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Dancing With Monica: Personal Perceptions of a Home-School Mom

Michele Sheehan

Home schooling can be a sensible alternative for meeting the needs of precocious children if the time, context, and relationships are right. This is a mother/daughter learning story. In fifth grade, daughter Monica changed from a little girl who followed classroom rules and enjoyed pleasing the teacher to a young woman with interests, ideas, and priorities of her own. A's changed to C's. Family, teacher, and student studied possible solutions. Together we settled on a few years of home-schooling. The adventure was far richer and more challenging than we perceived at the onset. The following essay is a sharing of some of our homeschool discoveries and choices, how these learning choices deepened our self-knowledge, and how home schooling interfaced with the location and learning environment transitions we faced. While this journey was uniquely ours, perhaps you will agree after sharing a glimpse of it, that home schooling can be a sensible alternative for meeting the needs of precocious children if the time, context, and relationships are right.

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Through an event of synchronicity, my daughter Monica reached a threshold in her transformation from little girl to young woman (11 years old) simultaneous to my completion of doctoral studies in natural/earth sciences. Also at this time, our family was preparing to move from Arizona to Hawai'i to Chile, as Monica's dad was to begin construction of twin telescopes

in these distant places. I share with you reflections on the learning path born of this temporal intersection that includes home school choices, learning/teaching strategies, and responses to transitions as an experiential history, not a model or template.

When Monica struggled through her fifth grade year in public school we listened, reasoned, and struggled with her. Teachers from kindergarten through fourth grade had consistently praised and rewarded the little, precocious girl for her well-done assignments and creative thought. Why then was the fifth grade report card riddled with C's? We questioned both child and teacher. "Yes, I like my teacher very much." "Yes, Monica understands the material we are covering, and she is a joy to have in the classroom. She simply does not turn in her work." Parents, child, and teacher made efforts to resolve this impasse. Finally, I came to believe that what appeared to be a deficiency in organizational skills and motivation actually contained tenacious roots of Monica's transformation from child to adolescent (Erikson, 1963).

Near the end of the year, her public school teacher advised us to consider a year of home schooling. I, a trained science teacher and scientist, her dad, a structural engineer; and older brother Dan (13 years old), a gregarious, sensitive, school community type, were all skeptical. However, our own current intense learning experiences (dissertation defense, telescope creation) had both parents thinking outside the box. We became open to education possibilities for Monica other than the K-12 norm. Monica, tired of the emotional struggle of the past year, explains her thoughts on the transition:

I was ready. My 5th grade teacher was one of my favorites from public school and she told me that she had home schooled her daughter for a while. She said that they were able to do a lot of the schoolwork required in a very short time and then

had the rest of the time to explore other interests. This especially appealed to me because I have always had interests outside of school that were important to me. I am very fond of animals (wild and captive) and being on a more unconstrained schedule allowed me to go out and look for birds or go to work at the wildlife rehabilitation center.

From this tentative stance Monica and I began exploring home schooling possibilities. Dad returned his focus to telescopes and Dan involved himself in basketball, track, and a young man's middle school years.

Being a teacher/mentor/mom, or perhaps more simply a learning guide was a returning for me. I had earned a teaching certificate by taking education courses at St. Mary's College while completing a bachelor in science at the University of Notre Dame. The philosophies of Montessori (Zeise, 2001), Glasser (2001), Dewey (Hickman, 2001), and Jung (Hall & Nordby, 1973; Williams, 2001) contributed to my beliefs in child-initiated learning, no-fail schools, pragmatic-experiential curricula, and the reality of personality types. However, in college, learning theory was secondary to my interest in geology. Then came graduation, marriage, and my first job teaching seventh grade earth science in an inner city school in Massachusetts. Seventh graders taught me that it was difficult for them to connect my fascination with earth sciences and their textbook. I listened and entered a Master of Science Education program at Boston University, which focused on outdoor experiential learning. As a student teacher, I misted spider webs, raised salamander eggs, and learned the many ferns of a New England forest. In my classroom, I was now a very pregnant science teacher carrying firstborn Dan. Then came Monica and I spent time at

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home creating nature education experiences for children on a project basis while my babies grew. When the children were 5 and 6, I returned to school to study renewable natural resources at the University of Arizona. Six years later, doctorate finally in hand, Monica asked to be home schooled.

