

Episode 415: Get Thee to a Homeschool Convention

Transcript

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So, Andrew, Episode 415.

Andrew Pudewa: Wow, they're just clicking along.

Julie Walker: Yes, they are.

Andrew Pudewa: Pretty soon we'll be at a thousand.

Julie Walker: Well, I don't know about that, but I do know that. As maybe some of our listeners know that when episode numbers end in five, we want to spend a few minutes, twenty or so to be exact, talking about homeschooling basics, homeschool 101 type topics.

And this being March, it's perfectly suited for us to talk about something that was very popular when I was homeschooling all those years ago that's not as popular today, but we think it should be, and that is homeschool conventions.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, that was, that was the thing everyone looked forward to. Like an unbelievable anticipation, the big event of the year in so many, so many states.

Julie Walker: You see friends that you hadn't seen since they were at the convention with you last year. You wanted to hurry and register because space was limited. And when you walked the floors of the exhibit hall, there were people everywhere. And it's a little different today. It's a lot different today.

Andrew Pudewa: There are some places. I remember walking into one show last year thinking, Wow, this is so crowded. It's like the old days. But there's one huge difference. In the old days, people were rolling around these gigantic carts and wagons and massive suitcases to buy all their curriculum for the year.

Julie Walker: Yeah, because they had to tote it home with them.

Andrew Pudewa: And now pretty much nobody has to do that because everyone...

Julie Walker: We're going to ship it all to you.

Andrew Pudewa: ...has free shipping coupons, and it's so much easier for everyone. Although there are some people who still, I want to take it with me, I want to have it. I can understand that.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: But what do you remember the most of your homeschool convention going days? What's some of the most thrilling moments in your memory?

Julie Walker: So, if I happened to sit in on a great workshop, which is not always, it's kind of hit and miss, but those, I still remember some talks that I heard in my early years of homeschooling, and really helped inform my future, and literally my children's future, because their influence influenced how I taught my students.

I was a teacher. I taught elementary school before I started homeschooling, so I did have some of that background, but to get it from a completely different perspective. You parent are providing an opportunity for your students to get an education of kings. That was one of the, the messages that I heard, that Kings were privately tutored and now your students are doing the same thing.

So I love that. I love that. And I would remind my students how fortunate they were that they were homeschooled.

Andrew Pudewa: Whether they believed it or not.

Julie Walker: And the other thing I love doing is I loved roaming the exhibit hall. Now, I, and maybe it's because I'm kind of bent and prone toward marketing, so I loved seeing the displays. I loved seeing the products. I was not allowed to buy anything at conventions. Because I could, because I'm that personality that would just buy everything. So my husband and I would really investigate whether or not we were going to do something.

Andrew Pudewa: And plan and then buy.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly. Exactly. But, so those exhibit halls were not overwhelming to me because I knew I couldn't buy anything anyway. I know I hear that a lot. Oh my goodness, there's so many options.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and you know, 25 years ago, there were not quite as many options as there are now. But that's definitely one thing that's changed is a much greater diversity of curriculum. And, you know, now it's everything from essential oils to Trail Life to things you never saw before. I like to roam the convention hall just to see if there's something I haven't ever seen before.

And of course, you know, how many conventions have I gone to? I don't know. Probably average 15 a year for 25 years, probably over 300.

Julie Walker: yes, yes, and some multiple times,

Andrew Pudewa: Then I view it as one of my personal missions is to find someone who's standing at a booth and they're just looking. Little tired and bored. Usually one of these young people at one of these college booths, and nobody really hangs out and looks at their stuff. They just walk by and pick up the free rulers, and so I always arm myself with a couple excellent jokes And I can wander around the hall and bring a moment of happiness of levity of cheer a chuckle, too The Unsuspecting Booth Manning person.

Julie Walker: Yes, yes. Well, and I just have to say, as an aside, sometimes you would do that at, I don't want to say the, at the expense of "where is Mr. Pudewa?" Because they would expect to see you.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, it's just Murphy's Law. I'm standing at our booth. There's nobody there. I think, well, it's time to roam. And as soon as I walk away, then this family walks up and, Oh, my kids really want to meet Mr. Pudewa.

Julie Walker: gone. We can't find him. It's like, yeah, he's around here somewhere.

