

Beyond The Homeschool Years

BY LAURA CARLSON

It is my hope that after reading this feature, second-generation homeschooling families will be encouraged to stay the course, and families new to homeschooling plan to finish the journey strong. Imagine we are sitting at my table holding cups of steaming tea and listening to three talented homeschool graduates share their educational stories. Where will your student's educational journey lead? I hope it ends with a high school graduation party!

Every student has a unique school experience, but when high school is finished, all students are grouped under one term, “the homeschool graduate.” Will the label of “homeschool graduate” profit or hurt your student? Is it as good as a “real” high school diploma? Can a homeschool graduate get into college? Some parents homeschool through eighth grade, and then enroll their children in public schools, thinking, “I can’t teach high school. I’m not equipped.”

Can you supervise chemistry and calculus classes when you don’t know what an algorithm is or how to explain electromotive forces to a teenager? Literally hundreds of parents walk with you on this path. Most of us aren’t scientists and physicists able to tiptoe through these lessons and experiments in our kitchens. (Well, I’m certainly not!) Seeking outside assistance when needed through coops, colleges, and friends with those degrees is one way to supervise and remain homeschooling families through high school.

Sculpting Her Future

Artist Emily Verdoorn was homeschooled “from the beginning until I graduated from high school. My parents deeply value a good education, for which I am so grateful. This meant reading a lot of good books and spending time outdoors, but also being consistent in work, like math, science, and other traditional subjects. My parents also encouraged us to pursue what interested us. For me, this was often art related.”

As a high school student, Verdoorn took private and group art classes in Des Moines. Almost all her free time was busy creating something, “clay penguins to popsicle-stick cabins to pencil drawings.” Participating in a variety of area homeschool co-ops offered many learning experiences for this budding artist. The freedom homeschooling offered gave her parents countless opportunities for varied art lessons and unique experiences as part of her high school programming.

“I knew I wanted to study art, but I did not know how or where. I learned about Belhaven University at a homeschool convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. For two years I took a few classes online through Belhaven and Des Moines Area Community College,” added Miss Verdoorn. “I attended Summit Semester in Pagosa Springs, Colorado, that brought 30 students together studying worldview and Christian thought. This shaped my thoughts, and I decided to finish my studies in Jackson, Mississippi, at Belhaven University’s campus. I did not know anyone there, and I was moving 13 hours away from my family. But my professors in the Art Department grew to be mentors, and I found close friends. I graduated in May 2017 with my Bachelor’s of Fine Arts in Visual Art (BFA). I returned to the Des Moines area and currently teach

art lessons through the Des Moines Home Instruction Program and The Art House Des Moines.”

Verdoorn credits her parents guiding her education that shapes her choices as an adult. “I am a Christian, and that is very important to me. My Christian education absolutely played a role in my worldview. In our culture, when we are immersed in social media, even mass education, it is easy to feel like a replicable part in a giant machine. In a family, this is different. Members are not interchangeable.”

She continues, “C.S. Lewis, one of my favorite authors, discussed the value of membership and loss of self in his book, *Weight of Glory*. He writes that an individual may lose their name by becoming a prisoner. In this case, he is given a number rather than a name. The second is if a man is in a family. There he is called “father” or “grandfather”. In the first instance an individual joins a collective. In the second instance he joins a membership. To quote Lewis, ‘The father and the grandfather are almost as different as the cat and the dog. If you subtract any one member, you have not simply reduced the family in number, you have inflicted injury on its structure.’ It was in membership that I was primarily educated. It was in membership that I became a Christian. This is no small thing. I cannot remember a time when I was not a Christian in a Christian home, surrounded by a supportive homeschooling community of all ages.”

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Emily Verdoorn
ARTIST