

The Imperfect Homeschooler  
(An interview with Barbara Frank)

Christine Field

Barbara Frank has been around the homeschooling block. This homeschooling mom of four has a passion for encouraging the imperfect parent (and that's *all* of us) and equipping our young people for the adult world. She is the author of *Life Prep for Homeschooled Teenagers* and *The Imperfect Homeschooler's Guide to Homeschooling*. She also has a few other ideas up her sleeve!

**TOS:** Welcome, Barbara! It's so cool that we live close enough to each other to actually meet up once in a while. It's been a joy to get to know you! You've been at this homeschooling thing since the early 1980s. Have the challenges we face as parents changed much during this time?

**Barbara:** Yes! I think parents are under much more pressure to put their young children in school now, even if their children are still toddlers. Add to that the pressure parents are under to get their kids ready for college, starting in kindergarten, and I think today's parents are nearly overwhelmed with pressure.

**TOS:** Tell us a bit about your family.

**Barbara:** Tim and I have been married for twenty-nine years and have four children who were homeschooled from birth through high school. Sarah (25) is an artist who works as a retail manager by day. Peter (23) graduated from college last year, got married, and now works for Concordia Publishing House. Mary (17) is a writer (working on her second novel), who also loves to sew and play the violin. Josh (15) is a video game player extraordinaire who happens to have Down syndrome.

**TOS:** Is there a story behind the idea of "imperfect homeschooling"?

**Barbara:** As a firstborn perfectionist, I've always put a lot of pressure on myself, and that got worse once I began homeschooling. I'd read stories in magazines about large homeschooling families (ten kids, all perfectly groomed and dressed alike!) and felt inadequate in comparison. But over time, as I watched my children grow, I learned that the success of our homeschooling venture didn't depend solely on my efforts. God led us *to* homeschooling, and then He guided us *through* it.

**TOS:** *The Imperfect Homeschooler's Guide to Homeschooling* is a wealth of information. I especially appreciated the chapter about overcoming obstacles to homeschooling. What obstacles have you personally faced?

**Barbara:** Like most parents, I've had to overcome the habits and prejudices I had from my childhood schooling experience; those can be significant for some people. Also, while I was fortunate that I didn't have overt resistance to homeschooling from relatives, I do come from a volatile and pretty dysfunctional family, and its dramas were often disruptive as I tried to maintain a peaceful home life where my children could learn and grow.

Our biggest obstacle was probably Josh's birth. He arrived with several medical problems that kept him in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for his first month of life and on a heart and apnea monitor for two years. He required many medical and therapy appointments, especially that first year, which made our home life pretty hectic for a time. I really feel for those parents who are homeschooling special needs children, because now I understand that we're under even more pressure than other homeschooling parents.

**TOS:** Do you have a newsletter? Tell us about it.

Barbara: *The Imperfect Homeschooler* is a free monthly E-Newsletter intended to encourage parents wherever they are on their homeschooling journeys. They can subscribe at my new website, [www.barbarafrankonline.com](http://www.barbarafrankonline.com) or at [www.cardamompublishers.com](http://www.cardamompublishers.com).

**TOS:** I have a passion for teaching our kids life skills (even wrote my own book on the subject, *Life Skills for Kids*). What prompted you to write *Life Prep for Homeschooled Teenagers*?

**Barbara:** Two words: *Sarah Frank*. My daughter is a very independent person. Starting when she was 18 months old, I'd find her in her room, struggling to remove the clothes I'd put on her so she could choose her own. By her early teens, she had rearranged her bedroom to look like an apartment. When she told me she would be moving out on her own as soon as she was done homeschooling, I believed her!

Since she didn't want to go to college, we decided it was useless for her to study college prep courses as she finished high school. So I designed projects for her that would teach her what I felt she needed to know for living on her own, and they prepared her. She moved to Chicago shortly before she turned 20. After a year of living with two roommates, she moved to her own apartment. She has lived on her own ever since.

**TOS:** What projects do you cover in that book?

**Barbara:** How to research and rent an apartment; how to understand taxes, insurance, and mortgages; how to research, find, and pay for a car and car insurance; . . . all the useful subjects we should have been taught in high school but weren't. I wanted to make sure Sarah would be prepared for life on her own.

Not long ago, we published a second, expanded edition of *Life Prep for Homeschooled Teenagers* with two new sections for parents (about part-time work and credit cards). There's also a new project for teens called "The Financial Freedom Project," which illustrates how the decisions young adults make affect their financial freedom while they're young as well as later on in their lives.

**TOS:** What are you working on these days?

**Barbara:** I'm nearly finished writing my new book, *Thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Preparing Our Children for the New Economic Reality*. The world our children will live in as adults will differ tremendously from the one we were prepared for when we were their age. We were told that if we earned a college degree, we'd always find good jobs with benefits and a pension for our old age. But that world is gone. Some people without degrees are making millions. Some people *with* degrees are making lattes at Starbucks. As for employer-paid benefits and pensions, they're quickly evaporating.

Our children are likely to have several different careers over their lifetimes. They'll occasionally find themselves between jobs and will sometimes need to obtain retraining or other forms of education. With pensions disappearing and social security's future in jeopardy, it's likely our children will have to finance their own retirements.

I'm fascinated by the question of how to prepare our children for this new economic reality. I've spent the last several years researching this issue while writing the book, and I've got a lot of specific recommendations for today's parents, along with some very good news: the things we need to be doing with our children lend themselves to homeschooling so completely that choosing to homeschool is becoming almost a necessity, if you want your child to be prepared for what's coming.

**TOS:** Tell our readers how they can learn more about your writing and get in touch with you.

Barbara: They can find me at [www.cardamompublishers.com](http://www.cardamompublishers.com), [www.barbarafrankonline.com](http://www.barbarafrankonline.com), and at my blog, [www.barbaramfrank.blogspot.com](http://www.barbaramfrank.blogspot.com).

**TOS:** Barb, thanks so much for your wisdom and work. You have helped many homeschoolers look to the future with confidence.

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### Biographical Information

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*Christine Field and her husband, Mark, have graduated two homeschoolers from high school and have two more to go! They live and work in Wheaton, IL where Mark is chief of police and Christine maintains a limited law practice. She is the author of several books, including Homeschooling 101, Homeschooling the Challenging Child, Life Skills for Kids, and Help for the Harried Homeschooler. Christine is a frequent conference speaker, often along with her husband, and is available to speak on a wide variety of topics related to homeschooling and family life. Visit her website at [www.HomeFieldAdvantage.org](http://www.HomeFieldAdvantage.org).*