

FINDING YOUR NICHE

BY JOSEPH BAILEY

Happy New Year! 2017 is a special year for us because it marks the 25th Anniversary of The Network of Iowa Christian Home Educators.

So, what exactly are we celebrating? Maybe, for some of our active volunteers, it is a remembrance of all the tears and sweat they have invested. Maybe it is a time to reflect on all the friendships forged with those we have served alongside. But, perhaps, the best way we can celebrate is by retelling the stories of how God has used NICHE to encourage and help families across Iowa who felt God's calling to disciple their children at home.

In this spirit, I would like to invite you to help us tell the story of how God has been, and continues to be, at work throughout the Iowa homeschooling movement. Perhaps you have a story about the pioneering days of homeschooling in Iowa. Maybe there is some small way NICHE has been a blessing to you in the past or recently. Or perhaps you are a 2nd generation homeschooler who can tell us how God has used your homeschool education to prosper and guide your path today.

I'll start by sharing a couple of pieces of my story. I was homeschooled K-12. The flexibility of homeschooling allowed my parents to tailor my education so that I was able to learn practical skills like welding and running a business—skills that have been invaluable to me in my college education and career.

Back in high school, I always looked forward to the NICHE conference when I could work side by side with teen vol-

unteers from across the state and where many friendships were cultivated. In fact, it was at a NICHE conference that I reconnected with my wife-to-be. I remember thinking "I hope I can be worthy of marrying a woman like this someday." That someday came about 5 years ago and, praise God, she must have thought I was good enough because she said "Of course [I will marry you]!" Now we have a busy home with 3 (going on 4) beautiful children.

As a second generation homeschool dad, I certainly don't know it all just because I was raised in a homeschool en-

vironment. I feel like I have even more questions than ever. How in the world did my parents pull this off? But, the foundation is already there, and, most importantly, the vision is solid. We are going to disciple our children at home in Christ's ways through high school (yes, you can remind my wife and I of this when we



feel like quitting). Now we enjoy going to NICHE events even more to meet like-minded friends, get fresh ideas, and enjoy Christian encouragement in this homeschool journey.

Well, enough about me. We would love to hear your story! Please send submissions of articles or short video clips to [NICHE memories@homeschooliowa.org](mailto:NICHE_memories@homeschooliowa.org). We hope to use some of your submissions in our upcoming events and publications. We look forward to hearing from you! ●

Joe Bailey is a second generation homeschool dad of 3 (going on 4) children. He and his wife, Elizabeth, are members of the Homeschool Iowa board.