

## Show & Tell

### By Kate Kessler

I love getting to know the TOS Homeschool Crew families. In the March *Show & Tell*, we are fortunate to be able to bring you the Smith family from Florida. Kimberly Smith is a homeschool mama of two lively boys and is joyfully homeschooling with her husband, David, who works from home. She impressed me with her zeal and outright delight in her homeschooling life. They are a big field trip family—thirty-eight of them in 2011! Can you imagine what they must have experienced and learned? I think I want to join their homeschool!

She loves the intricate weaving of subject matter that **Tapestry of Grace** offers her family and the fact that it “provides a strong Christ-centered curriculum and an equally strong academic framework.” When I asked her why she liked being a part of the TOS Homeschool Crew, she shared: “We’ve reviewed some awesome products. My boys loved the catapults and trebuchets from **Pitsco**. My favorite product has been the amazing resource guide, **Educating the Whole-Hearted Child**, by **Apologia**. I carry that thing around like it’s my Siamese twin.” She also shared that she has met some encouraging women through the Crew and that she is really glad to be connected to them. The blessings that come from the Crew are manifold. Her family’s journey to homeschooling in her story, “Getting There,” below, is a beautiful example of God leading His people. I am grateful that Kimberly is on the team!

## Getting There

### By Kimberly H. Smith

It all started when I was pregnant with my oldest son, Denver, in 1999. We began talking about this idea of homeschooling, and it was then that I started hoarding books and manipulatives. Then about a year later when Solomon was born, I became a manager with **Discovery Toys** and started selling educational products to friends and local preschools. I became immersed in my little part-time job, learning the capabilities of a child’s brain and the benefits of good quality educational toys. I was very confident that I could one day educate my own children. So we decided to add on a room to our house: The Schoolroom. I could just imagine how it was all going to play out. Antique school desks here. An American flag there. A poster of frog life cycles and parts of speech on the wall by the door. I think I even had my horn-rimmed glasses all picked out to play the part of the “School Marm.”

As the time neared for Denver to begin kindergarten, I got cold feet. I didn’t think I could possibly educate a child with a toddler running around. (Oh, how I wish my friends with nine and ten children had been in my life back then!) I totally caved, and Denver started kindergarten at a private school where he had been attending preschool a few days a week. Immediately some learning differences were spotted. We made use of every resource that was available to us there but came up frustrated. To make a very long story short, we accepted an invitation to the local magnet school, which we considered back then to be ultra-prestigious. We now refer to it as the Robot Factory. Things didn’t work there, to put it nicely.

After a series of disconnects with charter schools and especially our local public school, we were at our wits' end. Denver, my very "out of the box" child, was struggling to fit into the boxes. His educational quirks, such as pencil-tapping during math, were seen as disciplinary issues. He despised school. To him, it was just about sitting still, being quiet, and learning strategies to excel on the state standardized tests in March. There was no life to the lessons, only worksheets and lectures.

Solomon encountered a different set of challenges. He already knew most of what was being taught in the classroom, so I was sending in workbooks and magazines for him to read while he waited for everyone else to finish. The school didn't have a gifted program for kids this young, so he ended up attending gifted classes for older students. This, in itself, posed all sorts of problems. The kind of worldly garbage my 7-year-old child learned that year would make most adults blush. I was furious over the loss of innocence that occurred that year.

So, we came to a realization: the public school system was broken, at least in Florida. Boys aren't wired to "do school" the way society wants them to do school. My amazing, bright, and creative children were being forced to sit at a desk for hours, not speak, give the textbook answer, and read low-interest stories from a bland curriculum. At the end of the school year in 2009, both boys came to my husband and me and begged to be homeschooled. They had had it. We had all had it. It was time to take a different path.

These days, we get started with school around 9 a.m. The boys work at the school table, on their beds, stretched out on the lawn, or in the chicken coop out back if they choose. Most of the time, they pick the neighbor's oak tree as their classroom. We build models, play games, and read literature with rich characters and thrilling plots. We dissect things. And yes, during math, I hear the little tap-tap-tap of the pencil, which translates to "I'm thinking hard." In our classroom, we follow **Tapestry of Grace** as our core curriculum. It takes us on journeys through history, learning vocabulary, geography, fine arts, and much more. We are enjoying learning about the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Colonial America this year. We also study geography using giant maps on the wall combined with **Postcrossing**, a free international postcard exchange program online ([www.postcrossing.com](http://www.postcrossing.com)). We write *a lot*. We attend every stage performance that comes to town. We stay busy—until we get burned out . . . and then we relax. This works for us.

Denver is 12 now. His favorite part of the day is doing science experiments, art projects, or practicing his putting skills with his golf club while we listen to audio books. My house is very understanding of kinesthetic learners! I should have bought stock in **Thinking Putty**. Solomon, 10, loves working with circuits, robotics, or building historical models.

On an average day, I direct the teaching, but Dad loves to breeze through the classroom on his way to the coffeepot and interject a good economics lesson or give his two cents on politics. My children are so fortunate to have a dad who can go swimming with them on his lunch break! As their mom, I love that homeschooling has allowed us to salvage thirty-five extra hours a week with our kids, reading quality literature side by side, doing community service projects together, and teaching them according to their learning style. I also love that homeschooling allows us to take educational road trips, visit science museums when they aren't crowded, and properly mourn the loss of a beloved pet (because guinea pigs don't always die on the weekends).

So, we have taken the long route to arrive back at square one, what I sometimes like to call "what we should have done in the first place." But now our children can appreciate this

scenic route, because we've been through the pits and the mire. I praise God for a supportive husband, extended family who "get it," and kids who have always loved learning but now love the process by which they learn. But maybe, more than anything, I'm grateful for the stumbles along the way that led us here. When I asked God all those years ago, "Why is this happening to my kids?" I should have known He was guiding our path. Our destination is still way out on the horizon, but I think, finally, we're headed in the right direction.

*Kimberly Smith lives in Florida with her husband, David, her two sons, two black dogs, one surviving guinea pig, and six glamorous chickens. When she isn't homeschooling, she enjoys facilitating the Sweet Potato Book Club, watching British movies, and drinking caffeinated things. You're invited to visit her blog, The Well-Rounded Mind ([www.wellroundedmind.blogspot.com](http://www.wellroundedmind.blogspot.com)).*

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