



I Never Let My Schooling Interfere with My Education

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My parents made a significant investment in my life: preferring quality above convenience, they determined to provide the best education available—an education utilizing many unique opportunities not attainable within a conventional format. Accepting responsibility for a child's foundational education requires firm commitment, and my mother sacrificed her career to become a devoted stay-at-home educator. Thus, my siblings and I became homeschoolers.

I enjoyed learning at home because excellence and diligence were duly rewarded. With one-on-one instruction, our inquisitive minds never soured from monotonous hours of squirming in class waiting for slower students. When we mastered the required material, the remainder of the day was our own.

Our bookshelves were well-supplied with quality literature, so when we were not inventing various contraptions, our innate curiosity led to many hours of voluntary reading. These self-motivated, independent studies broadened our horizons and excited our interests in many skills and occupations that would have escaped us in a conventional classroom setting. Resultantly, we became well-rounded in our technical knowledge and successfully interacted with people from diverse backgrounds and age groups.

In adherence to our goal of achieving well-versed scholastic excellence, my parents and I reevaluated our educational options prior to the beginning of my ninth grade year. In order to make an objective decision, we visited both a private school and the local public high school. At the private school, the classroom we observed was so unruly that the teacher

was unable to conduct a normal lesson. The high school was somewhat more orderly; however, I was dismayed to find a police station located near the lunchroom in order to discourage drug abuse and violence. I also found the textbooks of both schools inferior to the materials we already had at home. Although we knew that challenges lay ahead, the verdict was unanimous: homeschooling remained our best option.

Within the world of home education, there are numerous methods for achieving a successful secondary education and college-preparatory experience. Our family carefully examined each option, enlisted the advice of homeschooling networks and publications, and ultimately chose an eclectic approach tailored to suit each child's talents and interests. This format included instruction from exceptionally qualified teachers such as Melody Lambert, M.Ed. (included in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers* five times) and Mary Hamilton, M.Ed. (with more than 35 successful students who became National Merit Scholars) in small classroom settings. Our results, I think, are hard to surpass. In fact, my mother is admittedly envious of my education, despite her accomplishments as an Air Force Academy graduate and high school valedictorian.

My classes varied greatly in style and structure. Some, including several Advanced Placement courses were taught by professional educators and met for one to two hours per week, requiring considerable outside study so that class periods could be devoted to discussion, laboratory experiments and test taking—much like a typical college course. Others were regular class periods facilitated by accredited distance learning

networks. Still others consisted of extensive reading assignments combined with supplemental materials, hands-on applications, and comprehensive testing superintended by my mother. Because of the variety, I acquired time management and other valuable study skills; I also accepted responsibility for much of my own education.

Knowledge and character development are equally important in the formation of successful individuals. College campuses across the world are seeking young leaders who notice problems and eagerly strive to offer solutions, regardless of recognition or reward, simply because it is the right and honorable thing to do. I believe that the home school community supplies the optimal solution with its personalized mentorship nearly impossible in all other forms of education. Among its many other advantages, homeschooling provides additional time for active community service—with excellence.

Contrary to many myths surrounding homeschooling, I never lacked social interaction. In fact, according to Jason Hays, World Irish Dance Champion in 2006, "[our social lives are] ten times greater directly because of homeschooling and the freedom it allows to travel and explore the world." Many young people with prodigious talent, including Olympic athletes, choose home education as an efficient way to maximize time for practice and competition. For example, it permitted the continuation of my own musical studies with exceptional instructors whose demanding schedules would have collided with a less flexible educational format. I also became friends with many gifted individuals whom I would not have encountered in any other high school setting—three National Merit Scholars,



several actors, a talented athlete whose team won the National Christian Homeschool Basketball Championships 6A title for four consecutive years, a nationally-competitive debater, a video game soundtrack composer, and an accomplished pianist/violinist/composer featured last year on National Public Radio, to name just a few.

