

Podcast 445: Homeschool 101 with Julie Walker

Episode Transcript

Julie Walker: I would say just realize that just because everybody else is doing it, you do what you know is right. No matter what anyone else is doing, and that's another momly that I share with my kids.

Andrew Pudewa: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language podcast with Julie Walker, Chief Marketing Officer for the Institute for Excellence in Writing, or as many like to say, IEW. My name is Andrew Pudewa, and I'm honored to serve with Julie and IEW as IEW's founder and director. Our goal here 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.

Well, Julie, it's my turn to start the podcast today because you are the guest.

Julie Walker: Yay!

Andrew Pudewa: And this is a Homeschool 101. We do this every ten episodes, and because you have such a wealth of experience and now have, as I do, grown children, it's lovely to be able to look back and realize, well, some of those things that you stressed about a lot really didn't matter that much. And other things perhaps you could have attended to a little better. And so the perspective we have as old people may or may not be of benefit to some of our younger listeners who are out kind of in the beginning of the road.

So the questions obviously are, what did you do that worked? What did you do that maybe you wanted to change, or didn't change but should have, or did change but could have done sooner. I would start off by noting to our audience that the thing you always say that you wanted was a clean house and well behaved children.

Julie Walker: Yes,

Andrew Pudewa: And what a great goal. Not too terribly ambitious.

Julie Walker: right.

Andrew Pudewa: So, I guess my first question is, how did you do with that– the clean house and the well behaved children? Okay.

Julie Walker: One of my memories is senior graduation speech. One of the things that our school, we had, we were part of an umbrella school, a private independent study school in Southern California. One of the requirements to graduate was to give a speech. And basically the rule was if you don't talk, you don't walk. It doesn't mean they don't get their diploma, but they just.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, so everybody had to give a speech. Hopefully there weren't hundreds of people.

Julie Walker: No, no, no. It was a handful. I think Mikael actually had the biggest graduating class in VBA, Village Bible Academy history, and there were fourteen graduates. And obviously we limited the amount of time they could speak. Daniel got up and thanked his grandmother for giving him a car for his other grandmother for making great food and always helping me with my house cleaning. And he said, "And I know mom, you always wanted a clean house and well behaved kids. So Joel and Mikael, it's up to you." So he passed the baton. And I wasn't always successful keeping that, but one of the strategies we did employ as soon as they were old enough to do chores was to assign them chores.

And we actually taught them at a pretty young age to do their own laundry because we did, doing laundry when you've got three boys, it can be a little overwhelming. If you have even more children, it can be.

But another thing that we did to have that clean house was we'd have a schedule and part one of the second things, second or third thing that we did before we got too far into the day was the white tornado and I would set the timer for 15 minutes and they each had their assigned room and they had to clean. For 15 minutes, whatever you see, whatever you see that needs to be done, do it. And if you finish early, then go help your brother in his area. So the kitchen was always its own area. And sometimes it would be, they run out of things to do and it's 10 minutes left and it's like, "great, mop the floor." Wow. How great it was to have my floor mopped every day, perhaps a little excessive. But my mom had a saying as all moms do, right? "Whatever you do around here will be appreciated." And so that was our goal. So that was one of the things that we did. To have a clean house.

Andrew Pudewa: I suppose we should back up a little bit. And you taught school for a time, and then you decided to homeschool. Everyone is always interested, like a conversion story, you know. What caused you to decide to try this homeschooling thing? And were you kind of, oh, we'll take it a year at a time, or did you jump in with no escape route?

Julie Walker: Right. Great, great question. And so many people that are my age might have a similar story and that is: My husband and I listened to Dr. Raymond Moore on Focus on the Family in 1983, I believe that episode was. And honestly, we were dating. We weren't even married yet.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh wow.

Julie Walker: I don't even think we were, we might've been engaged, but, so we must've been engaged because we were talking children already. And we decided. That would be the best, best environment for our own kids too. And because I was a school teacher, no problem. I've got this all figured out. I know how to teach children. I took the methods class. There was no writing methods class, we could talk about that or not, but I did the math methods. I did the reading methods. I knew how to teach. I was using curriculum that worked pretty well for the school I was working with.

