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## **Family Education, Starting in 1981**

Laura and I read to our daughters, Juniper and Amanda, from their beginnings, and they loved listening as we read.

When she was six, in 1981, Juniper tried public school and decided it wouldn't work for her. Her attitude was, so much for that, now it's time to learn to read. I have many books I want to read.

Amanda learned the beginning of reading by listening as Laura taught Juniper.

Juniper's reading lessons soon dwindled, because she had most of what she needed, and she started reading C.S. Lewis's Narnia books on her own. Amanda cried in frustration, "I want to read chapter books, but I don't know enough words."

I said, "I'll help you." We increased her reading vocabulary rapidly, but spring came. I had work to do on the ranch we lived on and took care of, and I needed to plant our garden.

So I took Amanda and her books with me when I worked on the ranch. In our garden, I pulled weeds and irrigated peas. Amanda sat on the ditch bank or on a bale of hay that waited to be spread to mulch. She read her books. Clouds blew over us. Sun shone on her pages.

Amanda spelled a word to me. I raked seed bed and told her the word or helped her sound it out. I never had to tell her a word twice. We taught Juniper and Amanda reading by sound because it allowed them to proceed on their own very soon after we started. We still read aloud together. As soon as they could, our daughters began reading aloud to us. Juniper or Amanda often read to Laura as she put a meal together or worked some project.

Some work I needed to do, I couldn't take Amanda. Some northeastern Oregon spring days, staying inside with the wood stove warming the house made good sense for a child. Laura and Juniper helped Amanda with her reading those days.

The people at the Baker library knew we drove almost fifty miles to town, so they suspended rules that limited the number of books checked out. Joann, the bookmobile librarian saved us magazines that would otherwise be discarded. It didn't bother anyone when Juniper and Amanda checked out every book in

the library about poisons. They were researching Sherlock Holmes.

Laura sometimes doubted our ability to teach our daughters. Sometimes, she wondered if home schooling could be effective. Harsh criticism from people she met increased her doubt. Sometimes, the question, were we doing the right thing for our daughters? dug deep into her concern and her conscience.

I intersected with my family as I irrigated meadow, fixed fences, gardened, and wrote. Irrigation waters I spread across a thousand acres helped create abundant habitat for wildlife. Sharing habitat with the wild species became part of our education. Myriad birds used the rich meadow around us. Elk walked down the steep ridges onto the meadow and became part of our education. Our identification with life, with the earth, became part of our education. We had no electricity, and we had no desire nor time for television nor any other form of techno-entertainment.

Part of my function was to be there when Laura came back from anyplace, in case she ran into vociferous denouncers of home education that trip, I could start right in helping her knit back together her psyche and her consciousness of what we were doing. I said, "Has to be these people are afraid."

"Of what? Why does attacking me and creating chaos in my thoughts help their fear?"

"They're afraid you're doing it right, and that makes them afraid, maybe they haven't done their kids' education the right way. Why else would people who would probably turn their backs and walk away if someone slaps a kid jump in feet first, no holds barred on your delicate psyche, before they even know you or anything about what you're doing? That's the only explanation that makes sense as far as I can see."

Friends with a daughter Juniper's age used to stop in and visit when they passed through our area. The parents decided to stop visiting when we started home schooling. They said we did our children damage by taking education into the family. Juniper felt deeply hurt that Leticia's parents no longer allowed her to visit.

When Laura came back from town after another verbal attack, I said, "Look at your daughters. How are they doing?"

I could see we were doing it right. Most of the time, Laura could see we were doing it right. Our daughters laughed a lot. We all laughed a lot. We formed a close family, based in love.

Not everything was ideal. Juniper got lonely, most noticeably in her teen years. She yearned for team sports,

orchestra, social activities that took more people than we were. She tried public school, her junior year of high school. Amanda tried sophomore year, the same year.

Juniper said, "All these years, everybody talked about public schools and how home schoolers miss out on socialization. Once you get there, you don't have any socialization. You don't have time for that. Five minutes between classes. Wave at your friends on the way by. If you visit with your friends after school, you miss the bus again, dial the phone, 'Hi Mom. It's me. Guess what? Another 90 mile round trip to pick me up and bring me home.'