Andrew Pudewa: For me, one of the things that has happened, I think the first few times it happened, it was tremendously impactful. And now because it's happened so many more times, it's not quite as surprising, but people who will come up and say something like, I heard you ten years ago at this convention when my son was six and couldn't read, and you saved my homeschool. I mean, sometimes they're very exaggerating. You saved my life.

I know I didn't save their life. But I appreciate the fact that they're confirming, you know, something I said in one of the talks I did was used by the Holy Spirit do something in their life of significance enough to remember it ten years later, kind of one of the best things for me. But a lot of people these days think, well, why bother? It takes time, you have to travel, it's money, maybe you have to stay in a hotel, you have to buy food or pack up a bunch of food. It's just, it's just a hassle and there's so many good resources online. All the curriculum companies have samples and catalogs online. So, why bother?

Julie Walker: Yep, and so I would ask you, Andrew, because that's kind of what we're talking about, is it's worth it. And why would you say is it worth it?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, in a way, it's, it's the difference between listening to a piece of music or even watching a YouTube of somebody performing a piece of music versus going to a concert, right? The impact is so much greater.

One of the things that we are all fighting in the world today is just fractured attention spans. We all believe that we can multitask and. You know, Oh, I'll do this little work while I answer these texts, while I check emails, while I listen to this YouTube talk. Well we don't do any of that well, and all the research proves that actually nobody multitasks. It's just, you get very, much better at shifting quickly between single tasks.

But are you doing any of those tasks well? And all the brain research is coming back now that if you want to maximize your time, minimize distraction, don't try to multitask, and focus on what you're doing. I think for a lot of people, when you go to a live talk, you could still pull out your phone and maybe answer urgent text, or if you get really bored, I suppose you could doom scroll for a while.

But most people, when they come into a room to listen to a talk, they've chosen that talk either because of the subject or the speaker, and they want to learn. So you're surrounded by people who are more focused, which makes it easier for you to be more focused. I think that's one of the big advantages is it's just an opportunity to kind of have a mini retreat. And I do know for a fact that little groups of moms will get the dads or the grandparents or a combination thereof to watch the kids for three days and take a little road trip and share a hotel room like they were college girls. And they're just so happy about it.

I have met a lot of people who've said, Nah, I didn't, I didn't really want to go, but I'm so glad I came. I have never met a single person who said, Well, I sure wish I hadn't come to this homeschool convention. What a waste of time. No! It's always the opposite. The hidden blessings are always there. And pretty easy to find, really.

Julie Walker: Yes, I appreciate, especially some of these bigger homeschool conventions that you often are a part of, Andrew, is seeing that this calling, this work that we're doing is so much bigger than just me and my kids at the dining room table. Wow. There are not maybe hundreds, but thousands of people here who are maybe brand new to homeschooling.

And just, or maybe just checking it out to see if it's even doable and are getting that encouragement from so many other people. I would say if you are thinking about going to a homeschool convention, find out from your friends who the best speakers are and go to them. And that way you're not wasting your time. But you also want to look at the topics that they're presenting. All these homeschool organizations that are hosting conventions pretty much have by now, it's March, their event programs online.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, there's big conventions, and that can be a little bit frustrating because, oh no, there's ten concurrent sessions, and I really wish I could go to both of these ones that are really interesting to me, but I can't. And, you know, try to solve that, you can buy recordings. And then you can go into an exhibit hall and there's 400 exhibits, and so you have to be careful about a big event and decision fatigue and overwhelm.

So sometimes small events are pretty nice. There's only three things going on. You choose one; there's 50 tables, you go look at stuff. You spend more time, I think, in a relaxed mode. So in fact, I know people who go to two conventions each year. One for the talks, and another one to shop.

Andrew Pudewa: Which, I don't think most people would do that, but if you're in proximity to a good event. So, well, you've got my calendar there.

Julie Walker: I do.

Andrew Pudewa: I know some of the events I'm going to, which would be all five of the Great Homeschool Conventions.

Julie Walker: Yes, yes, and I just want to camp there just for a little bit. You have been a longtime speaker there, and so people can pretty much count on you being there. And so this year, 2024, Andrew Pudewa will again be at the Great Homeschool Conferences.

Andrew Pudewa: I wasn't at one of them, and boy, were there some irritated people.

