

FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

By JULIE NABER-HAUS

Parents in Iowa can homeschool their children with relative freedom today. Was that always the case? The answer is: "No."

How was the recognition of the freedom to homeschool won in our state? The answer is: "It was won through the diligent efforts of dedicated parents."

There are literally hundreds of stories to document those efforts, but we'd like to share just one in particular as we prepare to commemorate our 25th NICHE anniversary.

Return with us to the late 1980's. At that time, Iowa law did not recognize private instruction by persons other than Iowa licensed teachers. A number of parents had been homeschooling in Iowa, several of whom faced prosecution and potential removal of their children under Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) threats.

In 1989, the Iowa Senate passed Senate File 149, a bill labeled as a truancy prevention measure. A prominent homeschool leader at that time described the bill: "[SF 149] allows and compels the county attorney to go directly to juvenile court and file a petition to remove truant children under the child in need of assistance portion

of the Iowa code. No educational neglect may be taking place. In fact, the child could be excelling, but the child could be taken from the home and placed elsewhere. This bill would lower the compulsory attendance age to six (6) and raise it to eighteen (18). We have very strong evidence that anti-home school intent was at the origin of this bill."

Home educators raised objections to the bill, and, by God's grace, the 1989 Iowa Legislature adjourned without passing SF 149. Unfortunately, the bill was still eligible for consideration by the 1990 legislature – at the very point to which it had progressed at the end of the 1989 session. As the 1990 legislative session approached, various homeschoolers prepared for the coming opportunity to enact legislation for homeschoolers in Iowa. One group in particular, the Dallas County Homeschool Support Group, began meeting regularly to discuss options and plans.

On January 6, 1990, before the legislative session opened, the Dallas County Home School Support Group invited their legislators to a group member's Adel home. Keep in mind that most of the families in this group were educating their children in a manner outside of the legally recognized means in Iowa at that time.