



Remarks by Tomi Fay Forbes at the Opening Session of WPA's 23rd Annual Home Education Conference on May 6, 2006. [Theme was "Homeschooling: Strengthening the Generations."] Published in *WPA Newsletter #88* - June 2006 pp. 4-5

A few months ago my children declared it was time for mom to own a laptop, so off I went with my 20 year-old son to Comp USA. My sole responsibility was to pay for the computer. My son would select it. As I stared at the plethora of choices and waited for Chandler's expert decision, I contemplated my present situation. My children, now nearly grown, speak into my life. They challenge me, counsel me, encourage me and press me in new directions. At the same time, my husband and I continue to speak wisdom into their lives. The generations connect.

Grandparents

When my oldest son was young, he would cross the street to the home of our dear elderly neighbor. There Brandon would do small jobs which enabled Lu to continue to live in her home. On a regular basis each of my three children would spend a winter month alone with the grandparents in Pennsylvania. This time was of such great value that, years later, when Brandon wrote his resume of experiences for college entrance, he ended with this statement:

"I spend a couple of weeks each year with my grandfather, who is an engineer, patented inventor, and a just plain ingenious person who learns and teaches every moment of his life."

Today, Brandon has nearly completed a mechanical engineering degree. Chandler, who selected my laptop, is pursuing a degree in mass media/digital recording.

For my children, the time spent with grandparents has been invaluable. Grandparents have a broader perspective on life. As parents, we become tangled up in the trauma of everyday life; grandparents can see that which really matters and that which will pass without damage. Three of my mother-in-law's classic sayings were:

"adjust"

"whatever works"

And, when two siblings or cousins couldn't work out a problem or see the other's perspective on an issue,

"draw the circle a little bigger."

As a woman who raised not only her own four children but who impacted the lives of over thirty foster children, then worked for years with special education students, Dottie had a perspective that was always calm in the storms of life. Though she is no longer with us, the impact of her life continues to influence the lives of those she touched.

If your children do not have grandparents in their lives, I encourage your family to "adopt"

a mature man, woman or couple who would love to share with your family. Encourage the generations to connect.

Family's Unique Personality

Each family has its own personality and its own strengths and weaknesses. In our family, we esteem “hands-on” talents. We fix that which is broken, haul what needs to be moved, and delight in technical challenges. My teenage daughter carries as many tools on her person as her brothers do. If the chair we are sitting in at the restaurant is wobbly, we pull out a multi-tool and tighten it. We glory in fixing, and find there a sense of identity. Your family has unique strengths and talents too. Find them and celebrate them.

Create a Learning Environment

My husband and I view the whole of life as a grand opportunity to learn. Our children have always seen us reading, doing research, helping others, and even struggling with problems. Every member of our family delights in researching new topics. We are lifelong learners. This is true of our parents and grandparents, and I see it in my children. Children model our example.

Our homes reflect our families and our attitude toward learning. Our cozy 1925 working class bungalow contains ten bookcases, filled with books all organized by topic. Craft materials, office supplies, travel materials, Boy Scout equipment and musical instruments abound. The large dining room table invites friends to stop and eat, homeschoolers to gather for a writing class, and just plain messy projects. After all, real learning creates clutter! Even our garage reflects who we are: it is a neighborhood center for car repair.

All of these materials give the visitor a picture of who we are and what we esteem. Our home, like yours, is rich in learning; its contents reflect the stories of its inhabitants. Look around your house. See how it speaks of a personality only your family possesses.

I have an incredible treasure. It is a metal box, filled with 26 diaries, documenting my grandparents' lives. Together, my mother and I are recording this information for the next generation, turning the diaries into stories. My children are delighted to watch my zeal as I work on this project, this legacy. You may not have a box of diaries, but your family has its own story. I encourage you to treasure that story by preserving it.

Conclusion

Homeschooling can strengthen the generations. Homeschooling offers the flexibility which allows your children to spend time with people of all ages, backgrounds, occupations, and passions. To quote my son Brandon, “We understand that what we need to know is not that which is easily captured and boxed, but instead that which is learned through hands-on living: genuine, intimate, mental interaction.” My grandmother homeschooled an ill neighbor child in the 1940s using the Calvert Curriculum. My children are marrying homeschoolers, and plan to homeschool their own children.

Homeschooling stabilizes families, links generations, celebrates the individual history

and personality of a family, and conveys a passion for learning to the next generation. What a priceless gift we offer to our own children and grandchildren, and to a society hungry for these values.

On behalf of Wisconsin's homeschoolers, I offer my congratulations to this year's graduates. Your parents have instilled virtues in you which will lead to rich, full, and productive life experiences. You are well rounded young people with exceptional depth.

I salute each of you gathered for this conference for your dedication to your family. I encourage you to continue on this gratifying path, adding your own gifts to those you have received, from generation to generation.

Today I am delighted to introduce you to my mother, who along with my dad has taught and encouraged me for over half a century. My mother traveled from Pennsylvania to attend this conference with me.

Also, please join me in recognizing the unselfish work of Larry and Susan Kaseman, who have labored for many years on behalf of every homeschooler in Wisconsin, because they believe in the potential of all of us. ❖