"They need classes just in socialization. Give everybody time to socialize, get to know each other, learn how to get along with each other in constructive ways, have some guidance about how people communicate. Work on socialization in classes. Then, when you go on to academics, people will learn, because socialization and communication is worked out for now, and they're willing to try to do a project, to learn a subject. The place is a madhouse, the way it is now."

Amanda said, "They need to have a class about teasing, what it is, some insight into why people do it and why several seize on one person to tease, and what that does to education."

Amanda came back to learning at home halfway through her sophomore year, not because other kids teased her, she said, but because her muses weren't speaking. Or, they spoke, but she had no time to listen with the long bus ride, the school day, too much homework.

By then, we took care of a Girl Scout ranch in northern Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Amanda returned to writing, singing, drawing, hiking along the creek, through forests and mountain meadows. Her muses spoke to her again, and she had time to listen. She went back to public school her senior year, loved the experience, and learned a lot, thanks largely to Mr. Berger and Miss Lane, inspired teachers and mentors.

Juniper skipped her senior year of high school and went directly to college. She graduated from college with honors. Amanda graduated with highest honors.

Juniper is a nanny now for a four-year-old girl in Seattle. Juniper's getting ready for graduate school. Amanda works at the library, writes, and doesn't know yet if she'll go to graduate school. Laura teaches Kindergarten at a beginning Waldorf school here in Bend, Oregon. I write at home.

What we did for our living, took care of a cattle ranch, then water inlets for the city of Bend, Oregon, then two consecutive

Girl Scout ranches in Colorado's Rocky Mountains, was wonderful for education almost disconnected from the consumer culture. A family existence that disconnected is rare. But education based in the family, based in love and respect isn't rare.

We wanted to give Juniper and Amanda their childhood. We wanted to give them the responsibility for their own education and their own view of the world. I think we succeeded.

The process of family evolves for all of us if we are careful and base what we do in love. Each of us reinvents education, toward an effective way of building family, education, love, spiritual force, and understanding.

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1445 words

## **Culture Shock**

Because we lived away from most people, taking care of ranches, and because we didn't watch television, Juniper and Amanda were not much acquainted with their peers or with attitudes prevalent in the culture. They stepped into the midst of the culture and into the midst of their peers by age when they started public school, Amanda as a sophomore in high school and Juniper as a junior. They rode the bus more than an hour each morning and evening.

The bus drivers devoted their primary attention to driving. The students, in close contact with each other, had very little supervision.

Amanda and Juniper said that, except for them, the girls on the bus accepted harassment from the boys. Amanda said, "They liked the attention. They agreed with what the boys said, "Yeah, I'm fat. Yeah, I'm dumb."

A boy put his arm around Amanda and said, "Hi sweetheart. I really like redheads."

Amanda stamped on his foot. He let go of her. Amanda told him, "If you ever do that again, I'm going to deck you." He left her alone after that.

Two boys in a seat behind Juniper and Amanda pulled Amanda's hair. Juniper turned around and slugged them. They didn't bother Amanda again.

Amanda's and Juniper's reactions to sexual harassment were

effective. I could not advise my daughters not to react with violence. I will never be where they were, needing to deal with sexual harassment quickly and to the best of their ability to avoid escalation into more serious sexual harassment or into violence against them. I support their decisions and actions to protect themselves.

After those first encounters, Amanda and Juniper were largely left out of interactions among students on the bus. They sat in the seat directly behind the driver, because discipline waned as the distance from the driver increased. One driver put boys on one side and girls on the other, which reduced the problems but did not completely solve them.

Gender stereotyping and actions based on stereotyping disturbed Juniper and Amanda and permeated classrooms, halls, and gymnasiums. They said most of the girls seemed to accept most of the stereotyping. Adults at the school also often acted on gender stereotypes. Often, teachers expected boys to lead classroom discussion, and girls allowed that pattern to exist.

“In Physical Education class,” Juniper said, “The boys say, ‘Stand up close and throw the ball easy. She's a girl.’ If they have to hit the ball, or throw any distance, the girls say, ‘I'm just a girl. I can't do that.’” Juniper asked, “How can girls learn to be the best they can be if they give up before they start and if they're encouraged to give up by everyone else's reduced expectations?”

Amanda and Juniper found it particularly offensive that the function of the two sexes for each other in this culture is seen to be romantic love, so that “mere” friendship between a boy and a girl is nearly impossible.