Home schooling, we found, came in many styles such as religious-based curricula; unschooling approaches (Fitsimmons, 2001); and comprehensive correspondence programs (Calvert School, 2001). We were fortunate to stumble into a loosely knit local home school group, Telao. The families within this organization were committed to support child and/or family freedom to choose the educational path that was right for them. Each family created its own school template of discipline, schedule, projects, core curriculum, field trips, tutors, and so forth. Diverse as we were, we all seemed to view education as an interconnected array of subjects related to daily life. Some families identified this wholeness within a unifying theme: music, classical literature, nature, culture, and the like. Together, the Telao families were a network of knowledge and resources such as textbook and materials catalogs, legal requirements, interesting activities within the region, and literature on home schooling approaches. Once a week parents and children gathered in a local park to talk and play. Usually, an activity was created for the enjoyment of all, Mary's Navaho hoop dancing, George's drum demo (with baby Sonia bouncing in his backpack carrier), Ann's gardening tips, Evelyn's preparation of fry bread, my big bang universe play and homemade rocks.

Designing a home learning curriculum that met state standards and our interests was both intimidating and stimulating. Together, Monica and I looked for innovative texts for some subjects, created projects of our own, and sought mentors to lead us in new ventures. Two areas of study that remained closely tied to a quality textbook sequence were literature/grammar/writing and mathematics. One or two other subjects were designed in a substantive yet freeform style. For example, because Monica was/is an avid reader, a set of historical novels was selected for history. Science was explored through projects such as our brainstorm idea of making beaded models of the Periodic Table of Elements (starts out easy, but by the time you have reached Uranium each atom takes quite a few beads!). Lastly, we

looked for people within the community who had something to teach us. These mentoring times began as diversions from the subject area projects and bookwork. Throughout the molding of home school curriculum, Monica had a strong voice in how we approached subjects. This shared leadership enhanced the experiences for both of us.

Grounded in a mother's knowing and a daughter's new wings of adolescence, a shared dance of experiential learning was set in motion. My interest in ways of learning was rekindled. Monica brought the precious energy of girl-woman and her personal sense of joy, enthusiasm, and adventure. Learning literally leaped out of the books and explorations into our way of living. During 3 years of middle school (2 in Arizona and 1 in Hawai'i) and a high school year (in Chile) a few threads of the home school experience became lifelines for us both. These threads were 1) approaching experiential learning/teaching through mentoring; 2) developing strategies for internalizing discipline and setting goals; 3) recognizing the gifts within our individual dualities of strengths and weaknesses.

Mentoring

I chose mentoring as a major learning approach for a number of reasons including my own farm community upbringing, Monica's personal learning style, a perceived need for women role models, and as an avenue for socialization. This approach was more than successful launching us into a fascinating, expanded world of community and experiential knowledge.

I was raised on an Indiana farm, which was a nontextbook introduction to mentored learning. To milk a cow, plant a garden, hunt spring mushrooms, can pickles, and the like, one asked for advice or a demonstration. I had wandered our 40-acre farm and woodlot, listened to my dad's stories of his master teachers in cabinet making, and watched mom roll out pie dough. Naturally, my parenting already incorporated mentoring; now, we were simply going to expand the teachers. The Foxfire books

Monica



(Wigginton, 1972) on Appalachian natural history and cultural knowledge were favorites in my childhood home. The farm and Foxfire taught me that knowledge was out there in the people. For home schooling, I simply had to find the mentors within our local environment.

