That’s Not the Way I Homeschool

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There is a long standing misconception that all homeschoolers educate at home because of religious reasons. Some people hear the term homeschool and automatically get a picture in their head of large families being taught by a denim jumper clad mother. These same people envision workbook pages, and copy work, Bible verse memorization, and strict obedience. While this is one homeschool model, that’s not the way I homeschool.

Another idea of homeschooling is that of the “hippie” back-to-nature sort of homeschooler. An outsider looking into a day in that homeschool might expect to find few books, but lots of hands on learning as the children learn to grow their own food, reduce their carbon footprint, and raise their own chickens. This, too, is one way that people homeschool. But that’s not the way I homeschool.

Yet another idea is the “unschooler” model of homeschooling. This is sometimes called student-led education. There are those who think this type of homeschooling, or unschooling, leaves students without a teacher, and allows the student to be lazy all day, playing video games and surfing the web. From what I understand about unschooling, that is not the case, but that is not the way I homeschool.

Then, of course, is the “gifted” homeschoolers. The common misconception here is that students are pushed too hard, forced into classes above their grade level or their age. Parents of these gifted students are seen as drivers who run their children ragged because the parent is out to prove that the public school is inadequate to keep up with the high demands of their gifted student. While this is probably true in some homes, it is not the norm, and that’s not how I homeschool.

Of course, there are the survivalists/anti-government homeschoolers who are seen as keeping their children under socialized and isolated. In this group one might expect to find students who are educated at home and separate from the world because the world is dangerous, the government is seen as controlling and invasive and students are kept home to keep them out of “the system.” Again, possible, but that's not how I homeschool.

There are as many ways to homeschool as there are families that homeschool. And there are probably almost as many misconceptions about homeschooling. Let me give you one picture of a homeschooling family, mine, that goes against all of the stereotypes.

We are what our homeschool curriculum, Time4Learning, calls accidental homeschoolers. It was never my intent to homeschool. I was a firm believer that children needed to go to school, to learn the things they needed to learn to exist in the world. After a year and a half
of public school I figured out three things: 1) my child was gifted, 2) my child had ADHD, and 3) the traditional classroom model did not work for my child.

And so after much thought, many tears, and a lot of denial we began our homeschooling journey.

We consider ourselves secular homeschoolers. We do not homeschool for religious reasons. That is not to say that we are not religious, only that we do not homeschool because of our religious convictions. My child is an only child, and her schoolwork contains almost no workbook pages. We use an online curriculum, which minimizes the amount of paperwork my child has to work through.

We are not the back-to-nature homeschoolers, either. We recently moved to acreage that allows us to have a garden. We do practice some hands-on learning where we grow some of our own vegetables and preserve that harvest. And that brings me to the student-led aspect of our homeschool. My child dearly wants to be a veterinarian. To that end, we encourage hands on animal husbandry, and lots of independent learning to prepare for that future career. There are more books around than I have room for, on many subjects, ranging from pet care, to classic literature, to cooking, canning, history, and biographies. Access to books is always free, and encouraged, whether it is for educational purposes, or enjoyment.

My child is gifted, but I do not drive her to learn, that drive comes from inside of her. I do not push her unless she needs pushing, to finish a social studies assignment, for example, or to go ahead and take a math quiz and not “orphan” it to the next day. I constantly plan ahead, so that I will have the necessary books and materials so that when she decides to push forward and finish a year of science in a little over a semester, I have other materials for her to move into. I know that she will need dual credit high school/college courses well before she is of an age to be allowed to independently attend college. That is all part of the planning I must do.

Sometimes I think having a gifted child just means that the parent has to work harder.

Finally, we do not homeschool because the world is a dangerous place, but it does give me comfort to know where my daughter is, with whom she is socializing, and to what she is being exposed. Because she is home with me most days I can monitor her phone and computer use. Hopefully I can keep her safe, and boost her self-esteem before the world gets to try to tear her down. She is not isolated from society or socialization. In fact, sometimes I wonder why it is called homeschooling when we spend so much time at the co-op, library, field trips, park days, choir, handbells, riding lessons, church, and Tae Kwon Do. We actually have to think carefully about adding any other social opportunities to our schedule so that we can concentrate on school work!

The interesting thing is that I do know families who fit the stereotypes listed above for homeschoolers. I also know a lot of families who share one or more aspects of the reasons and ways we homeschool in my home.

While each family’s homeschool may look different, what we do share in common is an active role in our children’s education and the flexibility to homeschool in the way that works for our own family. I try to provide the best, individualized education for my daughter’s unique learning styles, preferences, and interests.
That is the way I homeschool.