

Podcast 475: Homeschool 101 Sharing Hope with Stacia Lowe

Episode Transcript

Stacia Lowe: Having a budget is supposed to be the opposite of being restrictive. It is taking control of your money and being strategic with your spending so that you have the money available to spend it on the things that you love.

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, do you know what a barrel stave is?

Andrew Pudewa: I have a vague idea, but I wouldn't want to give a wrong definition in public. So you tell me.

Julie Walker: Okay, I will. Barrel staves are narrow strips of wood that are used to make the sides of barrels. They're also used for tanks, tubs...

Andrew Pudewa: And then the bands that go around the staves are something else.

Julie Walker: Yeah. They give the barrel the structure, but a barrel needs to have multiple staves in order to give it.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and they have to fit together perfectly and then they have to not leak. Did you know I actually worked on a business plan to start a bourbon barrel construction company

Julie Walker: To make the barrels

Andrew Pudewa: To make barrels, to import the oak and then cut it and it has to be done. Just, it's quite a phenomenal art to this thing.

Julie Walker: Yes. And of course people now use whiskey barrels or wine barrels in decor. And so this is something that you may not be able to use very long for its original intent, but it can be repurposed.

Andrew Pudewa: And it smells good.

Julie Walker: And it smells good. Yes. So I once, and this is pre Covid and you'll know it's a pre-covid story that I'm about to tell you because of the fact that I was reading a magazine on an airplane, and I don't know about you, Andrew, but where I fly, the airline that I fly with, they don't have magazines.

Andrew Pudewa: No, they don't anymore. I bring my own magazines, but yeah, they used to have those like things full of articles that aren't really interesting and advertisements for where you're going to go, but you found something worth reading.

Julie Walker: I did, and it was an article about barrel staves, but in the context of business. This gentleman had started a business, and he equated it to barrel staves, like this is a line of business. My son would call that an LOB, a line of business, and it fits together with the other things that he was doing to make this beautiful, beautiful product.

Andrew Pudewa: It holds liquid and accomplishes the process you're trying to do. And if you don't have the staves, leaks, failure, and loss.

Julie Walker: leaks. Here at IEW, we kind of have our barrel staves. We've got our writing program, of course, which started it all, but we've added onto it, our grammar, our spelling, and on and on, right? So we have a guest on our podcast today, and I want to tell you a little bit about her before we get too far into her story.

So this is a Homeschool 101 episode. We've started doing these—post-covid, a lot of accidental homeschoolers, like, “I gotta bring my kids home because there's no school.” And so we're here to help and we're continuing to help now five years later with anybody that's brand new to homeschooling.

And I have known Stacia, Stacia Lowe is our guest on our podcast. Thank you Stacia, for joining us.

Stacia Lowe: Thank you so much for having me.

Julie Walker: Well, and she to me is the quintessential barrel stave compiler. I want you to listen to all that I know about Stacia, all that she does, but we're going to focus on one area in particular that I think will help new homeschoolers as they're considering, “Wow. How am I going to do this with the limited resources I have?”

Stacia Lowe: Drum roll please.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly. Well, I first knew Stacia, Stacia's in Southern California, which is where I homeschooled my own kids, and I had forgotten she had told me that Stacia actually babysat my boys when they were younger, and I was working, we had that overlap between my husband coming home from work and me starting my job because I was homeschooling and then I was off to work. And so Stacia would come and fill in for that gap.

But Stacia, one of the most remarkable things that I remember about her when I was attending church with her and her family, is her beautiful singing voice. She, along with some of her friends had this incredible harmony group, like you cannot believe how beautiful. Stacia, did you ever record anything?

Stacia Lowe: We did.

Julie Walker: Okay. Well, we will find a link to your recording and I, I think Andrew, with your refined taste in music, even you will

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, acapella harmony singing is by far the best form of music

Stacia Lowe: It is my favorite.

Julie Walker: And Stacia, what part did you sing?

Stacia Lowe: Alto, Yep. I was always in the basement

Andrew Pudewa: No, no..

Stacia Lowe: I'm more of tenor.

Andrew Pudewa: no. Alto is the glue between the top and the bottom. It's, it's like the bands that hold the barrel staves together.