And so when I started actually teaching. Daniel, who, of course, was a gifted and brilliant child, and so at the age of four, I started him school at home, and basically using that same curriculum that I taught in a school and bringing it home. And this would be one of my failures. I started too young. He's a boy. He has a late birthday, day after Christmas, and so he was going on five, and I got really frustrated that he wasn't paying attention and doing all those things. Because when you're teaching at a school, part of what you're doing at that grade is keeping the kids busy so that you're controlling the environment. It's called classroom management. We called it seat work. Keep the kids in their seats so that you can control them better. And Daniel just wasn't interested in that. And so I actually said to him, "Daniel, if you're not going to sit and be good, then we're just going to put this away for a year and you're not going to do school," as if that was a threat. And he was like, sweet. And he said, okay. And he stood up and went outside. And I went, whoa. Okay. I've got to completely rethink how we homeschool 'cause homeschool isn't school at home because it's a very different environment.

Andrew Pudewa: you put things basically on the side burner for a year or so. And you basically, well, you had another kid in that time period, and you were intending still to do homeschooling, but your view of what that might look like changed a bit. Did you have friends who were homeschooling? Because that was the early days. What year was Daniel born?

Julie Walker: 84.

Andrew Pudewa: '84 So, '89, he would have been five, '90 six. Those were the rare days. There weren't a lot of homeschooling people.

Julie Walker: We were homeschooling in Southern California. And California, you had to be a little careful about kids playing in the front yard because you didn't want to be reported to Child Protective Services. But the nice thing about California is you can legally homeschool. And it's true to this day, thanks to the folks at HSLDA and Family Protection Ministries, you can homeschool legally just by filling out an affidavit, establishing yourself as a private school. And so that's what we did at least initially. But yes, I did have a really good friend. In fact, she was my sorority sister who also decided to homeschool. And she and I did schooling together and she was doing these unit studies with Konos. Do you remember Konos?

Andrew Pudewa: I do remember Konos, yeah.

Julie Walker: She had very high ambitions of what she wanted her students to do. And I was kind of following along. So the pendulum swung the other direction, and it was way too much again for my kids. So how do you find that balance of what's too much? Because Konos, you have all these projects. And of course, if it says on the paper that you're supposed to do it, you have to do it. All of it.

Andrew Pudewa: Especially a girl like you.

Julie Walker: yeah, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Who has to dot all the I's and cross all the T's and check all the boxes.

Julie Walker: We would go to the library, the Huntington Beach library, every Friday and check out the stack of books. And of course, my kids would also check out their books, and then we would throw the books in the car, or gently place the lovingly checked out library books in the car, and then pull our bikes out of the back of the car and would just ride around.

So Friday was a park day. We homeschooled four days a week. And definitely with boys, you got to get that energy out, especially since one of them I knew had ADHD. The other I found out later as an adult—oh, it turns out he had it too. So it was definitely an important thing for us to get outside.

Andrew Pudewa: Don't you think everybody has ADHD to some degree? There's a spectrum, and on one end is obvious, and on the other end is you'd never notice, but it's still there?

Julie Walker: Yes, yes. And I think because I was definitely trying to make, I don't want to say compensation, but make allowances, make it possible for my son to have ADHD, the other brother, who he was kind of thrown into that and he was able to be successful as well.

Andrew Pudewa: So you said you did four days a week, and that might make some people nervous because they're still in this idea that, well, we have to spend as much time “homeschooling” as a kid would spend if I sent them to school. And so you discovered pretty early on that's not the case. Like time is very flexible.

Julie Walker: Yeah, I would say that there were probably three phases of homeschooling. The first phase was those early primary elementary years. And absolutely, you can get done what you need to get done in fewer days a week. And in a shorter amount of time as far as your school schedule.

