

## **Judgment Day** *by Donna Courreges*

I haven't used a standardized test on my kids...yet. I'm still trying to decide if the "goods" outweigh the "bads". I think to myself....Testing is inescapable in our society. What's the big deal? Just go ahead and test the munchkins. I mean (I mumble subliminally) we are often judged in our society. We've all been judged by our looks, by our behavior and most definitely on how well we perform on written or oral tests.

The judgments are often superficial. People with a healthy self-image find such one-dimensional measure bothersome only if failing must keep us from a sought after goal. Sigh, groan, alas. It isn't always how well we actually know the game that counts. Often, it is how well we play the game. { Translation: how well other people THINK we know the game) My children are not going to be able to avoid all standardized tests. There is the DMV's driving test to look forward to. College midterms, professional certifications.....IF I do decide to formally test the kidsters, it'll mainly be so they can learn and practice test-taking itself. To that end, standardized testing my boys every year or two would have some value. Hey, practice makes perfect....

All the same, I have an instinctual dislike for standardized tests. My oldest son took many a standardized test before we started homeschooling over a year ago. What did those scores really mean? He scored really high on this and yippee! even on that. "Good boy!", said the school and parents. But what, really did those scores mean? They just said we was good in this and that.... Those scores said nothing else. Reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic.....need to know them, and yep, need to know them well. But I am afraid...I am afraid that we are all going to get so caught up on testing and making SURE we know the basics of language arts, arithmetic and such, that we will over-dedicate the limited time, energy and resources of our schools, teachers and families (yes, I mean homeschoolers too) in the pursuit of straight A's and 96th percentiles.

Warning: Hypothetical, made-up rambling scenario regarding Standardized Testing follows....

Tests, in themselves, are just an exercise. They can be useful. Let's pretend I like taking typing tests.....Maybe, I want an accurate, impartial gauge of improvement in speed, for example. I take a speed test. Uh oh! I plinked out a humbling 20 wpm. Let me try again....oooh! I got a 25 wpm score this time. Practice, practice....take the test. Aha! 40 wpm and climbing....I'm doing good! Now on paper, I look like I'm makin' the grade. I'm showing improvement, I'm hot, man!!! Compare me to all the other ladies in the neighborhood who also took the same standardized speed test and yo! I'm in the 80th percentile. Yay! So what does THAT mean? It means that I can type that particular bunch of words on that there test faster, more accurately than 79/100 other tested typists. And about 20/100 are, sniff! better typists.

Of course, luckily, there weren't too many numbers in my test paragraph, or I would have done much worse since I have to look at that row of keys...and , and, and good think I was familiar with that kind of test from all my practice tests. I would have been a lot slower trying to type an excerpt from a technical journal. Yes! I am a "good" typist. (I perform the Happy Dance)

Now...I do type the test faster and more accurately than when I first started taking the tests. Just the practicing reinforced my basic typing and test-taking skills. This is a good thing. But while I was obsessing with my speedtyping, my neighbor Shirley, had been doing some speed drills. She improved...went from 25 wpm to 45 wpm...but then she got interested in changing the fonts in her program. This led to her exploring deeper into her word-processing tutorial, which led her to reconfiguring her page layout...which led to her learning more about her desktop publishing program...which led to her becoming a much more computer-literate real-life capable person that she

had been before all this fun exploration began. Now, Shirley can't type as well as me (hee hee, she just in the 67th percentile) but, whenever something goes wrong with my Windows upgrades, I call my buddy, computer-guru Shirley, over to help out. Too bad she doesn't get extra credit for being a computer geek, huh?

Oh! and then there's Georgia---the lady across the street. She's in the 95th percentile. She just thinks she's just so great! If Shirley and I were more disciplined, dedicated, she says, then we could be really good typists--like her! But you know what's kind of sad? She quickly and easily got a job as a secretary. I mean that woman can type! Phew! But then, Shirley got hired too. And after a while...some of those people in the personnel department at WileyElectronics Inc, have to go by the book on job descriptions....took Shirley a while to prove herself...but now...she's Georgia's boss.

One Last Note.... If we teach to the test, our scores are higher, true. But now there isn't time for watching the ant hill in the front yard with the neighbor kids. Marveling at that the insect' tiny yet gargantuan strength and reading about the complexities of bug socialism will have to wait until that all-important spelling test has been studied for, again. Natural curiosity becomes a luxury we can't afford...we must get all our "real" work done first...When my kids are ready to launch forth, out on their own, into our wonderfully intricate world, I'll have to ask myself some questions and worry: Will they know how to think, learn about and adapt to our rapidly changing world? Or will they just be good testers.

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*This article generously donated by **Chart & Compass** March 1998*