Julie Walker: Yeah,

Andrew Pudewa: Why weren't you there?

Julie Walker: Well, and everybody, please just know that he's one man and you haven't figured out how to bi locate yet, have you?

Andrew Pudewa: No, no, that's a superpower of, of sainthood which I'm not at fully.

So the Great Homeschool Conventions are interesting because They tend to have the same core group of speakers year after year, which is fun for me because I can count on many of my friends will be there, but it does lend that consistency. I generally try to come up with two completely new talks, one or two. This year I think I have two. And then recycle some older talks. But in an informal poll, it appears to me that one third to one fourth of people each year are new, which makes sense because people may take a year off or they quit, their kids grow up and they're not homeschooling anymore or, or they're just coming into homeschooling.

So there is this turnover. And, the other thing I realized it's, it's okay to hear something that's worth hearing again. But I tried to get the two new talks for the Great Homeschool Conventions, and that's really consistent. I think I've done that over 20 years since they just got started. I was at the very, very, very first one in Cincinnati.

And then some of the state conventions, they prefer to rotate speakers just to create variety and have kind of a new panel, if you will. And that's good too. And I like it all. I mean, I have. Some places are kind of more fun to go to, Orlando.

Julie Walker: I was going to say Orlando because that way you can hit up Disney World while you're there.

Andrew Pudewa: And I have hit accidentally extremely, brutally cold, desolate places in the middle of spring, which in those places is still winter, but I like to rotate around, and I keep thinking each year, well, maybe this'll be my last year, but then something sparks me, you know, some letter or some comment or something causes me to think I should work while I have the light, you know, I should do what I can when I'm able because at some point I will either be unwilling or unable to travel.

Julie Walker: So let me list off some of the places that you are going to be this year.

Andrew Pudewa: Good, because I think I may have forgotten a few.

Julie Walker: You might have. The very first one that you are doing is a great homeschool convention in South Carolina, and that's March 14 through 16.

Andrew Pudewa: right? And then the very week after that, I believe is St. Charles, which is St. Louis area, Missouri. So those are the first two main ones back to back

Julie Walker: then you head off to the big one, Cincinnati. .

Andrew Pudewa: Cincinnati. And that's in April.

Julie Walker: Yes. Beginning, first weekend in April. Yeah. And then, one of those cold places, Andrew, you are heading out to Utah for a conference in Salt Lake City.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, that'll be good. I've been to the airport in Utah a few times, but I haven't been outside the airport in Utah for at least 10 years.

Julie Walker: Yes, I think you and I, and at the time Linda Mikottis was working for us, we did a special needs conference in Salt Lake City. That might have been the last time you were there, and that was about ten years ago.

Andrew Pudewa: Yep, so looking forward to that.

Julie Walker: Yeah, and then, and then you go really cold.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, maybe, maybe not. You never know about Alaska in April.

Andrew Pudewa: It's likely to be gray. But, I'm doing the whole tour. All five of the, um, curriculum fairs. It starts in Anchorage, and then out to Soldotna, which is on the Kenai Peninsula, and then up to Fairbanks. And then down to Juneau, so I guess that's four cities. And I'm the main banquet speaker, keynote speaker, and I'm happy. It's a long trip, but again, you never know who you're going to meet, and you never know the one thing you might say that would make a big difference for someone, whether it's about their little boy who doesn't like to read, or whether they should start homeschooling or

Julie Walker: Right. Right. Right. And I have to do a little digression right here. We were talking about this when we were getting ready to do this podcast. Two points. One, you're going to Alaska, which you've been to many, many times. And in fact, the cover of our school's Magalog this year has a feature article from a school that you went to 20-some years ago.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, actually, I didn't go to that school district, but some of those teachers came to another school district event that I was doing. But it was all part of that network of schools that I got connected with. Just, I mean, it was just so funny the way it happened

Julie Walker: So this is the Lower Yukon School District, and my goodness, they're scattered everywhere.

Andrew Pudewa: And from the looks of the kids on the cover of the Magalog and the article that we wrote about them, they are just flying with Structure and Style® and Fix It!™ Grammar and it's so gratifying to be able to help in, you know, a situation that's pretty tough in terms of a fairly low literacy rate, scattered, everything's scattered all over. Although I will say the teachers in Alaska I have met for, I would say almost all, if not all, are just extremely dedicated teachers.

Julie Walker: Dedicated teachers, yeah, through hard times, yeah. So the second thing I wanted to say about that is I know that when I was a school teacher, I also enjoyed going to homeschool conferences, because even as a school teacher, I was able to garner gems and look at different curriculum options and get some ideas for my students in my classroom.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I meet a lot of people who are teaching school that come to a convention just to see what's new in the homeschool curriculum world. A lot of times they can't necessarily make their school adopt something, but they can snag a little bit here and there and integrate it. And, and that's pretty much what good teachers are always doing is they're looking for the best methods and the best materials.

Julie Walker: Exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Where am I after Alaska?

Julie Walker: Okay, so, okay, the next conference, and I might have missed a couple here, but the one that I'm seeing that comes out to me is one of your favorite places. And it's not because of Disney World.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh yeah.

Julie Walker: Because it, just, listener for the record, Andrew is not a fan of Disney for some reason.

Andrew Pudewa: I am of the opinion that if the Disney corporation had never existed, the world would be a better place. But anyhow, Orlando is a festive place. And the event is at the Gaylord Palms. And so many families just look forward to being there. It's a beautiful, big facility. They have the middle of the hotel is this. So the hotel is, is like a hexagon shape or something. And in the middle is a big covered atrium. And they have, you know, little streams and islands and places to walk around. The kids just love it. And they have little alligators in the streams. and other wildlife.

Julie Walker: So no one's swimming. These are little alligators. These are not, kids are not swimming in these.

Andrew Pudewa: No, no, no, it says don't go in. But the, you know, these are like two foot alligators. Little things. My only complaint, and I'm sure everyone complains, is just the food

there is really pricey. Most of us manage to, you know, smuggle in enough food to survive on. One expensive meal plus snacks every day, but I love the way Florida organizes their convention. They just bring in a great variety of people, and it's just very festive. It's almost like more than any other place. I would say Florida is almost like a celebration of homeschooling.

Julie Walker: Oh, nice.

Andrew Pudewa: Let's just get together and

Julie Walker: Have a party a blast. That's fun.

Andrew Pudewa: They do a music festival there. Uh, that's very enjoyable and, uh, I, I'm, this is top secret, contemplating taking one or two grandchildren with me this year. Which would be really fun because I took their mother, when they were little 20 years ago and so it would be very nostalgic.

Julie Walker: That would be, and they would have such a good time. So just jumping around here a little bit more. You are speaking at and are helping to judge the NCFCA national final competition.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, well that's not really a homeschool convention because it's a debate tournament.

Julie Walker: It is, but it's a pretty remarkable thing and anybody can go to it.

Andrew Pudewa: Go and watch, and I hope we'll do a little podcast on why you should go visit a debate tournament, even if you don't have kids competing, because it will bring you hope for the rest of your life.

Julie Walker: And it's on our schedule, so yes, so we will be doing that. And then you're doing HEAV in Virginia.

Andrew Pudewa: HEAV is good. Virginia, it's right downtown Richmond. And, um, again, a very well organized event. Just lots of energy, lots of grateful, happy people. I think that, or, you know, Orlando and Richmond have the advantage of being kind of right in the center of the state, so they do draw really well from the north and the south.

I'm always interested too because they'll bring in a special big shot speaker. And that's kind of fun, you know, for me to hear someone who's relatively famous.

Julie Walker: So I want to just mention a couple other opportunities. These are conventions that we've mentioned that you are speaking at, Andrew, but you can't speak at them all, but a lot of them, IEW is still there. And do you remember the days, Andrew? We were that curriculum company that allowed people to take things home with them.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I remember very well, schlepping. You'd send 50 boxes of stuff.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Sometimes pallets on freight trucks.

Andrew Pudewa: Just the schlepping and the pain, and then, I remember the days when people had to handwrite their credit card numbers on the form, and then we'd have to come home and punch them all in.

Julie Walker: Well, thankfully those days are long gone. And if you are coming to a convention where you see IEW is participating. You know, it might be that Andrew's not speaking there. It's pretty clear on our website, IEW.com/events. You can filter it based on whether or not Andrew's speaking or not.

But if we're there, we have a display booth, and we're actually not even selling anything at the booth. We are just there so that you can put the hands on our materials, look through it, ask questions. The booth exhibitor will not be distracted by having to ring up another sale. It's just "here's a free shipping code. Go buy this online. Any other questions I can answer for you."

Andrew Pudewa: Free lesson download cards.

Julie Walker: Lots of great materials that we provide at our booth. And then we have some conventions that neither you nor someone on our team can get to, but we're still trying to have a presence there. We call those display booths where we have some of our selected key materials that are there. And quite frankly, we're asking the event organizer at the end of the show just to give them away.

Andrew Pudewa: We really work hard to support the state organizations and. my whistle stop tours...

Julie Walker: You've done three of them now.

Andrew Pudewa: And that idea of just to help people become aware. of the importance of their state homeschool organization in terms of they don't just have a convention or not, most of them are very busy all year providing information to new homeschoolers, how to legally homeschool in this state, what are curriculum options, where are the local groups near you, and then probably the most important thing is the monitoring of legislation. Every single state that has a legislature, every single session has someone who will propose a bill that would be detrimental to parental rights and homeschool freedoms to some degree. And keeping track of these things, that's a job. So part of my goal is to support these state organizations by going there if they invite me, sending someone if we can, but just having a presence to help their event be as valuable as possible to the people. So that they get that understanding that this is a thing.

And, you know, I long thought we could very easily double the number of people at a homeschool convention if everyone who would go would simply bring a friend.

Julie Walker: Right. There you go.

Andrew Pudewa: If you would just recruit one of your friends to go with you, maybe they're not homeschooling yet. Maybe they think homeschooling is weird. But if you could say, well, let's just go have fun and check it out, it can be a transformative experience. I have seen people walk out of talks literally in tears because of the transformative power of the message that they heard. Not that we want people to cry, but you get my point, that it's deep, meaningful, and worthy of investment of time.

Julie Walker: So, I'm going to be at two conventions this year. Yes,

Andrew Pudewa: I think you are.

Julie Walker: I am going to CHEA of Southern California. So, got great friends there. And actually, this year it's going to be at Biola University, my alma mater.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh will that be the most nostalgic ever.

Julie Walker: It's true. I'm really eager to see what classrooms the conference talks. You will not be there, Andrew, this year. But I will be there. I'll be doing it with my good friend, Debbie Hall, and she and I will be at the Chia Convention. I'm excited about that.

Andrew Pudewa: And you're doing a talk, right? For CHEA? What are you going to talk?

Julie Walker: Oh, of course I am. I don't know yet. They haven't told me. If anything else, Andrew, it will be EZ+1. You know, just learning more about IEW and how it works in your unique situation. So we always try to have that talk available to anybody who's new to homeschooling, who's new to IEW.

Andrew Pudewa: One year, CHEA invited my daughter to talk to the teenagers.

Julie Walker: I did that with her.

Andrew Pudewa: And she told the most disgusting joke that I have ever heard anyone tell, and I guess she got away with it, because nobody complained at least as far as I heard, but I thought, that's, I would not tell that joke in a group like that. I guess she probably won their hearts.

And what's the other one you're going to?

Julie Walker: I'm going to the Northern California one.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, that's right.

Julie Walker: I'm going because you're going to be there. And my grandchildren live in Northern California. So we're going to tie that one somehow together. That's going to be in

Rockland, California in July. So one of the, one of the last ones that you're doing this year. And then, you know, we're doing a few online here at IEW. We're doing a few virtual events and all of these can be found on our event page. But really, I think the message that you and I are trying to convey, Andrew, is go to a live event where you can shake the hands of someone that can help you on this journey, whether it's just parenting or grandparenting.

So going to a homeschool conference as a grandparent is very dangerous, because I no longer have a restriction on a homeschooling budget, and I come home with things that are way past what they're capable of doing right now, but I think I'll save this for them. Anyway, it's really fun to shop.

Andrew Pudewa: My strategy is never check a bag. So I am limited in space to the number of books that I can buy for my grandchildren.

Julie Walker: And that would be really hard for you, Andrew, because you have so many. Anyway, so our message today.

Andrew Pudewa: Get thee to a homeschool convention, and be ye illuminated and enriched in body and mind. And heart

Julie Walker: There you go. Thank you, Andrew.