So speaking of schedules, and this was probably in phase one of homeschooling, is we had a schedule. My kids were up, they had breakfast, we had our family devotions together, white tornado, they'd hit their academics, and their schedules varied a little bit, but it was very much parent directed. And the whole idea of practicing their piano and doing all these things. It was scheduled and it was a little, little rigid, but those early years kind of required that.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Structure.

Julie Walker: The second phase, I would call the, the more friendship phase where they're getting older and they wanted to play more with their friends. And so we did a lot more activities with friends. We did some co-op classes, which—you know Andrew, co-ops were not a big thing back in the 90s. They didn't really start taking off until probably the 90s and then in the year 2000 and beyond.

But we had a little homeschool group connected to our church and we did a few classes there, but that grew into the Biola Star program for junior high and high school students. And that was the phase where they wanted to play with friends. But I was still homeschooling. I was

still responsible for their education, and the classes that they didn't take with their friends, we would do on our own at home. I took algebra, Andrew, four times. Once in high school myself and three other times with each of my kids. I got pretty good at algebra actually. But that would be phase two. And then phase three was more of the student-directed learning. They started to find out what they were really good at and what they loved to do.

And I would allow them to spend more time in that. An example would be Joel is my musician. And all of my boys had piano lessons. When Joel was 12, we got him the guitar, and that's when he started guitar lessons. And one of his classes that he took that's on his high school transcript is music composition, where he actually created his own CD of his own music and wrote some songs. All of his songs are his own songs, and he recorded him, he mastered him, he did the whole thing. And so just for fun, I could put a little mp3 of one of the songs that he wrote when he was in high school on the show notes. So you can kind of see.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, you should, maybe it'll go viral. Somebody will repost it to a Tiktok or something.

Julie Walker: And of course, Joel right now is not a professional musician in that he has a real job, but he still very much enjoys music. And what we got for each of our boys for their high school graduation gift was different. Daniel, we got him a personal data device, a PDA. I can't remember what they were called, like a BlackBerry kind of thing. That, of course, turned into something more useful, like a laptop computer. Same with Mikael. But the middle child got a Gretsch Firebird 68 guitar. Guess who still has their high school graduation present?

Andrew Pudewa: Well probably the guitar has lasting power over the technology stuff.

Julie Walker: So Daniel and Mikael got the computers, and Joel got the guitar.

Andrew Pudewa: So, if you survey these many years, since it was all of them.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Andrew Pudewa: About 30 years total? from the beginning of Daniel to the end of Mikael?

Julie Walker: Mikael, no, 20, maybe 20 years. And you asked the question, did, did my husband and I decide we're in this for the long haul? And initially, no, it was a year by year thing. We were just going to try it, especially after that first experience going, "Oh my goodness, I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I have the patience for this." I hear that all the time.

And to be honest, that would be one of my failures as a homeschooling mom is I was busy. Big surprise. I'm always busy. But I had a lot of extracurricular things personally that I had going on, including I worked. I worked outside the home, and so my husband would work during the day. I would work in the evening. I was tired. I'd come home. I'd wake up. I'd be a little grouchy and yet we had to hit the ground running. And so I made some mistakes in

terms of not being as patient as I should be. By that time, as I was in the throes of all of this, it was a year by year commitment. But then once we got into middle school, we knew that this needed to be something that we either needed to enroll our kids in school or commit. And we decided to commit. So all of our boys were homeschooled, kindergarten through high school.

Andrew Pudewa: And at what point did Village Bible Academy—when did that group coalesce and you became a part of it?

Julie Walker: 1996 or '95-96. And then the STAR program started, I believe in '98, '97-98, so just a couple years later. And we invited you to come down and do teacher training for us in '99. So that's how we got acquainted with IEW.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I remember that. You got the biggest crowd I'd ever spoken to at that point, or at least for a whole day seminar.

So, looking back, what, what would be the kind of things that you are really happy with, you did really well, maybe the top three things? And then, of course, the alternate side, what are three things you would say to your younger self, given your now perspective, that other moms might value from hearing?