From early childhood, Monica was not an easily steered child. Joyful, loving, energetic, she never willingly sacrificed her own way of doing things to please others. On the other hand, once she was engaged in something, she absorbed knowledge and demonstrated almost immediately an ability to utilize this new understanding. Her ingenuity was in the creation of little plans and procedures. A family favorite is her instructions on how to place her chickens into the mesquite tree for their playtime (these were written for dad when she was going to be away for a few days). Recently, at a beach in Chile, she decided to try using salt water to mix watercolor paints. She located a broken whiskey bottle and filled it with sea water, then sat down to paint the sunset. The catch in this, if there is one, is that her creativity has always been spontaneous, free flowing, not consciously engaged. She learned as she played and played with beauty and grace!

Monica's transition from little girl to young woman was rapidly approaching. Reflecting on my own journey, I was struck by the fact that I was in the final stages of graduate studies in a field dominated by male thought and male teachers. Only two women stood out as influential role models within three natural science degrees! At home, our neighbor Jen shared an article with me, "The Lost Girls," which described 11-year-olds as being on a cusp between carefree, adventurous girls and self-conscious, appearance absorbed young women. "What happens to their courage, their humor, their self-esteem?" (O'Reilly, 1994). Learning from women and discovering herself as a woman were two good reasons to find women mentors. Monica could learn skills and knowledge simultaneous with observing individual women's life choices—babies, jobs, homes, and so forth. Monica's experience with women role models alone made the years of home schooling a success.

Learning in the home, for some, brings to mind an ugly picture of isolated, overly sheltered children who are not in touch with the outside world. We, as well as many of our home school friends, were often asked whether or not depriving our child of the experience of a classroom of peers might be harmful to her. This is a hotly debated subject among educators, one that I do not wish to enter here except to state that we chose mentoring as one avenue to address the hazard of being disconnected from community. We were two intuitive introverts who needed to socialize to remain sociable.

Given our interest in mentored learning activities, the trick was to find mentors to whom Monica would relate and who were willing to share time with an 11-plus-year-old. Focusing on a few of her key interests, I searched the greater community of Tucson, Arizona for mentors. Several people gave Monica a qualified maybe until she could prove her attentiveness and steady commitment.

Jan instructed her in spinning and knitting and guided the creation of wool-angora socks for grandpa and a blanket for a neighbor's new baby (all the while being a model of patience and hospitality). Wendy initiated projects of bird perch construction and design (listening attentively to her young apprentice's sugges-

tions), led adventures to locate Burrowing owl communities and Harris hawk nests, taught falconry-style handling of raptors, and sent her charge out to monitor the new season's young birds.

Eliza shared an afternoon of art projects each week while awaiting the birth of her second child and nurturing her 2-year-old son.

Rebecca taught Suzuki style violin. She, too, illustrated the balancing act of new motherhood with profession.

Evelyn shared with Monica the knowledge of beading Navaho prayer feathers because she saw in her a true respect and love of the birds.

Benedictine contemplative monks, sisters of the monastery where we worshiped, simply quietly prayed and were there. Monica knew that she was welcomed within the quiet peace created by their lifestyle of continuous prayer.

Dad and brother Dan validated and cherished the equal yet unique qualities of women within the loving context of our family life.

Jerry sparked Monica's Celtic fiddle enthusiasm. From the beginning the focus was on enjoying and bringing forth music, to share and for her satisfaction. Sessions between them were more learning jams than instrument lessons.

George, a home school dad caring for his three small girls during the day and a musician by night, shared many home school activities with us.

Greg taught her rock climbing and led us all on trails through remote areas of Yosemite National Park.

None of these women or men told Monica what kind of woman to become; they simply were themselves in her presence. Each person was a valuable thread in the *hidden curriculum* (Raywid, 2002) of Monica's schooling as well as valuable subject area teachers. Within this hidden curriculum, character unfolds, habits of mind are formulated, and individual qualities are developed. Monica's mentors provided a supportive and diverse learning environment.

