

## A GRANDMOTHER'S THOUGHTS ON HOMESCHOOLING

*by Dora Back*

When my daughter first told me she was considering homeschooling for my three granddaughters my first knee-jerk reaction was that they would miss socializing, doing what other children their age would be doing and all the other intangibles that accompany "going to school".

However when I began to remember my own experiences at school, I quickly abandoned that line of thinking. My recollections about closed circles, a classroom defined by privileged insiders and outsiders, of which I was undoubtedly one, shallow definitions of good looks, attractiveness, popularity and being one of the "in" group, of which I was definitely not, made me think that attending school was not the great experience I first thought it to be. School made my self esteem sink to ground level and it was only when I went out into the business world that I realized I had brains and was smarter than a great many of the people with whom I came in contact.

Unfortunately when children meet education and learning in the school, the tyranny of peer groups based on preposterous values such as popularity, "in groups", sports ability and type casting meet little resistance and are accepted by the child as popular culture because their life experience has not given them any other models to relate to. The children outside of these "groups" suffer from lowered self esteem, feelings of inferiority, and an inability to "belong" and they are "trapped" in an artificial world which they believe to be real. A child will be teased for being serious about schoolwork and being an "outsider". Most thoughtful young people suffer the school environment in silence. Teasing is harmful to children because if they do not learn to effectively counteract it, it can make them feel powerless and inadequate. This injury to their sense of competence is more damaging than the actual taunts or put-downs. Outside of school, no other group of adults, young or old, is confined to an age-sequestered environment, where members of the same age group define each other's world.

Nowhere else in the world will the child be in a group where there is such a narrow segmentation by chronology. Often the school outsider becomes the more successful and admired adult. In maturing, the definitions of masculinity and femininity go through sufficient transformation to make the game of popularity in school an embarrassment. By the time children go out into the world and realize what really is at stake in becoming an adult, too many opportunities have been lost and too much time has been wasted. They need to enter a world where they are not in a lunchroom with only their peers, estranged from other age groups and cut off from the game of life as it is really played.

Meanwhile, my three granddaughters are enjoying homeschooling and seem to be flourishing. They all read very well. They like to listen to their mother read aloud both chapter books and picture books. The oldest, who is twelve, is reading High School and adult level books and the seven and eight-and-a-half-year-old girls read books that would be considered above their grade level if they were in school. They all have a great interest in the world around them. They are all good spellers, which I never learned to do. My two younger granddaughters like using the computer and have been playing a game called "Jumpstart 4th grade". The youngest would be in first grade and the middle girl would be in third if they were in school.

All of the girls are in Girl Scouting. The oldest girl is very good at organizing herself, she makes or asks for assignments and then works on them regularly. She is also a leader when she is in a group and is very kind and considerate of others. She recently became a Cadette Girl Scout; as a Junior Girl Scout she earned about 30 badges and all four "signs", mostly on her own. All three girls are interested in the theater and each one of them has auditioned and been given parts in different plays. They all enjoy music and take music lessons. They have lots of friends and are very sociable and outgoing.

While the ideal of giving everyone an education is admirable, the reality is that the school environment

does not provide the kind of education the child needs to deal with the outside world. Children frequently look at the world with genuine awe, wonder and excitement. Children fascinated with space learn about telescopes and astronomy; those interested in sports immerse themselves in practice; children interested in current events or theater throw themselves into pursuit of knowledge in these areas both in and out of school. In school these interests must be subjugated to the needs of completing the curriculum. A child's "real self" is not cultivated because of the numbers of children which the teacher has to educate.

Personal interests cannot be cultivated if they deviate from the subjects which must be taught. And the speed of learning is adjusted to the slower "members of the class". This environment can discourage dreams and put a damper on talents in the name of "realism", which can mean abandoning true interests and pursuing something practical in which there may be no real interest. Thus the budding scientist, performer or politician is pushed into whatever field is seen as practical at the time. When you can follow your dreams and work toward the ultimate goal, the journey, the career path, will be exciting and rewarding. Internal motivation is a far better motivator rather than just practicality or money. Not the destination but the journey itself will be a source of meaning in life. We need to encourage students to pursue their dreams and work with their genuine desires and interests to help them take the right steps on this important journey so that their life is one of joy and gratification. What does not change is the human need for fulfillment and meaning.

Dora is a lifelong learner who lives in New Jersey; her 3 granddaughters homeschool in Massachusetts.