that and began looking into homeschooling in earnest.

My biggest reservation was, "Can I do it?" In addition to my son whom I would homeschool, I had two younger kids, a budding writing career, and I volunteered in local organizations. Yet as I began looking at curriculum, I grew excited about spending quality time with my kids and building a lifetime of learning together. ("Together" being the key word!) Growing up, the only times my brother and I were together was after school—when we didn't have anyone else to play with. We rarely interacted, and when we did, it wasn't a pretty sight.

I wanted something better for my own children, and I know other homeschoolers feel the same.

"One of the main reasons my husband Tim and I decided to homeschool was because of our daughters' relationships," says Jeanette Nostrum, mother of four girls, ages 5-12, who has been homeschooling for three years. "We noticed when they were at school all day, they spent little time together. They also put more emphasis on their relationships with their peers rather than with each other. Bringing them home for schooling has provided the time and opportunity for them to become best friends."

Faith Walk

Another main reason my husband and I decided to homeschool was because of our faith. John and I felt that learning to love God was even more important than academic success. So this became one of our main focuses—spending time reading faith stories together, memorizing verses, and including a faith-based curriculum as a core subject.

Of course, this is only one reason to homeschool. According to the National Home Education Research institute, teaching specific philosophical or religious values, controlling social interactions, developing close families, and high level academics are the most common reasons for home schooling.¹

Where to Start

When I first started homeschooling, one thing that helped the most was talking to veteran homeschoolers. I asked dozens of questions, including what they'd tried, what had worked, what hadn't, and why. It also helped to know that normal people were schooling at home and finding success.

"I have a great support system and find I can always turn to my sister and friends for advice," says Jeanette. "I've frequently gone to the local bookstore, and they always have good information. They point me to curriculums that meet my needs and even provide resources for field trips."

Unique Learning for Unique Kids

Another aspect I enjoy about homeschooling is the ability to tailor my children's education to their unique needs. There have been times in our educational journey that it was necessary to take learning slow with one of my kids. Other times, I had trouble keeping up with them as they raced through the books as fast as I could find them.

Now that they are older, two of my children enjoy doing their homework on the computer, having interactive lessons and getting immediate feedback. Then there's my other child who would rather read aloud to me from a good book.

I've purchased numerous curriculums over the years, trying everything from classical literature, traditional workbooks, and unit studies (instructor-designed thematic studies). There's always something new to try, which keeps our routine fresh and fun. I also utilize our local library system, checking out both fiction and non-fiction books to keep up with inquisitive minds.

One of the best ways to learn about curriculum choices is by attending a curriculum fair or visiting local bookstores that carry curriculum. Some areas also have resources through the local superintendent of schools.

A Lifestyle of Learning

Of course, parents can attempt to plan the perfect schedule and pick the best curriculum, but what it all comes down to is how the children learn.

In our homeschool we've adopted a natural style of learning, which involves learning with and without books. Our "official" school day begins around 9:00 a.m. and ends around 2:00 p.m., but throughout the day we also enjoy cooking together, playing board games, reading in the evenings, and attending each others' sporting events.

One wonderful thing about the growth of homeschooling is that there are numerous activities for my kids to get involved in. They've been a part of homeschool choir, swimming lessons, and basketball. They've also taken private classes such as dance,

voice lessons, piano, and guitar. In addition, there are numerous classes offered through local schools, including art, acting, writing, science labs, and much more.

“My two oldest daughters have been part of homeschool basketball, and my husband and I had the opportunity to coach,” says Jeanette. “Through homeschool sports my kids learn teamwork and sportsmanship. Plus they get exercise. Not only that, but we’ve gotten to know some great families through the program as we spend time together traveling for games.”

And let’s not forget field trips and volunteering. My family has enjoyed nature hikes, chocolate making, and tours of local historical sites. My kids have also gotten involved in volunteering through local non-profit organizations.

After Graduation

One of the most common questions asked of homeschoolers is, “What about graduation?” As my oldest son nears graduation age, I’ve begun looking into this more. Amazingly, I’ve found that most colleges accept transcripts designed by parents, as long as a “student portfolio” is provided which includes a student’s work.

Personally, my husband and I choose to have our children take standardized testing every year to ensure we haven’t missed any vital subjects. This is not only a helpful reference, but it’s also a boost when our kids see how well they’re doing.

“Homeschool graduates closely parallel their public school counterparts—about two-thirds go on to post-secondary education, and one-third directly into the job market,” says Brian Ray, in *Strengths of Their Own—Home Schoolers Across America*, NHERI, 1997.

Obviously the end of formal homeschooling is not the end of the educational road. Also according to Ray, over 74% of home-educated adults ages 18–24 have taken college-level courses, compared to 46% of the general United States population. Homeschool graduates are active and involved in their communities. Seventy-one percent participate in an ongoing community service activity (e.g., coaching a sports team, volunteering at a school, or working with a church or neighborhood association), compared to 37% of U.S. adults of similar ages. Eighty-eight percent of the homeschool graduates surveyed were members of an organization (e.g., a community group, church or synagogue, union, homeschool group, or professional organization), compared to 50% of U.S. adults. ⁱⁱ

The Heart

It’s hard to believe, but with my oldest son entering 11th grade and my youngest son entering 6th, my homeschool journey is more than half over. Yet when I look at my kids, I see young men and women who have strong character and the family connectedness I longed for. They love their family, have a strong faith, and seem to be excelling in their education.

Of course, I can't say that the years have been without frustration and tears. There were days when I seriously questioned if I was crazy for taking on this task. I lost my temper (more than once!) and questioned if I was doing enough to ensure my children would lead productive lives.

Yet in the end, I look back with joy and appreciation of our time spent learning together. I have fond memories of teaching three children to read, of attempting science projects on the kitchen counter, and discovering each child's unique personality and God-given talents.

Now that my son will soon be graduating and moving on to higher education, I'm especially thankful for the chance to truly know him and the chance for him to get to know me—spending 24/7 with anyone will ensure that!

And as looking back, I can say without a doubt I'd do it all again. Through the years, we've learned home's a cool place to be. To laugh, to love, and to learn.

ⁱ <http://www.nheri.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=17>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.hsllda.org/research/ray2003/beyond.asp>

Biographical Information

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Tricia Goyer is the author of eighteen books including *From Dust and Ashes, My Life UnScripted*, and the children's book *10 Minutes to Showtime*. She won Historical Novel of the Year in 2005 and 2006 from ACFW, and was honored with the Writer of the Year award from Mt. Hermon Writer's Conference in 2003. Tricia's book *Life Interrupted* was a finalist for the Gold Medallion in 2005. In addition to her novels, Tricia writes non-fiction books and magazine articles for publications like *Today's Christian Woman*, and *Focus on the Family*. Tricia is a regular speaker at conventions and conferences, and has been a workshop presenter at the MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International Conventions. She and her family make their home in the mountains of Montana.

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