

## Free to Learn: My High School Years

By Rachel Kresina

“No school today?” The familiar question is asked by a nurse whom I meet in the elevator. I smile and patiently begin to explain yet again, “Actually, I’m homeschooled, so I can study extra on some days and then volunteer here at the hospital!”

“Oh, really? That’s great!” she replies, and we step off the elevator for our separate ways.

Yes, it is great to be homeschooled. I wish I had time to tell her more about all the ways I have been blessed through homeschooling. The sacrifices and difficulties my parents bore to give “the gift of homeschooling” to my brother Daniel and me has resulted in benefits and opportunities which probably even they did not imagine at the beginning. Primarily, homeschooling has facilitated our personal relationships, educational opportunities, and love of learning.

One of the greatest blessings has been the way in which we were protected from the confusion of a godless worldview in the years when we did not have the understanding and biblical grounding to combat it. Instead of being swept away with the crowd, we can truly stand as lights in the world, bringing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ to those around us. Moreover, our relationships at home have deepened, giving us a wonderful home life. We really *enjoy* learning together, working together, and just *being* together! Although this is really due to the grace of God in giving us the Bible’s pattern for the family, homeschooling has played a large part in drawing us so close to one another. Instead of being scattered among a variety of classes and activities at school, we get to do so much together!

That’s not to say we don’t have plenty of “outside” involvement! In fact, homeschooling has enhanced, rather than stymied, our social life and learning opportunities, for we are not bound by a school’s schedule. We can take advantage of chances to interact with people of all ages, and participate in many different activities! These opportunities range from leading a children’s Bible club to taking care of my uncle’s dairy farm for a couple of weeks while he and his wife went on vacation! My brother has been able to learn useful skills, such as carpentry, mechanics, laying tile, and building stone walls, as he helps various acquaintances on their projects. While we may not necessarily use these skills in a vocation, who knows when they may come in handy?

Through the variety and flexibility of homeschooling, we have gained a true love for learning and an ability to learn on our own in the ways we find most effective. Although I consider this one of the most valuable things I have gained from my homeschooling experience, we did not discover it right away. Until about the time I began high school, Mom had done most of the organizing and planning of our schoolwork. We were undoubtedly getting a good education, and even enjoying much of the experience, but we had not entered into the full delight of homeschooling. Mom was doing an admirable job, but she was sometimes burdened and discouraged as she tried to make us learn. Then, she

and Dad decided that the time had come to let us start taking the reins of our education more firmly. Mom and Dad took the role of general overseers, making sure we were driving in the right direction, but Daniel and I were increasingly given the freedom to choose our own specific routes.

Our homeschooling took on a new dimension! Though we were still learning the foundational subjects, Daniel and I began to focus on areas of our talents and interests. It was really thrilling! The freedom we were given resulted in the creation of our own routines and goals. We were basically on our own, studying when and where we chose. Whether I took my book to the trampoline outside, sprawled on my bed to study, or left the book on the shelf while I worked in the garden, I enjoyed being in charge of my learning. An amazing thing happened! Rather than slacking off on the subjects I didn't enjoy, I worked at them with *more* perseverance than before, because I myself had decided that the learning would be useful, instead of Mom making me do it. I had not resented Mom's supervision previously, and I still did not, yet it felt good to know that I was responsible for directing my own path. I knew I was being prepared for life in a deeper way than book learning—I was learning how to learn.

As I entered my final years of high school, my learning became less structured but remained quite as profitable. I began to devote greater time to acquiring useful skills, often listening to an audio book if the project allowed. Thus, I've been able to explore numerous areas of history, listen to great literary classics, and enjoy the biographies of remarkable men, all while expanding my practical skills.

One of the best things our parents did was encourage a love of books. When we were very young, Mom utilized every vacant moment to read to us—even during some meals or rides in the car. Our literary diet included books about history and science, as well as such classics as *Little House on the Prairie*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and works by Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens, and Shakespeare.

This exposure to excellent writing has, I believe, been a major factor in my love of writing—a love which, for quite a while, was very much dormant! When I was young, I *hated* writing—many of the editing sessions Mom and I spent on my papers ended in tears and frustration! Fortunately, although Mom did make sure I learned grammar and writing principles and produced a small number of writing projects, she wisely did not burden me with lots of writing.

The breakthrough for me came at about age nine, when Mom asked me to write a report for a thrilling book about Annie Oakley, the renowned sharpshooter. Somehow this piece had come out well, as opposed to my previous works. I was thrilled by Mom's abundant praise. We made a special cover for it, and my *magnum opus* was complete! Shortly thereafter, I wrote another book review for a biography of Thomas Edison, with similar results! Thus, a flexible approach won the day, and I began to really enjoy writing. As I began to put more effort and enthusiasm into it, my work improved. Since then, writing has actually been one of my favorite subjects! Since the end of 2001, I have been co-editing a magazine for Christian young ladies, *Apples of Gold*, for which we write articles

dealing with Christ-centered living and practical skills. I have learned so much through that project and have met numerous girls around the world! Recently, we made the difficult decision to conclude the publication of the magazine as we move on to other activities, but I believe it was one of the best things I have participated in so far!

People often ask, “So, what are you going to do after high school?” I have to answer truthfully, “I’m not sure just yet.” While I pray more about it and explore different possibilities, I’m enjoying being able to continue my studies. Part of the beauty of flexibility is that there are many options available; as long as a firm foundation of education is established, the student is capable of success in many areas. Regardless of a person’s educational background, he is sure to meet problems to which he doesn’t know the answers. The important thing is to have discovered *how* to learn and to have a *love* of learning which will enable you take on life’s challenges.

This, along with healthy relationships and wonderful educational opportunities, has been given to me through homeschooling. And yet homeschooling alone does not automatically produce a well-equipped young person. Many elements are involved, but in the end they really condense into one entity: the grace of God. “*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*” (Romans 11:36)

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### **Biographical Information**

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