

Maybe I couldn't do this homeschooling thing? That is when a lovely veteran homeschool mom told me to stop teaching her to read. I couldn't believe what I heard her saying! How could I stop teaching her to read?! She explained that it was not important to put information into her head, but to instill a love of learning. How did tears over a letter sound instill a love of learning? It was a mind-blowing question that I simply had to answer, "It doesn't." So we stopped teaching reading.

How did she learn, then? What do you mean? How could that work? Simply. We went to the library and checked out books she liked. We snuggled up on the couch together and read those books to her. While we were reading, I pointed to words and matched words to pictures. I said the words out loud. Sometimes sounding them out, sometimes just reading them. One day, we were driving down the road in San Pedro, California. Gazing out the window, she said, "Hollywood Video!" That was not a store we frequented, so we were quite amazed. We started pointing out signs to see if she could read them. She read them all! It was all very natural, very comforting, and very fun. She learned her letters and she learned to read. Today she loves both reading and writing for fun.

One year later, we were thrown our next big curveball. We experienced the loss of a job in a horrible economy. After a lot of discussion, hours of prayer, and some pretty awesome miracles from the hand of God, we embarked on a journey home to Iowa. Coming home was a big change; one I wasn't sure I could handle.

By this time, I was dead set on homeschooling. No way were my kids ever going to step foot in a public school. I feared government overreach and felt a supervising teacher would be oppressive. Iowa laws required testing, which would require my kids going into the public school or I had to have a supervising teacher. Thankfully, these laws have since changed, but at the time, this was the way that it was.

My ways are not God's ways. And the next curveball was pitched. He has never really allowed me to be stuck in my ways. Our finances had suffered from being unemployed for an extended period of time, and I had to go to work for a season. We tried to continue to homeschool through this time, but it just didn't work out. My husband would go back to work his 12-hour shifts more tired than when he came home for his days off. I was exhausted and school was falling behind. Our daughters were in 2nd and 4th grade. My heart broke as we made the tough decision to enroll them in school. I had two little boys at home by now as well. Thankfully my mom was able to help with them, but school was the best option for our family at the time.

It was an experience I would not change for anything now. It was not easy. There were good and bad that came out of it, but the good far outweighed the bad for our family. My heart was still broken over the loss of homeschooling. During their time in public school, I came to understand that we all need to be "homeschoolers." Homeschooling is a way of life, a mindset you develop toward learning. This mindset says our school options are just our resources to be successful in our parental responsibility to educate our children. For a season, our primary resource for educating our children was the public school system. It was what we needed for a season. But during that time, we were still of the "homeschool" mindset.

While they were in the public school, we still had many conversations around the dinner table about what they were learning. We watched a lot of movies and documentaries together to supplement what their teachers were teaching. We countered some of what

they were exposed to with the truth of the Bible, and spent a lot of time praying our way through some difficult social circumstances. We were tested and tried during that time period. And as summer ended one year, we started discussing their return to school. Sitting around the table with three weeks left of summer, one by one, the three middle kids (we now have 5) decided to come back home. Their primary reason was that they just didn't like the social pressures to do things they felt were wrong in order to be accepted by friends. They found it exhausting.

So we were back to scrambling for resources. My attitude toward the HSAP (Home School Assistance Program) and supervising teachers was completely altered. The Iowa laws had also changed for the better. This meant more options with more freedom. I no longer felt it was oppressive. I was glad to have some support as I scrambled to find resources on short notice.

My heart in homeschooling my children is to instill a love of learning no matter the resources I use. I love having us all together learning around the table. I have used a wide variety of resources along the way. As my kids have gotten older, and curriculum becomes less about fun hands-on activities and more about writing papers and researching topics, I have had to get more creative in how I bring us all together. Which brings me to the current evolution in my homeschooling journey. It's what I like to call Fun-Schooling Fusion. Making sure the "fun factor" is ever present in learning is extremely important to me. I tried letting my kids choose what they wanted to learn. I bought some games centered on those themes hoping they would be both fun and academic. Neither one worked out perfectly for us because of my need to have stability and planning in my life and the disappointment of a game being academic, but not fun, or really fun, but losing the academics. We have created our own little combination that works quite well for us in this season.

We still use a structured curriculum for Math and Language Arts. We do unit studies for Science and History with a variety of resources available in our home library. Every day we start our day with an educational game or two. I have a variety of games to choose from, most of them from a company called SimplyFun. I found and joined SimplyFun as a consultant because I was so impressed with the work they put into making facts available to their customers through their website. They have made my life so much easier as a homeschool mom, and I wanted to share that resource with others.

So here we are now, one child in college, one a senior this year, and my boys 13, 11, and 9. We love learning together. My kids fight like siblings, but play like best friends. They learn well, enjoy pursuing passions, and I feel they are well-balanced kids. My goal is not to see my children go to college and get a prestigious degree or be the best in a sport or other activity. My goal is to see my kids enjoy learning, seek out and refine their personal gifts and grow where they are planted. If where they are planted requires a college degree, that is fine. I support that 100%. If it doesn't, that is fine, too.

We continue to face life's challenges head on as they come our way. Sick parents/grandparents, a kid heading off to college, a kid changing her major, change of job, an upcoming move, change, and a little more change. Despite the changes and challenges, we have settled into a routine for now. The biggest lesson I have learned and now embrace is "Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken."

To learn more about Simply Fun and Gameschooling, visit Jamie's website at: <https://www.simplyfun.com/fun-schoolingfusion>.

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