Julie Walker: Well, I did a talk at the Christian Home Educators Association convention a couple years ago on discipling teens. If you go to the CHEA website, you can hear the talk. But part of what I did for that talk was interview my boys and ask them to give feedback on their own homeschooling experience. Every single one of them mentioned our morning devotions. We would be at the dining room table, and they referenced the blue book. And that was the Bible stories, all the different Bible stories that, there's a series of volumes of book and I would just read out loud to them, those Bible stories. They would also write down a proverb of the day.

Andrew Pudewa: Do you still have that collection of Bible stories?

Julie Walker: I don't.

Andrew Pudewa: Now people are going to be very curious. Well, what was it? Where can I get

Julie Walker: Oh, well, you can find it probably on eBay. I don't know if they publish those anymore. But I got them at a garage sale. And I knew about them because often times you would find those in the doctor's office. So I would say that consistency, that memorization. We did a lot of. Memorization was something that we did.

I actually got an article this morning, and I'll link to this in the show notes, entitled "Teaching Teens the Power of Discipline." And the story that the author describes and opens with was his piano lessons and how he practiced every day. Did he love practicing every day? No. Did he love going to lessons? Maybe not, but it taught him discipline, and it taught him this whole idea of making a little bit of commitment every day in the long run. Sarah Mackenzie talks

about this, our good friend Sarah Mackenzie. If you just read 15 minutes a day, do you know how many books you can get through? It would be so powerful, so much, such a great investment in time.

And he actually then recommended, the author of this book recommended, the Slight Edge, which has to do with that idea of small changes in your behavior ultimately can result in great, great results. And I love that this is focused on teens because I think it's easier to build a habit when they're young.

And so when my kids, I remember in particular Daniel being the firstborn, right? We're in Staples and we're buying school supplies for him as he goes off to college. And you know what he did, Andrew? He picked out notebooks one by one. For every class, because that's how we organized his schedule. And I just thought I was a little nervous because I thought, okay, he's taking the habits that he had in high school into college. Are they going to work? Yes. And then he actually came home from college. The weekend and said, "Mom, you know what? College is just like Star." Star was our two day a week tutoring thing that we did. And I thought, well, that's good. So yes, I prepared him for college.

Andrew Pudewa: That's why you have so many little notebooks all over the place.

Julie Walker: I do have notebooks and folders and color coding.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh one book I wish I had come across decades before—I don't know if it would have helped me as much, but—Atomic Habits by James Clear. And in there, he gets into the nitty gritty and the mechanics of how to do exactly that, how to give yourself an edge by consistency and tracking your consistency and taking time to reflect on the benefits of the habits you've chosen. Because sometimes we get a habit and we just keep doing it without standing back to say, is this the best use of time? Is this the best habit I could inculcate here?

But it also reminds me in another book I would refer listeners to is The Boy Crisis by Warren Farrell and John Gray. In that book, it's a phenomenal book, I remember finishing it thinking, wow, if everyone would read this book, the whole world would be a better place because I understood myself better, I understood my father better, I understood my son better, I understood what my wife thought about me better, I understood the daughters and what they thought about the boy. Unfortunately, or fortunately, some of it is kind of serious in that he points out the tremendous crisis we have with boys in our world today and their self-perceptions have been very affected by schools and society and to a degree a kind of misguided feminist, anti boy, anti man. And Warren Farrell is so interesting because he was a feminist speaker. He was on the board of the National Organization for Women for New York. And then in his clinical practice as a psychologist, he started to see: wow, these boys are really not doing well. And if what we really want is to support women, we need to raise up good men.

And anyway, in the book, to get back to my point, I just wanted to sell the book a little bit there. He does say that the single greatest predictor of success for men is delayed gratification, the ability to work now for a benefit later. And that's why I think, things like music, exercise, study of a foreign language, anything where you have to put in effort every day, and it doesn't always seem like you're making progress, because not every day is better

than the previous day. But you do that because you have knowledge, faith, you have confidence that in the end you will have benefited from that. I'm sure you saw that in many ways in your boys.

