

Podcast 515: Homeschool 101: Preparing for Homeschool Conventions

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: No one ever went to a homeschool conference or homeschool convention and then said, I wish I hadn't done that. Everybody is grateful there's some discomfort or effort involved in doing it, but you always think that was a really good thing. I did.

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: Well, Andrew, this is episode 515, so it's on the fives. That means this is a Homeschool 101 podcast.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, okay, so we're talking about homeschooling.

Julie Walker: Well, homeschooling for those particularly who are new to homeschooling or who may be considering homeschooling or know someone that they think should homeschool and maybe they can just share this podcast with them.

Andrew Pudewa: All right. Sounds good.

Julie Walker: Yeah. And so this, I love the topic of our conversation today because it's about homeschool conferences, homeschool conventions.

Andrew Pudewa: conventions.

Julie Walker: Yeah. So today, in February, it's a little early to be talking about this, but not really because our first convention that we are going to, or that you are going to, is in Indiana on March 13th.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, and February's a short month, so March is right around the corner.

Julie Walker: It is.

Andrew Pudewa: Indiana is in a different location. It's going to be in a super beautiful venue this year. They're trying something a little different, and it's been years since I've been to that IAHE, so I'm excited about that and many other events as well.

Julie Walker: Oh, yes, we have. Well, I will tell you a little bit of the history of IEW and homeschool conferences.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay,

Julie Walker: So when I first started working at IEW, wow, okay, that was almost 19 years ago now it's hard to believe.

Andrew Pudewa: Half your life.

Julie Walker: Oh, I had to do math right there. Uh, no, actually.

Andrew Pudewa: A third

Julie Walker: Okay. A third-ish of all my life. But when I first started Andrew, we did more than 70 homeschool conferences.

Now, you personally didn't go to 70.

Andrew Pudewa: Right?

Julie Walker: but we

Andrew Pudewa: had people all over the country. Well, that was the main way that we would let people know that we existed. The whole social media thing, internet advertising wasn't happening back then. And so that was the main way that people would go and get information.

Julie Walker: Yes, and we still to this day love meeting people at homeschool conferences. This year. We are actually doing only, well, I don't know exactly how many, but I know at this point, when we're recording this, we are doing less than twenty, but that's not because there are seventy out there to choose from when we're only doing twenty. There are not many more than twenty because we love going to homeschool conferences.

We love to meet you, our listener, where you can come up to us and say hello and open our products and take a look at them and have conversations and listen to great speakers and it's just fun. It's a big party. I love parties.

Andrew Pudewa: I think there's still an important role that conferences and conventions play in that people really do need the non-digital experience. Talking to real people face-to-face, looking at real books, opening, flipping through, asking questions, having conversations. You really can't do that. Just clicking on an ad and perusing a website or listening to some podcast, and then going to a website to find out.

Julie Walker: And looking at samples digitally when you can't really get the feel of what's, what's the real oomph of this book? What is it really all about? All I can see is a few sample pages.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, and I think, I mean, every time I've gone to an event, I've seen something that I never expected, I never would have looked for. I'm kind of past my homeschool curriculum buying, although I do buy stuff for the grandchildren from time to

time. But there's just something wonderful about being able to walk around an exhibit hall, sit and listen to the speakers who may or may not be connected with something they're selling.

So I'm always encouraging people, take the time, spend the money. You won't regret it.

Julie Walker: Yep. Well, before I mention any specific conferences that we are going to be at or that you in particular are going to be at, I want to camp just for a moment on this idea of preparing for a homeschool convention. Andrew, what advice do you have for those new homeschoolers that are saying, okay, I believe you, I'm going to get myself to a homeschool conference. What kind of things should they do to be prepared to attend?

Andrew Pudewa: Like you'd plan anything, get it on the calendar, and then you're committed. Decide. Are you going to take the whole family and deal with the kids, or are you going to call on the grandparents to watch kids? I'm increasingly meeting couples, and I'll talk to them, before a talk. They're sitting there. How old are your kids? Oh, they're seven, five, and two. Okay. Where are they?

