



**Remarks by Lisa Rivero at the General Session of WPA's 27th Annual Home Education Conference on May 8, 2010. [The Conference theme was *Homeschooling: Loving Learning, Enriching Families.*] Published in *WPA Newsletter #104*, June 2010, p. 8.**

Being in the midst of so many families who love to learn, I must warn you that, as a writing instructor, I am very tempted to ask you to put your chairs in a circle, take out some paper and a pencil, and freewrite for ten minutes before we talk. I am truly honored to say a few words today. This is my first year attending the Wisconsin Parents Association conference without my young homeschooler. He gave his own graduation remarks here last year and this weekend is studying for final exams to finish his first year of college. At first I wondered, with more than a little sadness, does this mean I am no longer a homeschooler? Then I thought about how often this past year, when I turn on my computer in the morning, an instant message pop-up screen appears with a note from my son: a pop quiz on politics, or a tidbit of information he's learned that he needs to share, or wanting to know my opinion on the British elections, which I'm not following nearly as much as he would like me to. I also think of how a friend who is a veteran homeschooler told me that she and her mother, who is 88 years old, have been reading and discussing books about poetry together long distance, in my friend's words, "another way to homeschool." So I realize that, yes, I still am and always will be a homeschooler. Homeschooling is kind of like getting an upgrade. It doesn't disappear.

Loving learning, enriching families. When I heard the theme of the conference over the phone, I made a mental typo and put a comma after loving: loving, learning, enriching families. That's interesting, I thought, kind of haiku like.

As an aside, here is the only piece of practical homeschooling advice I want to offer: Whenever you are at a loss for how to react to a situation, and especially when you are frustrated or close to overreacting, take a tip from horse trainers who are taught to say to themselves "that's interesting" or "how interesting" as a way to give them a pause before reacting inappropriately to a horse's behavior. Try it with your children. It does wonders. Another thing I learned to ask myself whenever life gets crazy is, "Would this person or situation be funny if it were on a Bill Cosby sit-com?" Most of the time, the answer was yes, and I could smile rather than say or do something I would later regret.

Loving learning, enriching families. It was only later that I saw the clever turn of phrase that the comma after learning provides. We usually talk of ways to enrich learning and of loving families. Homeschooling, however, encourages us also to continue to love learning and to enrich our families. It is nice, isn't it, to see the word love connected to learning, and to think about consciously making our families stronger and richer?

But how does love of learning and enrichment of families happen in homeschooling?

What does it look like? That's what the Wisconsin Parents Association Home Education Conference is all about, and, lucky for you, I have only about four minutes left, so I'll keep my thoughts short.

First, I want to borrow an idea from an article about writing by Reg Saner ("Creationism: The Ecotone Made of Words," *The Writer's Chronicle*, March/April 2010), in which he argues that "writing creates you as you write it." He means that the very act of writing, regardless of how good it is or if it is just for ourselves, whether we publish it or crumple it up and throw it away, changes us. It becomes part of our on-going self-creation as we transform our thoughts into words. Homeschooling is like that, too. Homeschooling enriches families as we homeschool, especially when we keep loving learning at the forefront.

**A**nother thing I like about this year's theme is that love is used as a verb form, an active word. Loving learning is a relationship between the learner and the world, and, like all relationships, it will have ups and downs. Sometimes when parents say that their children don't love learning, I wonder if the learner is just going through a tough spell or meeting some resistance that must be met and worked through, as we all do in important, loving relationships. No one else can make us love learning. That relationship belongs to the individual learner alone.

I began by talking about writing, so it seems fitting to close the circle by ending with poetry. The poem I'm going to read comes from another way that homeschooling has enriched our family, and that is by the connections and friendships we have formed with other homeschooling families. I strongly encourage all of you to reach out to the families you know and to form your own web of community and support. Don't wait for that support to come to you. Be a good homeschooler: Do it yourself. We were very fortunate to be a part of a homeschooling writing and literature group that met once a week for several years. Together we read and wrote plays, short stories, and poetry, with the only goal being, in the words of Susannah Sheffer, to write because we loved to. Each family contributed something important to that group, whether by leading discussions or letting us overtake their home for a morning or bringing warm snacks straight from their kitchens. We each entered that group as separate learners, unsure of how our ideas would be received or whether we would fit in. How we emerged I leave in the hands of one of our young poets from that group, Samuel Flood, who is currently traveling in France and who gave me permission to read this to you today. It is also a fitting tribute to this year's graduates.

*Last Circle*  
by Samuel Flood

This is it.  
One last circle.  
We're sitting  
quiet  
thoughtful  
We are here,  
quiet

thoughtful  
Aren't we?  
quiet  
thoughtful  
It's been near two years.  
quiet  
thoughtful  
We're older now.  
more quiet  
more thoughtful  
We're better writers,  
Better actors,  
Better people.  
This has been good.  
Better  
and  
Better.  
We've sat together  
Talked together  
Laughed together  
Cried together  
Dreamed together  
We've BEEN together.  
Been Fairies  
Been Lovers  
Been Writers  
Been Singers  
Been Poets.  
We've had fun here.  
Even in learning,  
Even in difference.  
This is it.  
One last circle.  
quiet  
thoughtful.