Throughout high school, I dedicated myself to studying and extracurricular activities because I knew that colleges considered those things very seriously. The process of discovering the perfect university, gaining acceptance, and competing for scholarships is difficult for most high school students; however, it is *especially* challenging for homeschoolers who must provide their own career guidance, school documentation, transcripts, and other items normally provided to students by paid school administrators—all *before* they even begin their college search.

In my case, my mother had other children and affairs to tend, and much of the responsibility for finding colleges and scholarships was therefore delegated to me. I spent many long hours visiting colleges (often solo) and researching possible majors, which created an additional burden on my already hectic schedule. To make my search simpler, I sought advice from knowledgeable adults and usually avoided colleges that were not listed as “homeschooler friendly” in various homeschool publications.

I never comprehended that I was an alienated minority until I actually began my applications. Although our curriculum fully met and even surpassed our state’s requirements for high school graduation, many institutions—particularly military-related ones—demanded additional paperwork as evidence. Agonizing over numerous “Home School Supplements” (several of which were so discriminatory that I never completed them), I often felt that the tremendous amount of effort I had poured into my studies was in vain because an extraordinary weight rested upon the results of my college entrance

examinations. My score in the 99th percentile on the PSAT two consecutive years and SAT score of 2280 ameliorated my predicament; however, many homeschoolers who are exemplary students with *equivalent potential*, are denied recognition solely because of their standardized test results.

On many applications, I became frustrated by the lack of accommodation for my unique talents and achievements. I could not check the boxes for student body council, JROTC, and other activities often denied to homeschoolers by public school systems, yet there were none to list my experience, for instance, in managing our home dairy. There were not enough spaces for me to list all seven siblings, or to explain that our large family size had limited which activities I could cram onto my résumé in four years, yet it also developed many intangible qualities outside the traditional mold such as natural leadership and the ability to tolerate others’ differences.

I received many full-tuition scholarships and was able to choose the college where I believed I would be the most academically and socially developed during the next four years. However, the majority of homeschoolers are not so fortunate. Nearly all of my classmates received a similar caliber of education and were likewise talented in numerous disciplines, yet very few received equal recognition. Although one classmate was accepted to Harvard University (MA), a large percentage—including several mentioned above—will be attending community colleges this fall, mainly because of the meager scholarship and financial aid offerings from four-year universities.

According to the Home School Legal Defense Association, “statistics demonstrate that homeschoolers tend to score above the national average on both their SAT and ACT scores.” Nevertheless, these same model students are seldom accordingly compensated by colleges who attempt to recruit intelligent and diversified students. The FAFSA does not adequately accommodate

those who invest large amounts of time and resources in their children’s futures *in addition to paying local ISD taxes*; neither does it fairly compensate those with extenuating circumstances, especially large families with only one parent in the work force. I myself felt the burden of a distorted EFC and was concerned that my siblings would be unable to complete their own educations if I did not receive a substantial college scholarship. As self-taught photographer Hannah Reinmiller wrote, “many grants and scholarships just look at the total income and don’t take into account that for homeschoolers, education even before college is a much larger expense... because of the amount spent on curriculum and activities that, for most families, are funded by taxes.”

For these and similar reasons, the next generation of independently motivated leaders are often missing out on quality college educations. Every homeschooler has huge dreams because of the freedom to imagine without the discouragement of official red tape and negative peer pressure, yet those dreams are often shattered when these same individuals apply to college and hit financial brick walls. However, my hope is that this will soon change as more outstanding homeschooled students are admitted to universities, awarded scholarships commensurate with their achievements, and prove to fare as well or better, on the whole, than their public and private-schooled counterparts.

Although the next phase of my life preparation begins as I enter college this fall, I will proudly retain my identity as a homeschooler amongst many distinguished alumni including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Thomas Edison, Andrew Carnegie, Charlie Chaplin, Albert Einstein, C. S. Lewis, Winston Churchill, George S. Patton, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Sandra Day O’Connor, and Tim Tebow, to name only a few. I am honored to continue the legacy of world-changing leadership as a graduate of the world’s oldest and arguably most prestigious educational institution known by the inauspicious title, “Homeschool.”

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