Self-Discipline

Without school bells, class periods, and quarterly grades, the rhythm and products of learning became the responsibility of Monica as learner and me as guide. Unfortunately (or not) both of us are definite P's on the Jungian psychology personality types. Myers-Briggs testing categorized each of us on independent testing occasions as INFP's (introverted, intuitive, feeling, perceiving). (See Consulting Psychologists Press, 2000; Butt (1999); BMS Consulting, (2000) for additional information.) Introvert--I, internally processes daily life and then shares oneself with others. Needs time alone.

Intuitive--N, tends to gain a sense of things rather than specific details.

Feeling--F, approaches the world through heart, belief system more strongly than mental analysis.

Perceiving--P, focuses on process more than project, goal, or end point.

As P's, we have had wonderful discoveries along our learning path. It is difficult, however, to describe to people where exactly we have been.

Task-accomplishment frustration often ran high for both of us. There were times when Monica went into her room to work on algebra an hour a day for several weeks and only later admitted that she had not opened the book. Some projects dragged on for extensive time periods, beyond their worth simply because she did not want to do them. From the guide standpoint, it was difficult to enforce the completion of task when both of us were already looking around the next bend. Documentation of our journey was supposed to be a joint effort with direction from me. However, there were weeks when we both lost track of schedule and papers in the rush to start a new adventure.

Monica's description of home school work is as follows:

Bookwork is hard for me to do alone. I think that my greatest challenge in home schooling was that fact. I can be very lazy, and when you do your work at home, it is you, yourself who has to make you do the work. It's not that I don't learn well. I learned many things about life, about myself, and about my interests that many people don't have the opportunity to do. I have trouble with the bookwork though, and I think that home schooling helped me learn how to do this

work on my own. People tell me it is wonderful prep for college; now, all I need to do is use that knowledge that I've discovered about learning.

Self-discipline strategies were easy to design but difficult to adhere to. This struggle of personal growth for mother and daughter was the most difficult part of the journey (still is). As I said, we are P's, the next interesting path was always more important than finishing up the one at hand. Also, often we found ourselves pulled off-track by other people's agendas (because we had no strict plan of our own). It is something of a wonder that both of us were learning these discipline strategies at the same time. One might think that a scientist/teacher would be well versed in procedures and lesson plans. Home schooling with Monica came at a time in my life when I, too, was tired of completing tasks designated by someone else. Monica's oblivious rebellion to handing in fifth grade assignments that she considered irrelevant resonated with me. I was ready to find my own recipe for prioritizing activities and precious time. Developing, practicing, failing, and adjusting self-discipline strategies, were daily struggles for us. One might call this our prime home school subject.

In our 4 years of home study we tried dozens of organizational strategies (i.e., creating daily, weekly, monthly charts with boxes for each subject; setting morning as bookwork time; establishing project timelines and finish dates; etc.). The best fit for us became a combination of the following:

- selecting yearly subject area and content goals;
- setting priorities and balancing time at the start of every week;
- focusing, each morning, on a short, doable list of tasks for the day.

Some days were adventures with no books. Others became content crunching—finish the second algebra workbook or engage in focused writing for the day. Monica and I wrestled like Jacob with creating patterns within days that were entirely open to our own shaping. The following are reflections of self-discovery taken from my web-page journal letter (February, 2000), written during our last home school year in Chile.

We can stay entirely occupied with interesting activities and not accomplish ANY of our goals for the day.

We do not get bored.

Once one sets a scheduled time for some activity (i.e., riding lessons, yoga, clase de español) at least three other possible events will fall into that time slot.

Walking in wild places (por ejemplo, through a rocky riverbed looking for rock outcrops and wild parrot nesting sites) brings out something from within us that has lain dormant in our reading/ writing/study times.

The refrigerator needs to be well stocked with lettuce. (A friend says this calms the nervous system.) There are other more obvious side effects in eating more lettuce than helado.

Housework could be a fulltime job. Neither of us wants to sign-on or hire a maid.

There is a fine balance between too little and too much social life. (The balance is not necessarily the same for both of us.)

Heisenberg's principle holds for our accomplishment of goals (as well as the movement-position of subatomic particles). You can either choose direction or destination; trying to achieve both compromises the whole endeavor.