Oh, we have grandparents. This is like a date. it doesn't sound like the most romantic venue, but in a way it is because when a mom and dad can get away, listen to talks that are interested them look around and then have dinner, stay in a hotel if needed, have that time to talk about what arguably is indeed the most important thing in their life. Their children and the education thereof. I think that's a great plan if you've got the resources. But on the other hand, it's really fun, especially for me to meet kids at homeschool conventions and I think they get a lot out of it. Many of them have really good children's programs, excellent teen programs, Unbound, really top level teen programs in many places as well as, uh, generation Joshua. So I think sometimes for the teenagers, it's very important for them to realize we're not alone.

Julie Walker: There's a lot of people.

Andrew Pudewa: Not just our little group out in Podunk, wherever. There's hundreds, thousands of people doing this and making new friends like that.

Julie Walker: Well, I like the suggestion that you gave of mom and dad going together. When I was homeschooling my boys, probably in the nineties is what I think about my homeschooling decade, my husband and I kind of had an agreement that I got to go to the CHEA Convention, which is Christian Home Educators Association of California.

That was kind of where those were my, my gang, that's who I hung out with. He would come every other year. So he would come with me every other year to be a part of the craziness. He's, he's not as into parties as I am. He is more of an introvert, but he appreciated the opportunity to hear the speakers, to look at the curriculum with me and make buying decisions, and then I didn't have to find a payphone to call him to say, because we didn't have cell phones in those days, Can I spend \$300 on this? where he can't actually see it, and so it was just really helpful for him to be a part of that. I think too, of just kind of that value of kind of what I was alluding to just then is when I would go to these homeschool conferences

year after year, I would see some of the same people that maybe, I only saw them at homeschool conventions every year, and it was just, it was just great to rekindle friendships.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, absolutely. So on the idea of being ready, if you know which convention you're going to go to and whether or not you're going to bring kids and what they're going to do. If you go, and it's interesting, a lot of people bring their children, and I'm saying as young as six or seven to sit in the talks that I'm giving.

And I'm assuming, the kids go with their parents to other people's talks as well. I, I super enjoy having. Children in the audience. I think it just kind of, it brightens me up a little bit. And I'll banter with them before and maybe tell a joke and a lot of times I think, oh, they're going to be bored. And yet, hey, if they're bored, that's okay. But sometimes kids, 11 years old, walk up and ask me a question about something I said, so they are listening. And that's one of the things that we value so much about homeschooling is the opportunity for our kids. To interact with a wide range of people of all ages and learn from other adults. And then sometimes you see kids that are just sitting there, drawing or reading, hopefully not playing a game on an iPad. That, that kind of depresses me now and then, but it happens. I, I get it. So then of course you can research ahead of time. Okay, what talks are going to be available? What speakers are you interested?

can even listen. Almost everybody I know has got something out there on YouTube or Instagram. Is this a person that's going to be worth my time? And then what curriculum exhibits are you particularly interested and are they going to be represented? So you just plan a little bit that way you don't walk in. Feel disoriented or overwhelmed or trying to figure out what to do right now at the last minute. So a little bit of planning and I think most conventions are pretty good about putting that information out there and making it available. The other thing, and I always say this to my audiences 'cause I don't know who's there, I don't know what they're expecting. I always say if. After five or 10 minutes, you feel like this is not what you were hoping it would be. Feel free to leave. It won't hurt my feelings. I'd rather have you leave soon than sit there for an hour and be irritated that you had to sit there for an hour. So, I, I think that's generally good advice and I think most speakers, although some might be a little disappointed, I think what we're there for is to serve. If we're not serving people in the way they need or were expecting, then that's fine. Go, go find something that is of more value. I would also suggest food.

Julie Walker: Oh.

Andrew Pudewa: I, my experience with, and I'm a little picky about food, as you know, I I do not like to eat anything that is not

good for me. Convention venues, unfortunately. Are not known for quality food. Occasionally I'll find something that I. Would eat if I were a bit more desperate than I usually am. But I would say just pack some good, solid, nutritious food that you will be happy eating and don't plan on having to go and get. a hot dog and french fries or something really toxic at the

convention venue or say, well, we'll go out to a restaurant, but then you have to leave the venue and

that. parking or walking it takes, it takes a lot of time.

So I would say plan the food. That's if, if you care the way I do about what you put in your body.

