



Remarks by Uli Henes at the General Session of WPA's 24th Annual Home Education Conference on May 4, 2007. [The Conference theme was *Homeschooling: Experience the Adventure*.] Published in *WPA Newsletter #93*, August 2007, p. 4

Good morning. My name is Uli Henes. I've lived in Madison for the past 25 years and have three children, who have been homeschooled by my wife Marty and me. Sarah is 27, Thomas is 24, and Daniel is 17.

I am a native of Germany. I am self-employed and organize conferences and act as a consultant to companies who want to sell their products globally. I help them figure out how to modify their products to make their German, Chinese, and other international customers happy, whether it is software, printers, or medical devices.

I'm delighted to be here this morning. As Joe [King] mentioned, we have been homeschoolers for 20-some years, and coming to the WPA conference each year has been important to us. I like the topic of this year's conference, "Homeschooling: Experience the Adventure" a lot. When Larry [Kaseman] asked me some time ago to share my thoughts with you here at the graduation ceremony, I started thinking:

In this theme, we are dealing with a couple of different concepts. First we have homeschooling, then there is adventure, and, finally, experience. I can easily negotiate homeschooling and experience, but adventure gives me pause. There are different connotations to adventure. I like adventure. I have probably always been adventurous. There is a sense of excitement about adventure. One feels good, affirmed after a successful adventure. Yet there is a risky side to adventure. Adventure entails the risk of losing something. If you are lucky, you just lose some time. But there is the possibility that you might lose more, like money, friends, and, in an extreme case, even your life.

This is as far as I got on my own. For help I turned to the dictionary to see what it had to say about adventure. I liked what I found. According to the dictionary, adventure is an "unusual and interesting, usually hazardous activity or experience that calls for enthusiasm and enterprise." I held this definition and my experience of homeschooling up against the light and found that the two matched quite well!

Hazardous? Risky might even be a better description. What kind of risks do we take as homeschoolers? I thought back to the time we started homeschooling and remembered that it felt quite risky. At stake were the education of our children and, tied up with it, a good chunk of their future success and happiness. Would my wife and I be able to give them what they could get in school, and would we be able to guide them and help them grow into the kind of people we hoped they would become? It felt like a big risk. Would I measure up to my own standards? Would I be able to deliver what my children needed?

Then there are the financial risks. Most of us who homeschool need to make do on one income. That can mean driving an older car that is prone to breaking down more frequently. (I see you have been there and done that.) It might mean delaying a medical treatment or having to cut back on expenses to afford braces. Financial advice columns today tell us that to be on the safe side, we should be putting away \$1 to 2 million for retirement. That is hard to accomplish on a single income.

There is another risk. The society around us — our friends, neighbors, close relatives — aren't always supportive of homeschooling. Some just don't understand. Others are downright hostile. I have heard over the years from families who had relatives call in the authorities because they equate homeschooling with abuse.

So much on the risks of the homeschooling adventure.

But let's not forget the rewards, the ones that make the adventure worthwhile. I really value the ability to have direct involvement with my children and to be able pass on to them on a day-to-day basis the values that my wife and I share, values that attracted us to each other in the first place. I am grateful that we were able to protect our children from the negative socialization they were likely to experience in school. Meeting someone recently I had not seen in years and hearing her tale of woe of what happened to her children made me aware of how fortunate we have been.

If you'd ask me, "How is your adventure going?" I would tell you that it is going quite well. The risks turned out far less serious than I imagined them to be, and the rewards have exceeded my expectation. I am enjoying the homeschooling adventure.

Before closing, there is one more thought I would like to share with you. In German we have a word "Zivilcourage." Literally translated it means "civil courage." It is similar to military courage, but instead of finding application in times of war, it finds expression in civilian life. "Zivilcourage" can make people go out and stand up for their rights or fight injustices. A special benefit I feel we are passing on to the children we homeschool, is that by homeschooling them we are involving them in the practice of civil courage. On a daily basis they experience how to successfully go against the stream, how to creatively think outside the box. As they become adults and go out into the world, they will carry with them the empowerment that comes with these experiences. This is important to me, because as I will be slowing down in the next 10-15 years, it will be reassuring to know that I will be leaving the world in the hands of young people who are confident about who they are and who will actively participate in the affairs of the world and this nation.

Enjoy the homeschooling adventure! ❖