Juniper started to develop a friendship with a boy, but comments from fellow students about “Your girlfriend” scared the boy off, and the friendship died.

In their home schooling, in our lives together, from our religious teachings, Amanda and Juniper had learned that all humans are worthy of respect, with equal power and equal treatment, from the government, from other humans, before God. Our friends, male or female, young or older, treated our daughters with respect. Since Laura and I treated them as equal human beings, our friends also treated them as equal. People who didn't accept them as equal weren't usually our friends for long, because an approach that excluded children from adult occupations and conversations meant we tended to share little common ground.

From their reading, and from what they saw and heard of

the world around them as they grew up, our daughters knew our approach to living, to each other, to education, and to gender was in many ways not typical of the culture, but experiencing the difference on the bus and at school startled them.

They knew the students around them were not completely responsible for what they believed and acted out. They act as they are taught to act. They reflect the culture. If television and movies show a crippled, limited relationship between the sexes, and if the students watch television and movies, they will act out what they have learned. If parents and friends live, communicate, and act in ways that express less value for females than for males, except as possible partners in romantic love, then the students will also express less value and respect for females until something stops them and makes them think through what they live, communicate, and act out.

Juniper and Amanda expected peer pressure to attempt to push them toward change, and they started their public schooling with determination to maintain their values and their individuality. They adapted well to the world as it came at them and as they approached it. They did maintain their values and their individuality.

Amanda returned to home schooling midyear, but sexism around her played only a small part in her decision. Her loss of time to pursue her own interests and her own education meant most to her.

She returned to public school her senior year, and she did well academically and socially. She had several excellent teachers, including a woman who had overcome many gender stereotypes in her own career and taught her students as intelligent individuals. Amanda graduated from public school. She thought that year was time well invested and excellent preparation for college.

While Amanda completed her sophomore year at home, Juniper completed her junior year in public school. She skipped her senior year and started college. She attended the nearby college and commuted. During a vacation, when the campus was nearly deserted and Juniper was home, an unidentified man raped a student.

I read about the rape in the newspaper, and I called the college and checked all security procedures on campus. Juniper and I together covered details of existence like requesting an escort around campus after dark, checking the inside of her car before she got in, and other common sense practices for safety in a sometimes dangerous world.

When Juniper and Amanda and I looked in the library for Naomi Wolf's book, *The Beauty Myth*, an important study of the position of women in our male-dominated consumer culture, we also found *Back Off*, by Martha J. Langelan, a book about effective techniques to end sexual harassment, from verbal harassment to attempted rape. I ordered two copies from the book store and sent them to Juniper and Amanda after they returned to college in Illinois.

The book does not immediately solve all problems. But now that book circulates on campus. From the book and from many other sources, awareness among the students about their right to be free of negative influences from the culture grows. On the small, conservative campus where Amanda and Juniper attend college, students have a Sexual Harassment Education Committee that meets weekly, circulates printed material, and operates a hot line on campus.

Awareness that women need not allow any degree of sexual harassment and that boys and men do a serious disservice to women and to themselves when they participate in any form of harassment increases on campus. Amanda tells me her male friends have given her some of the most sensible advice and staunch support in dealing with sexual harassment. Despite what many of the students see as lack of support from the administration and an unwillingness to admit there is ever a problem, students have formed a women's rape support group on campus.

Our daughters pursue their education. They participate in a surge of awareness of problems in the culture and problems in the institutions of education. By their activities, by their pursuit of education, by their participation in the dissemination of information about the problems they and other students around them see, they attempt to reduce the severity of those problems. They see progress, and through them, I see progress in increasing awareness of problems, and in starting to solve some of those problems.

They also pursue extra curricular activities, maintain high grades, develop friendships, and pursue their own creative desires.

The question that so often concerned Laura, "Are we doing okay at our daughters' education and at raising them?" seems to have a clear answer. They have become adults, and they walk in good directions, with strong, positive values. They have some positive influence on the world around them, and that is what education is about, and that is what life is about, and that is

what love is about.

Now we can say, “Yes. We did okay with education and with life and with love. Now let us celebrate the work we achieved together, the life we have lived and continue to live and the love we built that spreads around us and still continues.”