Julie Walker: Well, and you'll all probably save a lot of money too, because sometimes those prices can be a little steep when you're buying your hot dog french fries and a drink, and it's \$18.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Yeah, no comment.

Julie Walker: No comment. So you mentioned doing a little bit of research about speakers. I would be remiss if I didn't direct our listeners to some of the talks that they can listen to from you.

And if you go to iw.com/andrew pua all one word, you'll find. A lot of the recordings that we've done over the years of you, Andrew giving talks right here in our recording studio. So we've got them pretty well polished and you don't have to hear some of the background noises of children crying or

Andrew Pudewa: Right, and, and the other thing is I try to add in a couple new talks, each year.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Andrew Pudewa: So, some of the talks have been around for a long, long time. Spelling in the brain, maybe. Okay, maybe you don't, you could listen to that online. But I find this, don't you find this when, when you're watching or listening to something, almost always I'm doing something else, right?

I'm driving, I'm cooking, I'm at the gym, I'm, working on mundane work. I'm kind of half listening. Half doing something. The great thing about being, for lack of a better word, captive in a convention room is that you're not doing those other things. Therefore, your mind is freed to really listen and think about what you're hearing and take notes and, and use that information in a way that's just so much. More likely to be of value than if you're just half listening while you're multitasking and, and doing all that. And then of course, part of the, the great thing is you can have conversations with people,

in, in my convention life I usually do a talk and then, half an hour or an hour and a half later, I'll be scheduled to do another one. Well, I'll leave the talk and then it will take me. That long to get back to the booth in the exhibit hall because I just meet so many people. They want to ask questions, they wanna tell me stories, and then it's time to go to the next talk. So that's the biggest complaint I get is where are you? where's Andrew going to be?

Somewhere between the talk I just gave and the exhibit hall. Or the exhibit hall and the next talk I'm going to get, that's where you'll find me.

Julie Walker: That's exactly right. And get a seat early because that way maybe you can get up front and have a conversation with Andrew before or after the talk, especially if you have kids, because he will gravitate toward your kids. I have been an exhibitor. Standing in a booth going, where is Andrew right now? And AB absolutely no.

The conundrum you're in. But my goodness, what, what a delightful time to be able to meet people face to face. And we just, we are a relational company. We love talking to people and that's why we will continue to go to homeschool conferences and as many as we are able to,

Andrew Pudewa: I took a couple grandchildren to the first kind of big convention that I took them to, and it was big. It's one of the biggest, they didn't know what to expect, but hanging around me basically most all the time is I'm doing talks or people are coming up to talk to me, or they're telling me stories or they're thanking me and, uh. Kind of on toward the second part of the second day. My grandson said, grandpa, are you famous? And, and he was, I don't know, 11 at the time, I guess. I said, no, not really. But in this place there are a lot of people who know me. So yeah, I'm, I'm famous in very small circles.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Then on the trip home, we were walking through the Atlanta Airport, which is the busiest airport, I think in the world, but certainly in Northern America. And someone just walking past stops and goes, Andrew Poodle.

Julie Walker: and there

Andrew Pudewa: They weren't even at the convention. It was just totally random. And then my grandson said, see, grandpa, you are famous.

Julie Walker: That's cute. That's really cute. So I'm going to mention now as promised a few dates

Andrew Pudewa: Okay, good.

Julie Walker: locations of where you're going to be. Not all of 'em, because as I said, there's a bunch. You are going to be as mentioned in Indiana. You are then going to the Great Hope School Conference in South Carolina.

Andrew Pudewa: Yep. That's a great one.

Julie Walker: Then you're going to the Great Hope School Conference in Missouri.

Andrew Pudewa: That's another great one. That's a smaller, little more intimate, St. Charles is a part of St. Louis, and I kind of like that one just because it's small, it's contained, it's friendly.

Julie Walker: I would say, and then I'm going to mention the other in the category of the biggest homeschool conferences that are here in the United States—Great Homeschool Conference in Ohio, which is in April.

Andrew Pudewa: The Great Homeschool calls it convention and what's the difference between convention and conference? Not a lot. It's kind of the use of a word—convention you tend to think of it's a little bigger. There's going to be more exhibits. People are coming from all over the area. Conference, okay, a little bit smaller, fewer speakers, maybe a smaller event, maybe some panel discussions, things like that.