Swimming laps together keeps us motivated and is fun.

Gifts: Strengths—Weaknesses

When teachers within a given school system define learning structure, content, and evaluation, the learner's role is to prove herself competent within this construct. While possibly worthy and whole, the construct comes prepackaged. One does not have to contemplate what is "good" or "successful," one simply enters the rhythm. We treated home school as a blank sheet upon which we would balance and create the elements of an education. Making choices of what was important to do, how and when to relate to others, and where we were going, often consumed and confused us. Rich in introspection, this approach of selecting the pieces of an education was both painful and enlightening. We personally experienced the duality of our

own strengths and weaknesses. As with discovering what self-discipline for a perceiver type is, we found other dual-faced gifts within our personalities.

Monica's joyful carefree personality flowed into her work style. Both the joy and work were grounded and deepened. In home school, her joyful, loving nature was honed through self-discipline strategies and her relationships with home school friends, mentors, and family. She learned some of the responsibilities that accompany various types of relationship, such as patience with little and old ones, respect of others' opinions and belief systems, and follow through on commitments. She shared tea with an 80-year-old and played Twister with a 4-year-old. At Monica's 13th birthday sleepover, my husband and I eavesdropped in amazement as 11 young women discussed evolution and creationism, peacefully and with respect for each other's sensitivity on this issue (Mormon, Navaho, Catholic, Protestant). Monica agonized over the slow steps required to create homespun socks. Yet, she knew that her commitment to her teacher and herself was critical. Each experience strengthened her skills in responsible relationships. To her natural gifts of a joyful, loving, caring personality was added a developed sense of awareness, tolerance, and patience. Significantly, she also learned to ask these qualities of others.

Her personal working play style of addressing task accomplishment was likewise given room to mature within the home school environment. We broadened the workspace to include parameters beyond a pragmatic, efficiency focused, assignment-oriented learning environment. Given the freedom to explore, she unlocked a powerful, free-flowing nature, which lovingly involved those within her path, yet followed an internal authority.

Inquisitiveness and innovation were unselfconscious elements of her working play. For example, after tending birds at a wildlife rehabilitation site she began creating feather earrings, reading animal stories, writing a short story *The Falcon Tree*, and playing bird-like tunes on her fiddle. She could also be a conscientious volunteer for wildlife rehabilitation, zoo, and veterinarian. Art and music were even more free flowing. Since she was little, Monica always had an art studio (niche) in our house. She avoided how-to books; instead she preferred to experiment with all types of

media and subject matter. The only tutors in this subject area who survived with her were ones who understood that she was intuitively translating the beauty and life within and around her—a sunset, a lamb dying, a bunny dancing, the feather tunnel of a dream. Monica approached music similarly. For 6 years she dearly loved time spent with her Suzuki violin teacher; however, she reached a stagnant plateau. I found a Celtic fiddle teacher, Jerry, who taught by improvisation of beloved tunes. Monica's interest and learning soared. Ever since then, haunting and lively tunes have flowed through our home.

Two years ago on our trip through Ireland, Monica made a very tiny wildflower, weed, fern, and feather bouquet at each special place on our journey through beaches, high cross meadows, and boggy streams. These bouquets were beautiful, nonintrusive collages of place. They were examples of Monica's personal translation of her surroundings. In our home, we name such examples of innovation and creativity as being 'a monica.' We are all still trying to learn how to do them.

As home school guide, the teacher and the scientist within me battled for position. I won when they finally fused. Monica's working play provided me with a rich palette of experimentation within which to discover who I was as a teacher. Days spent creating order within our semiamorphous learning environment honed my teaching strategies. To Monica's contributions of joy and working play, I brought learning setting, science-based questioning, and gift giving-work satisfaction.

Devising settings for learning experience, like crafting a scene in a story, became spontaneously enacted, conscious work for me. I, like Monica, had the capability to start in one place and wander through a convoluted path of wondrous discoveries. In my role as learning guide, I sought to provide environments and activities that focused, knitted together, and broadened her experiences.