Stacia Lowe: Yeah, but I would always also sing the really high parts that nobody else wanted, so I kind of,

Andrew Pudewa: Flex.

Julie Walker: very eclectic. Okay, so she also did drama. I remember attending some of her drama productions. But then now that she's all grown up and has boys of her own, she's a boy mom, they have four boys. Yep.

Stacia Lowe: Four boys

Andrew Pudewa: God only gives boys to the moms who can handle it.

Julie Walker: That's what I think. That's what I think.

Stacia Lowe: I agree.

Julie Walker: So now she has a business. She's an entrepreneur, has her own business. Oh, I forgot to mention one other thing about Stacia that I did with her. A couple things. She has an accounting degree, so she did accounting at Biola University, which is where I worked. She also taught a geometry class for the program that I oversaw connected to Biola.

So accounting, worked for me as basically an administrative assistant, just super organized. But now, all right, ready for eclectic. She has a business and you can find her business@staciaraylowe.com, and we'll put link in the show notes. She has writing, so she's written some, what would you say, middle school novels.

Stacia Lowe: Middle grade fiction

Julie Walker: Yep. Middle grade fiction

Stacia Lowe: For elementary age kids.

Julie Walker: and she's self-published. And maybe someday we'll have her back on our podcast to talk about how you can do that. She's had a degree of success with that. She has, as you mentioned, a knitting business and she actually teaches homeschoolers how to knit in Southern California.

Stacia Lowe: Oh, I love it.

Julie Walker: And one of her passions, and this is the reason why I wanted her to speak to our audience today, is budgeting.

Andrew Pudewa: Budgeting. That is an ugly word for so many young people.

Stacia Lowe: Exactly, and that's why, I am coming into the scene saying, Hey, it's not so bad.

Andrew Pudewa: One of my daughters uses an app called You Need a Budget, and she's trying to sell her siblings on how great this is. And there's some pushback on this idea, like, I don't want anyone to tell me you need a budget. I just want to kind of float through, but then the credit card balances go up and up and up, and you get into a deep hole pretty quickly.

So I'm glad you can help us with this, Stacia.

Stacia Lowe: Thank you. I hope what I have can be helped to moms out there who are just, they hear that word and think, Ugh, I don't want to.

Julie Walker: When you and I were speaking about this, you were talking about that very thing that Andrew just spoke to, and that is a budget feels constraining, like it's a list of what I cannot do. Let's just start right there. Why don't you speak to that?

Stacia Lowe: So I've spoken to women's groups about this and I ask the question, what's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word budget? And they say—restriction and my husband telling me I can't spend money and like bad, I have an allowance and it's all negative.

And so what I am trying to do is help moms understand that having a budget is supposed to be the opposite of being restrictive. It is taking control of your money and putting a strategy in place for your spending. It's not about not spending, it's about being strategic with your spending so that you have the money available to spend it on the things that you love and that are a high priority for you and your family.

So it's just about a perspective shift that I'm trying to help moms and their children understand because... So I, you mentioned my knitting class to homeschool students. The class is actually called, Knot Your Average Knitting, KNOT. Yes. I love play on words, but because I teach fourth through twelfth graders knitting plus budgeting.

So I'm halfway through the semester, we start having budgeting conversations as we're all knitting our projects and to help them understand financial responsibility. And it's not just about, "Hey, mom and dad, I want this. Buy it for me." Actually, there's a lot more that are parents and eventually when you grow up and are living on your own, that you will have to do with your money and you need to get organized before you're looking in the rear view mirror going, "Oh, that credit card debt. I am drowning. I am overwhelmed." It's get ahead of the game and be prepared when you know what you're spending before you spend it. It just brings a lot more peace of mind. And that's what I hope to help moms accomplish.

Andrew Pudewa: So you teach this to people in a seminar, online individual coaching? How do you get people excited about this?

Stacia Lowe: Sure. A lot of my knitting students, basically I want to give moms of my students the resources so that they too can learn what their children are learning in my class. So, I'll send home weekly emails, and I send out a monthly newsletter. And it's my small business: It's Knits and Novels: Hobbies from the Heart with Purpose.

