

HOMESCHOOLING CAN LIBERATE BOTH CHILDREN AND PARENTS

It may not work for everyone, but for us it's a perfect fit.

by **John O. Andersen**

Homeschooling is not for everyone, and it's not necessarily the best way to learn. Nevertheless, it works well for us, and here are three important reasons why:

1. Homeschooling enables exposure to a broad range of people, ideas, and places

We live in a fascinating cosmopolitan city. Nearby are mountains and the ocean. Within a short drive there are state parks, a renowned aquarium, lighthouses, historic sites, art museums, stately homes, a zoo, libraries, botanical gardens, science museums, factories, farms, orchards, a hydroelectric power plant, a variety of bridges, forested areas, a state capitol, etc., etc.

The flexibility of homeschooling allows us to take a family field trip each Friday to one of those places. We like to think that taking tours, meeting knowledgeable people, or volunteering to help at a cultural institution, are all great ways to learn. We particularly enjoy field trips during the week rather than on crowded and busy weekends when time and tempers can be short, and tour guides, or educators may be too busy to answer our individual questions.

In conjunction with our weekly family outings, our children find related books and videos in the library (they know their local library well, they are volunteers there each Wednesday), write thank you notes to tour guides, do written reports, draw pictures, and sometimes give oral presentations to other homeschoolers.

All of these experiences have helped us to realize there are good teachers in every walk of life; not just in public or private schools. Mandy and I take pains to search out these special people, and bring our children in contact with them. In the past few years, we've run across dozens of such people.

I'm thinking about the inventor of the self-cleaning house with whom we shared an entire afternoon; or the volunteer who took us through a local botanical garden; or the science museum educator who spent an hour explaining skull characteristics to my daughter and me; or the other homeschooling parents, many of whom have significant formal education, who share their interests in co-op courses; or the tour guide at the military museum who let us climb into the armored vehicles and took us into the vault with the extensive collection of small arms dating back to the Civil War; or the marine science volunteers on the beach who showed us examples of tide pool life; or the self-taught ethnobotanist who took us on a very interesting walk through a local state park; or perhaps the weaver at a woolen mill museum who let our children actually operate a hand loom. The list goes on and on and on.

Mandy and I like to believe that when we bring our children into regular contact with some of our community's great yet often unheralded teachers, we are laying the groundwork for a superior education for our children. We also believe that our children's regular contact with many local homeschooled peers is an integral part of that education.

2. Homeschooling provides opportunities to teach our children business skills

Homeschooling enables our children to be a more active part of our family carpet cleaning business. We think this is an excellent opportunity to teach them skills which will serve them in any livelihood they might choose as adults.

I've shown our 11 year old daughter how to do basic bookkeeping on the computer. With the attention to detail she has already demonstrated in many ways, she will soon be able to do all of the daily bookkeeping entries.

Our 9 year old son helps me clean the van and do minor repairs. He holds tools for me, fetches things, and watches me work. Perhaps in not too many years, he will be able to tackle small engine maintenance.

Our children may not want to run the family business when they grow up, but we think regardless of what they choose, they will be well-equipped to either run their own business, or be valuable employees to someone else.

3. It allows great flexibility for vacations

For us, another benefit of homeschooling is the freedom to take vacations in the off-season when prices are significantly lower and crowds are rare.

One winter, for instance, we took a long distance train trip. It was great to travel at a reduced rate, enjoy the scenery, meet lots of interesting people, and not have to worry about getting back at a specific time for school to start, or some other deadline.

We also enjoy camping as a family. Because, especially in Oregon, so many other people like to camp, we take advantage of our flexible schedule by going during the week, or in the weeks before Memorial Day and after Labor Day.

Perhaps when our children reach their teen years and can better handle the physical rigors, we might be able to take a post Labor Day extended backpacking trip down the Oregon Coast (one of my dreams); or we might go rockhounding; or maybe live on the road in an RV for an extended period of time.

Conclusion: We homeschool because it allows us to do so much of what we truly love to do. In a nutshell, that's why it works so well for us.

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About the Author:

John O. Andersen is the spouse of Mandy. They have a 12 year old daughter and a 9 year old son. They do lots of fun things together like travel, tickle fights, and gardening.

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