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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 reading.

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 limiting the number of books checked out. Joann, the bookmobile librarian saved us magazines that would 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 no 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. She'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. If I were doing it again, I would build more ceremonies together, invested with the religious force of the family, of the earth we live on, invested with the religious force of life, to celebrate growing, especially into adulthood.

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.