



Remarks by Pete Gilbert at the General Session of WPA's 26th Annual Home Education Conference on May 2, 2009. [The Conference theme was *Homeschooling: Experience the Adventure*.] Published in *WPA Newsletter #100*, June 2009, p. 6.

Good morning. I'm Pete Gilbert. Together with my wife, Sarah, and our daughters, Emily and Susannah, we've been learning together as a family up the road in Appleton for – really a long time.

As you know, the conference theme this year is *Homeschooling: A Family's Investment*. Now, I'm not an investment counselor, nor do I play one on the Internet, but I'd like to talk for a few minutes about investments.

I looked up the word "investment." I'm a librarian; I can't help it. The earliest definitions of investment have to do with getting dressed. To invest meant to "clothe, robe, or envelop." It came to refer specifically to dressing in the regalia of high office, and so "to invest" also came to mean "to endow with power, authority, or privilege" – in other words, identifying our priorities, focusing on what's most important, putting our resources into what we value. And that's how I'd like us to think about investment this morning.

First, a story:

It starts, as so many things do, with Tarzan. Several years ago, we were visiting my brother and his family in Colorado, and the hotel where we were staying was also hosting a Tarzan Convention – dozens of Tarzan enthusiasts, Tarzan booksellers, Tarzan impersonators...you can imagine. So when we got home, we went to the library and checked out the classic Johnny Weissmuller- Maureen O'Sullivan Tarzan movies. We don't remember much about the films except the location – the Mutia Escarpment, a mysterious wall of rock rising up from the African plains.

And of course, talking about escarpments leads to a discussion about the Niagara Escarpment (that mysterious wall of rock rising up from northeastern Wisconsin which gives us High Cliff and Door County and Niagara Falls). Can we find a map of the Escarpment? A quick look in our encyclopedia comes up empty, but we do come across the entry for Richard Nixon. And that leads to a discussion about Watergate – and from there to scandals, the problems of second term presidents, the coming election, vice presidents who became president unexpectedly, Franklin Roosevelt, term limits, and Harry Truman. A list of major world events during Truman's presidency leads us to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Because the girls can recite the kings and queens of England from William the Conqueror on down, we knew that meant George was king during WWII. And before that? Edward, of course, and didn't he abdicate to marry an American woman? From Tarzan to the romantic entanglements of the British royal family in 15 easy steps.

I see heads nodding. You know how it goes. A single, seemingly simple question leads to an hour, an afternoon, a week, or a lifetime of exploration.

And to be prepared for that to happen, we need to make investments – we need to put our resources where our hearts are. So – what are we investing and what are we investing in?

We invest our time. It's not quick or easy to take full responsibility for our family's education. But as homeschoolers, we do it. It's a 24/7 job, because you never know when learning will happen – first thing in the morning, over lunch, or late in the evening after watching a Tarzan double feature.

We invest our creative energy. We take the initiative to not only think outside the proverbial box - but to put our ideas into daily practice - how do we learn about escarpments? What is a good way to learn about presidential politics or British royal succession?

We invest our space. We live in what our friends generously call “an enriched environment.” We have a long tradition of reading out loud to each other and one of our favorite books talks about “reverse burglars” – people who sneak into your house and leave piles of things – and I'm pretty sure that's what's happened to us. But that's because our house is not simply a way station that sits empty all day. It's our science lab, our library, our art studio, our recital hall – and once, even a birthing center – Susannah was born there on the Saturday morning of the WPA conference in 1992 – the only conference we've missed in the last 20 years. I suppose we could have come over in the afternoon, but...

Of course, we invest our money. For many of us, that means forgoing a second income and willingly living with less. You know how this goes. For years, the WPA conference evaluation asked if we made a financial sacrifice to homeschool. My response was always, well, duh. But again – that's no so much a sacrifice as an investment. We're putting our money where our hearts are.

We invest in our local support groups. Ours started 17 years ago when Emily was 6 and Susannah was a new baby. Most of the original group has “graduated” – they're in college or married or working or some combination of the above. And now a new generation of kids storms around together at our monthly potlucks, making sea creatures for the coral reef, reading on their own timetables, and teaching all of us how they learn. No matter our ages, we still support one another: answering questions, sharing resources and laughing together - a lot.

And we invest in our statewide support group – the Wisconsin Parents Association. Sure, you can homeschool in Wisconsin without joining WPA or reading the handbook – but why would you want to? For our family, WPA has been a necessary investment. WPA keeps an eye on the homeschooling law, gives us accurate, helpful information, and a conference full of inspiration and connections.

What's the pay-off for all this investment?

It's days like our Tarzan day – when we learn together about things we're interested in, when we stop to ask and wonder and laugh together – as a family.

It's evenings like our last group potluck – when we got together with friends to share food, stories, ideas, and learning – as families.

It's weekends like this one – when our family gets together with old friends and people

we've just met and people we don't know yet to talk and learn and share and celebrate our homeschooling freedoms.

We invest in things that we care about, the things that we love – our families, our friends, the world around us.

Did we ever find a map of the Niagara Escarpment? A week or so later, I was at a meeting in Sturgeon Bay. Sarah, Emily, and Susi came along to explore Door County on a windy and rainy day. They stopped at a county park to watch the crashing waves – and stopped to read an informational sign. Lo and behold: a map of the Niagara Escarpment. Homeschooling: a little investment and a lot of serendipity.

One of the wisest people I know – that would be my wife - once wrote, “Learn because you love it; learn that which draws you irresistibly... Learn because you are curious, because you are a part of this vast multifaceted world and you want to make some sense of it. That which you really love will draw you forward, will create the path before your feet.”

The investments we make in “that which we really love” will create that path – a path worth following for ourselves and for our families.

Thanks for being here this morning. Have a good conference. Make good investments. ❖