So it's not just buying whatever books you want, whenever you want them, and buying more yarn because you have all of these projects you want to do. It's: Yes, I want those things. Let's figure out how we can do it without adding stress and strain to your pocketbook, your wallet.

I am online. I've got my website. I like on my Instagram account, it's just fun making fun videos to draw moms in to give them a good laugh and then say, Hey, if you want, I can help you with the hard stuff because it doesn't have to be so hard. I just want to simplify motherhood for you.

Julie Walker: When I think about the brand new homeschooler, maybe she's brought her kids home from school. Sometimes it can be overwhelming to look at, "Now I have to make all these choices about not just what curriculum I should buy, but how can we afford it?"

Because of course, if you have your kids enrolled in a school, that's all provided for you. All those decisions are made for you. In a private school, of course, you're paying tuition. A public school is generally completely free other than the school supplies that you have to provide. So this budgeting idea, Stacia, isn't just how much am I going to spend a week on groceries, but how can I accomplish the goals that I'm wanting to accomplish with the limited funds that I have?

Because everybody, no matter how rich you are, there is still a limit to how much money in.

Stacia Lowe: And so this all started for me when my husband was unemployed because the California division of his company closed and they said, you can keep your job as long as you move to Texas with us. And we said, no thank you, our family's here, this is where we're staying. So we went back down to one income.

Well see, I've lived on a single income for five years when I was a single mom, and that's when I started doing the budgeting. So when he was unemployed, I said, that's fine, we will just tighten the budget. And then I was talking to a friend about it, and I was just talking nonchalant, like, "oh, everyone does this budget thing."

She's like, "Stacia, no, I. It's not common for people to practice budgeting." And I said, "Oh, really? I love it. And I'll do it for downtime because I am looking down the road, preparing the finances, everything is said. I'm not worried about what's coming up."

And if I like doing it so much, I'm going to create resources that help moms do it automatically, just plug in your numbers and your budget populates. And so the resources I provide are not only teaching my knitting students like the beginning budget, which covers not just your hobbies that you know you're learning in class, but when you start living on your own, the income that comes in and the expenses that go out, the cash inflow and outflow.

So when it comes to the mom who's starting this whole homeschooling job, I've got the resources to plug it in. If it's just for school expenses, you can budget that to know what you have based on the money coming in for school purposes, but overall, what the family budget is. So sources of income and all of your rent or mortgage or utilities and groceries and gas, it's all in there. So you just plug it in, what you want to be spending for the month to see, oh, I don't have enough money to spend that much, or, oh, I've got so much more I can now put it into savings, or get an extra whatever. So my goal is to help moms simplify the hard things, like the daunting task of money management since I enjoy it so much.

Andrew Pudewa: What is the first step? Like if you're talking to someone, and they just aren't doing it at all, and they have very little or no savings, their debt is gradually increasing. What do you tell them as the first thing you've got to do? And then what's the next thing and the next thing? What's the basic plan that you try to teach people?

Stacia Lowe: The first thing that you need to do is become aware of what you're already spending. So I'll tell moms, go back to your last month's finances, which means you're going to have to take the time. Yes, you have a lot of important things to do and it doesn't sound fun, so you kind of put it to the back of the list of things to do, but it needs to get done, you just have to do it. It'll take about a half hour or... You go through your bank statement or your credit card statement to see what you spent your money on, and then you're going to have the realization, "oh my goodness. I had a lot more coffees than I thought I did, and oh, I haven't even worn that pair of jeans that I bought last month."

If you're just spending haphazardly and just whatever you want to buy, the impulse purchases, you're not keeping track of all of those things. And so the more you do it, the more it gets away from you. And so I just encourage moms, go back and look what you're already spending your money on, and then you can figure out what of those things are unnecessary.

If you're having ten coffees, cut it down to seven. I'm not saying cut out everything that's good. Don't spend your money on anything that's fun. Absolutely not. I actually say the

opposite because it is more rewarding to do the hard effort of saving your money for the big stuff, for the priorities in life. It's more rewarding to do that when you can enjoy things on the way. So I say budget, add categories in your budget for the fun things, for the family activities, even the family vacations that could get expensive. But if it's in the budget, and you know that your vacation is coming in three months down the road, you can start putting money away for that now, not spending money on ten coffees, only seven or five. And then there's that money that you save from not spending what you usually would have and now it's going towards your vacation fund or college tuition or the big things, a car or whatever.

Julie Walker: One of the things, Stacia, that we get here at IEW is the, I'm going to say, misunderstanding that our curriculum is expensive. What I like to say is, well, first and foremost, it works. It's guaranteed to work. If you are not satisfied with our products, we will cheerfully refund your money. We are so confident that it works. But the other thing is if you buy some other curriculum and that doesn't work, and then you buy another one and that one doesn't work, and by the time you just stop doing that, if you would've added that all together just not done that and started with us, you're going to have better results.

Andrew Pudewa: And people try to make the best decisions they can at the time, but there is that price tag, sticker shock kind of thing. And I think we've done a good job in working with that and assuring people you invest in the education of yourself, that's a lifetime investment. And so we kind of go that direction.

One of the things I've heard young people say right now is it's stupid to save money because the money is always worth less, and your interest in your little bank account or whatever doesn't keep up with inflation, so you might as well buy what you need. Now, have you heard people talk about that idea? like inflation makes savings not satisfying? and a waste of effort on the other. How do you respond to that?

Stacia Lowe: Well, for the most part, the moms that I'm talking to aren't thinking inflation. They're just, "I do what I gotta do, and I'm going to buy what I want, and I'm doing it now." like with a blindfold on to not think of anything how it's affecting the rest of the family. But I can understand that concept.

However, if you are spending all your money now, how are you going to afford the unexpected tire cost when you get a flat tire that happened to me two days ago and earlier this month?

Andrew Pudewa: A contingency fund

Stacia Lowe: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: A critical part.

Stacia Lowe: Absolutely. Because what happens when you don't have funds available for the emergency? The extra \$300 in your budget emergency, you don't have that.

What happens then to your stress level? It skyrockets. And then what does that stress do to your kids? Speaking to parents, a stressful mom is going to be more stressed in her family with her kids, and that's not what any of us want. So my goal is to help reduce the financial stress by being prepared, knowing what's coming, or being prepared for the unexpected that you don't know is coming, so that if it does happen, if you get two flat tires in a month, like what happened to us this month, it's okay. It's not the end of the world. Yes, it's unfortunate, and no one wants to spend the extra money, but you don't have to be stressed that the other necessities aren't being covered.

Andrew Pudewa: Another thing, I wonder...

Stacia Lowe: It's just about being prepared.

Andrew Pudewa: if you have help for people. It seems like today, more than any other time in my life, you can't essentially, you can't do anything online at all without a constant hit of very appealing products available and things you can spend money. So it used to be, yeah, you could pull the Dave Ramsey idea and you got your money. You put cash in envelopes and then you just allocate that way. And nobody uses cash or envelopes, so you have to kind of redo that. But I wonder if you have any tips for people who feel particularly susceptible to, "wow, that's such a great deal. I have to buy it now because it's 20% off and it looks so cool. It's going to make my life better. But yeah, it's 80 bucks and, and you don't get to the point of thinking, do I have that 80 bucks now? It's like, if I don't spend 80 now, I'll have to spend a hundred later when I do buy this thing."

Stacia Lowe: So it's what I'm trying to constantly teach my boys. You are not in a hurry. You do not have to be rushed into anything, any purchases. It is successful marketing that convinces you that you do. And so if you think about it, if you already have your budget in place and you know what you want to buy, I always encourage moms to keep your financial goals in your line of sight so that you come across it every day to remind yourself, "oh yeah, that's why I'm not buying such and such, you know?" If you think about all of these ads that pop up, oh, I need that. Right now, it's 20% off. But right now, in the budget that I've already planned out, it's my plan. I'm sticking to my plan. The budget for today is \$0 spent on that whatever it is. So 20% off of the ticket price is still much more expensive than the \$0 that is set already in today's budget. And so don't, I always say, don't give into the peer pressure of marketing. You are in charge of your money and the timing of when you spend your money. Don't let anyone rush you or convince you otherwise.