Julie Walker: I think I use those terms interchangeably, but I like the word conference better because I think of getting together and talking with people. Okay. Just a couple more. Two of the biggest conferences I mentioned, the top three are Great Homeschool Conventions—Ohio that you're going to be at. The other two you are not going to be at this year, and that would be Florida's conference convention. And then Virginia, in Richmond, Virginia, you are also not going to be at, but we will be

Andrew Pudewa: Why am I not there?

Julie Walker: Well, you're going to be speaking at other places, so

Andrew Pudewa: And for me, it's almost like whoever asks first, that's what I'll do. But it's nice to get around, and alternate between places. Florida's a big party. If anybody, if you want to, party, Florida's the place to go.

Julie Walker: I have never been to that one, Andrew. Maybe this'll be the year that I

Andrew Pudewa: You should, you know.

Julie Walker: I should. So then just, I want to mention some smaller shows because we don't just do the big ones, we do the small ones. And you are going to Ottawa this year. You are going to

Andrew Pudewa: Ottawa in Canada? just to be sure because there is an Ottawa in Kansas

Julie Walker: this is, oh, okay. That's right. Ottawa, I blanked on the province. Ontario. Okay. Ottawa, Ontario. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. We know US geography better than Canadian. I'm so sorry. All you Canadians out there.

Andrew Pudewa: Winnipeg is in Manitoba.

Julie Walker: I do know that. I've been there several times. I love Winnipeg, Massachusetts, and South Dakota. You are going to South Dakota this year.

Andrew Pudewa: That could be a surprise because I learned a few things recently. South Dakota has the largest number, the largest percentage of homeschoolers of any state. Per capita. And it's in Rapid City, which is not the largest city, right? I think Sioux Falls, but Rapid City, although it's smaller, has more homeschoolers.

Then Sioux Falls and Rapid City is kind of in this little corner, and so they'll get people, coming up from Colorado, probably Wyoming, who knows Montana possibly. So that should be actually, I think, a very good show. New organizers, new event. Lots of young, young, the younger leaders are injecting excitement and enthusiasm.

Julie Walker: I do want to just mention one thing and just ask you to share a closing thought. The thing that the then and now conversation that we had earlier. It used to be that we would sell product in the booth. People could take home their student videos, their grammar, Fix, a grammar, whatever.

Andrew Pudewa: Buy the stuff and haul it

Julie Walker: We no longer do that. We only are consulting, and we make recommendations on what to buy, and we have a free shipping code. It makes it so much easier for the exhibitor, and it applies so much less pressure on our customers, and so I'm really happy to be able to offer that to our families. And maybe you're disappointed that you can't actually take home that shiny new workbook, but you at least get free shipping.

Andrew Pudewa: And the one thing we always want to start telling people is if you are going to buy something from us, don't wait until August because it's such a slam, and then people are frustrated, and we got a queue two weeks, the reseller. So, go ahead and buy it a little earlier in the year, even

Julie Walker: is not too early. February is not too early. Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: That's one of the benefits too, of going and deciding and getting the free shipping and, and then if it's a wrong thing or change your mind, we have our returns policy which is very liberal.

Julie Walker: So any concluding thoughts about the value of attending a homeschool conference?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I think you've heard me say. No one ever went to a homeschool conference or homeschool convention and then said, I wish I hadn't done that. Everybody is grateful. It's kinda like going to the gym. There's some discomfort or effort involved in doing it. After you always think that was a really good thing. I did. And homeschool conferences are the same way, and I will look forward to meeting hopefully many of our listeners in one or more of the cities that we will be at, and you'll probably meet some of them at the cities you're going to be at, and let's build the community. It's also, you said this earlier, but I would underscore. It's a really great place to bring people who don't, they don't necessarily

already homeschool, but maybe they're curious or they're thinking about it, or maybe they're skeptical, and then they go and realize this is normal. People doing really good stuff with really happy, intelligent, respectful kids. I think a lot of people, they got into homeschooling by saying, wow, I'd like my kids to, to have that level of social comfort in such a broad venue.

Julie Walker: Great. All right, listener. We'll see you at the homeschool conferences, conventions, whatever they are, this year. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you

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