- We read aloud from *Flame Trees of Thika*, during low energy afternoon time, while sitting in comfortable living room chairs with a cup of tea.
- We scrambled through desert, rainforest, mountain landscapes with backpacks, lunches, binoculars, journals, and a rock hammer.
- We placed newly created bead model atoms on fish-line string beneath the skylight until we had a sunlit mobile of spheres.

Adventures with Monica taught me that my primary talents lie in weaving together elements of natural science in an interdisciplinary realm of atoms and art, story and animal knowledge, bird watching and poetry.

Shedding an excessive vocabulary of scientific jargon, I used multilevel questioning to sharpen Monica's problem solving, critical thinking, and inquiry skills. We did not study scientific methods; we employed them. For example, in Monica's bird studies we discovered hazards for wildlife in the city while answering the wildlife rehabilitation hotline calls. Our minds became storehouses for anecdotal bits of bird knowledge, inductive data. In time, we became bird wise, able to deduce possible solutions to problems. We knew important knowledge such as do not feed Great Horned Owl nestlings pieces of meat unless you wish to have the full grown (very large!) owl attack begging for food. When Monica's hawk mentor, Wendy, asked her to independently survey a section of the city for active nests, I drove the car slowly through her designated areas and asked questions about surveying and data collection. Monica and I sought bird information: stories, field guides, and ornithological texts. She preferred the stories. All of the above was overlaid upon Monica's initial predisposition toward animals, birds in particular. Importantly, throughout these learning experiences, Monica was the bird expert. I asked questions and connected her with people, resources, and opportunities.

The subject of task completion has been addressed as an issue of self-discipline earlier in this paper. Here, I add the dimension of the creation of gifts and useable products as work incentive. As a Benedictine oblate, I also know work as prayer. Work as the gift of one's energy, time, creativity is an old idea, yet it seems to be missing in many lesson plans and assignments outside of Mother's Day handicrafts. We used fiber crafts, stories, paintings, music gigs as gifts to be shared with family and friends. Grandpa Q received the first (and last?) pair of socks; Dad an inkle loom banjo strap; me a painting of dancing bunnies; Dan a friendship bracelet; friends a participatory musical Christmas party. We provided homes and food for our household animals, and they gave us eggs, bunny wool, and company. Beauty and food were cultivated in our desert and tropical gardens of herbs, vegetables, and fruits. Raptor bird surveys (AZ), rainforest vegetation study plots (HI), and turtle nesting mon-

itoring (HI) were contributions to larger community. While all learning experiences might not be translated into gifts of pleasure and utility, we discovered that many do.

Transitions

Transitions of location and learning environment during Monica's secondary education played a major role in overall learning. We prepared for and responded to these temporal catalysts. They shook us up, made us reestablish ourselves under different parameters, and provided a wide range of opportunities. The transitions include: move from Arizona to Hawai'i (home school eighth grade year), change from home school to parochial school (freshman and sophomore years), move to Chile (home school junior year), return to Hawai'i and parochial high school (senior year).

After 2 years of home schooling in Tucson, Arizona we moved to the Big Island of Hawai'i. Distant now were the community of mentors and friends. Present were the wonders of a tropical island. We spent a rare weekend on a turtle beach with a team that monitored the nesting season of endangered hawksbill sea turtles. On one full moon night we watched a female lay eggs in a new nest while her young from last month's nest bubbled to the surface and raced to the sea. We wrote poetry in the rainforest with a newfound friend. Monica joined a canoe club and paddled as one of a six-person team in weekend regattas. Experiences were rich in Hawai'i. The community of peers that we had developed in Arizona was difficult to recreate.

For her freshman year, Monica chose to return to a classroom setting. Monica wanted to be in a daily classroom peer group and have the comfort of structure to keep her on track in necessary coursework. At the entrance exam for the local parochial school, I sat nervously waiting. Our freeform learning style had left holes within the expected content comprehension of a ninth grader. She did well (97% composite score) and was warmly welcomed. For the first month, we waited for signs of dysfunction between school system and independent child. None came. Monica was ready to be back in the classroom. I followed her lead and taught Science Teaching Methods for the local university teacher education cohort. As for me, a teacher of teachers, my teaching was now biased toward experiential, discovery, inquiry styles, and lots of field trips.

After 2 years of high school we faced a new hurdle. Dad's job required a family move to Chile for 1 year. Before the move, the home school mom-daughter team reconvened for long-term and immediate education planning. The short-term options to be considered were whether to home school in Chile or enter the country's school year midterm. Next, we outlined future scenarios of returning to high school for senior year or completing secondary education with a GED and entering a college program upon returning. After careful analysis, Monica chose to home school in Chile, selecting coursework to prepare her to graduate with her senior class the following year.

The year in Chile was difficult, lonely, amazing, and expanding. Beautiful friends, incredible landscapes, the essence of a very different culture, all pooled into a year not to be forgotten. With brother in college and dad on the mountain, mother and daughter faced the adventures of everyday life within another culture where everything was an experience (wandering through town, going to the grocery, watching television).

Each morning we started with coffee, Chilean bread and yogurt, propped up in mom and dad's bed. We read *Madeleine L'Engle, Suncatcher* (Chase, 1990) and other spiritual literature. Before rising, we composed a short list of activities for the day (on Mondays we viewed the week). Monica learned equestrian dressage and I learned yoga from Spanish-speaking teachers. We explored craft and local vegetable markets and gathered cultural music. Monica's structured coursework included three correspondence courses.

Having the unique opportunity of being in an international telescope community while a scope was being built, I used my role as learning guide to gather the teenagers of these engineer/astronomer families together for an exploration of conceptual physics through the telescope. The dads gave tours and hands-on demonstrations of their respective part in the overall project. Deep friendships were made among teenagers and families. Out in the landscape, whole days were spent in the deep valleys that ran between the sea and Andean peaks. On one trip we

climbed a glittering ridge of metasandstone that held pockets of crystals, ran with our Irish setter pup, and paused at a place overlooking a valley vineyard. Monica caught the fall colors of the vines on canvas. What a blessing for a mother to have this selfish year with her young woman who was soon to leave home's nest.

Back in Hawai'i, Monica rebounded with local high school friends and once again performed the 180-degree turn around of participating within a parochial school system versus self-molded learning. The Chilean experience remained with her. She assisted a first grader from Spain in his adjustment to Hawai'i. We both continued to play our Latino music at work and play. Monica connected with a group of Brazilian exchange students. Preparing dinner, she commented that the produce here, especially the broccoli, was not like what we had in Chile.

All of these transitions shaped us. Our adaptability to change grew.

Conclusions

When asked about home schooling, Monica replied

I did not want for friends, being a home schooler. There were many of us in the same type of situation and we developed friendships that still, in many cases, hold strong for me. I am now a high school senior and I believe I am, in many ways, different from a lot of people my age. Home schooling throughout middle school was a different experience than many people have had and it changed me a lot.

We tried on many learning and being patterns like children backstage at an old theatre. Some costumes fit us better than others. We danced this experience together within a whole loving family. Without Dad and Dan this would be a very different story. Venturing out of the home we found a community of mentors, friends, and special places. We discovered our strengths/gifts and learned how to transform our weaknesses. My teaching style evolved.

Monica will begin college this fall. She plans to unite animal science, music, and foreign language/culture into one cohesive program. At least 1 more year immersed in another country's language and culture (Chile and/or Ireland) is in the plan. She is currently preparing a letter to the veterinarians within her college town, so that she may continue the veterinarian clinic technician/office experience job that she has had here at home.

Home schooling is a viable option for educating precocious, gifted and talented children. There are real life lessons to be learned along with interdisciplinary skills and knowledge within the community through mentors, family, and friends. Both student and parent change and are changed by the process.

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