Andrew Pudewa: That is one reason why I have always held, from the very beginning of this business, we just don't discount, we don't have these periodic times when you can get a big discount because. I don't want people to feel that pressure. our price is our price. It's always going to be our price. Anybody selling our stuff, I think that gives a little bit of security. Whereas, I get these emails like, buy today and save 35%. I just hate that. Like, could you just set your price and keep it the same and then I can buy it when I can? Rather than, oh, now I have to, and I wish more people would take my attitude about it.

Stacia Lowe: It's the industry and marketing and the social media and every, all of the ads and everything. It's how certain businesses get their money because. I like what you, what you say. Parents can trust that they can come and get your curriculum and what they want from you at the same cost tomorrow as it was yesterday. That's really good. I really like, and I want to help moms just slow down in their spending because yes. Take the time, the half hour now to look through your spending and start planning for the things that you want to spend your money on for next month based on what you're saving and not spending that you did last month.

Slow down. And it will require that time to put into it. So you're not going to be doing something else in that time that you're working on your budget, but that is intentionality. You're being intentional to slow down and be prepared in your finances so that anxiety of money stresses don't have to feed into your parenting and your home life, your family life.

Julie Walker: Stacia, we're unfortunately out of time as I suspected we are going to be. Looks like Andrew has another question for you.

Andrew Pudewa: I want people to know and I'm sure you're going to tell us. Let's say there is a mom who understands, this is tough. I need help, and they want to find out if you can help them. What's the pathway into getting your help this way?

Stacia Lowe: So I've got a page on my website that has all of my low budget products. Lowe is my last name, another play on words. I love it.

Andrew Pudewa: Is it LOWE?

Stacia Lowe: It is Lowe Budget, exactly, but you'll see everything from my ebook that I wrote to give you the perspective shift to be able to encourage you in your intentional spending and saving strategies. Stop Staying Stuck, taking that first step into financial peace of mind. That's my ebook, and that'll kind of be a good starting point. I've got free resources. Also, the cash tracker is just a printout that you can get on my website. And you can fill in all of the different categories of spending from last month to then circle one or two or three that you are not going to spend this month, and it'll show you how much that you're saving by not spending the same way you did last month. And then you can go to my savings calculator and this just puts in last month's actual spendings and then the amount you want for your current month budget. So you reduce last month's spending five or 10 bucks in all of the categories. And now you have a savings account that can either go into savings or you can apply it to another spending category.

It's just about being intentional with the timing of the spending of your money. So my three month budget, that is your whole family inflow and outflow, your income and your expenses. Things that are fixed or variable throughout the month, whether it's the same amount every month, or it changes depending on time of month or whatever. You'll see side by side, March, April, May, and all of my spending and what I could be saving each of those months. So you've got three months in advance that you're looking at that can prepare you for a quarter of

the year of peace of mind because everything is in its place. I've also got the student budget, which I offer to my students in my knitting class, and it is the basics. So it's just practicing sources of cash inflow. If you have a job, if you earn an allowance, and things that you spend your money on, if you're buying gifts for your family, or it's just a matter of becoming familiar with what comes in and what goes out and the timing that that happens throughout the month.

So I've got different sheets, and they're Google Sheets, so I wanted to make something even easier because there's tons of apps and even the simplest app that is free and it's on your phone, it can be overwhelming. So I wanted to take it a step back, even, simplify even more.

It is just a Google sheet that can go with you wherever you go, and you are just putting in numbers. You can see the category, and you put in your number, and then the flow of your money over the month populates automatically.

Andrew Pudewa: Kind of like what we do with writing: take a big complex thing and break it into very small, manageable, step one, step two, step three, step four.

Julie Walker: Well, Stacia, it has been too long since we've seen each other although I was in Southern California not too long ago, but I do plan to be there again later next month. Hopefully we can connect then and thank you so much for joining us on this podcast. I do hope that your tips and your tools will be of help to all families.

Andrew Pudewa: Well I'm going to send these links to a couple of my kids right away.

Stacia Lowe: Oh, good. Good. Thank you so much, Julie and Andrew. I appreciate you having me on the show.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.