Julie Walker: Oh, sure, absolutely, Oh, one more thing I'm going to mention as far as the good things that we did is as we got into that phase three, where they're wanting to select now, not everything, I mean, they still, we were very much wanting to prepare our kids for college, both my husband and I have college degrees. This was something that was instilled in us as we were growing up and, and whether or not they chose to complete their college degrees, it didn't matter. What ultimately mattered is were they prepared to do that should they choose. And so we were intentional about their academics. We allowed a lot of flexibility with their extracurricular, drama, sports, music. These were very much a part of who we, who we were. But through that, the big thing that my husband and I wanted to do was mentors. Because oftentimes you hear, well, homeschooling, you just imagine that only mom and dad are speaking into these children's lives. And that is not true, especially as they're getting older, they really benefit from good mentors, and in some ways because we were homeschooling, we got to choose who they were.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. And you have community to do that. Did you have any opportunity for dual enrollment in the later high school years?

Julie Walker: We didn't.

Andrew Pudewa: It really wasn't a thing yet. Now it certainly is. And you see so many teenagers able to get that external accountability by taking a class at a live class at a college or an online distance learning.

And so we didn't really have that option with the older ones. In our case, the two younger ones did have some.

Julie Walker: more opportunities

Andrew Pudewa: And what advice would you give your younger self in, with the perspective you have?

Julie Walker: well, and this kind of goes with the mistakes I made, so do the white tornado. That's really good because just to have a clutter free environment does help so much. But don't fall into the trap of over committing your, your kids to so many activities. my kids could finish this sentence.

Whenever you say yes to something, you have to say no to something else. In case, listener, you didn't know.

Andrew Pudewa: Or if you're doing one thing, you can't do another. So it's always a matter of choosing.

Julie Walker: But we definitely tried to do it all. And initially, we had our kids enrolled in little league baseball, and AYSO soccer, and three boys, and three different sports, and three different games, all year round, every year. And then Joel was considering doing a club team, but he was also the musician. And then Daniel got into drama, and we had to do every play. And if he got a lead role, which he often did, it was more and more rehearsals. And it was just like, you got to be kidding me. And what's funny, Andrew is now that I have grandchildren in my youngest. My oldest son now has two kids and I kind of look at that like, "Daniel, why don't you have Lucy enrolled in swimming lessons?" She swims. She's doing fine. I pretty much taught her how to swim myself. What about voice lessons? She's got a beautiful voice. She's very talented athletically. You should enroll her in gymnastics. And I love this, Andrew. Both he and his wife are like, "Relax, Grandma. She's not going to do it all."

Andrew Pudewa: She's only seven years old.

Julie Walker: She's only seven. And so I would say just realize that just because everybody else is doing it, you do what you know is right. No matter what anyone else is doing. And that's another "mom-mily" that I share with my kids often is just don't feel like you have to do it all because that's going to reduce your stress and is going to make you not make the anger mistakes that I made.

And another thing that I would say that my husband really helped me with is: I'm a good planner, I can plan and plan all day long, but sometimes that follow-through, like what does my school day look like in January? Well, it might be no school at all that day because my plan is unraveled. And so just that follow-through to, if you've created a plan and it's a good plan, then stick to it because of those small steps that you can make to give you that slight edge.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and we have now a resource that really didn't exist when we were starting out in the nineties—that sounds so funny—which is the next generation, right? We, there weren't a lot of older parents who'd been through homeschooling that were around to even talk to. And now we have so many people in your and my demographic age, experience level that can help.

So I just encourage everyone out there. Call Julie Walker. No, but no, find the people who've trod the path to some degree and make use of their wisdom. And I'm sure our listeners are very grateful for the small amount of the vast amount, the small bit of the vast amount of wisdom that you have to share with us.

Thank you.

Julie Walker: It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

Andrew Pudewa: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to this podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Until then, on behalf of the team at IEW, I thank you for the privilege of allowing us to partner with you on this educational journey toward better listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking.