

I am writing this to support increasing the regulations around homeschooling to help protect those who cannot defend themselves from the types of people who would use it under a misguided veil of freedom that hides a foundation of ignorance, abuse, and pain. Because of their extreme religious convictions, my father and the religious group he chose to latch onto systematically denied me an education in core subjects, which I had to spend a great deal of my adult life making up for.

My personal homeschooling journey began in 4<sup>th</sup> grade in the Midwest. My father joined an extremely anti-government Christian group that consisted of a leader, his 4 children – 3 boys and a girl -, and a few other people. They believed themselves above most others and were very opposed to the children learning a number of the broadly accepted subjects commonly taught in public schools, instead using a remote Christian homeschooling program that was filled with lies, inaccuracies, and fearmongering. They believed that women were inferior to men, and the daughter was kept separate from the boys, and strictly forbidden from having any contact with me, the only non-related young male around.

The first couple of years, my father would drop me off in the mornings at the leader's mobile home where I and the other children sat quietly in the kitchen. We were led to believe that roving bands of CPS agents were always on the prowl looking for delinquent children to thrust them back into The System, and we were not allowed to go outside or even draw the curtains during school hours lest we be seen. Even later when the group lived in an enclosed compound surrounded by a 10ft privacy fence, we were kept in fear of "CPS choppers circling overhead."

Fear was a big topic, and we were taught to be afraid of a lot of things, including the teachers. We were watched over during this period by the leader's wife, a woman from Thailand who did not read English and barely spoke it. Her anger needed no translation, however, and the only thing any of the children really learned was how to be sneaky, how to lie, how to rebel without getting caught.

This scenario only lasted temporarily, however. My undiagnosed ADHD prevented me from ever assimilating to their group, and so I was banished from it. This meant that I was kept isolated while my father worked, under orders to stay at home alone and study every day. For weeks, I would not leave the house or have any contact with anyone besides him, and I was required to perform all the cooking and cleaning for both of us while teaching myself and grading all of my own schoolwork. At the beginning of the school year when the boxes of books and answer keys arrived in the mail from the homeschooling program, I was given both and told to complete the year on my own. "Do the schoolwork, take the tests, and grade it all yourself" were the only instructions I was given.

The final 3 years, I simply copied the answers and submitted them back while not reading any of it. At no point during this period or any others was there any follow-up or confirmation of any sort of learning. I did reveal my cheating eventually to my father to provoke a reaction and to impress upon him how worthless the supposed education I was getting was. The retribution was severe, and even the charade of education ceased after.

I cannot name a single textbook I used, or even a single tangible thing I learned during this

period beyond how to cook. Science books were filled with demonstrably false statements and ludicrous claims, while history books contained distorted, twisted versions of cherry-picked stories. I imagine that math books existed, but I have no memory of any, and social studies included such topics as how the UN was the instrument of the antichrist. We barely learned anything about the English language, much less any other, and the only sex education any of us ever received consisted of, "sex is evil." Mostly, I read a lot of thrift store books about WW2 and early settler life.

I developed a variety of tics and neuroses, and because they didn't believe in doctors, I almost died at 15 years old when Crohn's disease caused me to lose 60lbs in 3 months. Abuse was doled out frequently and liberally for a host of varying reasons and involved being beaten by pieces of wood that had been wrapped in duct tape. Two of the leader's children had been home births and went through unimaginable hardship later on in life simply trying to get basic documentation, like a Social Security number and state ID. All of us had trouble integrating into society, along with a staggering gullibility, poor impulse control, and we all indulged a host of self destructive tendencies that took years of work to overcome.

Upon reaching adulthood and leaving that group, I had to learn how to be a person at the most base levels and how to operate in the world completely on my own, years behind my peers, and every bad decision I made after the fact could've been avoided with better guidance and education. I got my GED on my own at 20 years old solely for employment necessity and the previously untreated health problems prevented me from ever achieving more than a year or so of college.

Opponents of increasing regulations will use the "FREEDOM" rallying cry, as happens so often by those who wish to oppress. They will say that even the smallest level of regulation or restriction is infringing on their rights while completely ignoring the rights of the ones who cannot defend themselves. They rail and cry against any sort of guardrails because they know they fail to meet even the barest standards, and they feel like they deserve to be the special exception to the rule.

Children are not possessions, however, and just the act of having a child does not automatically bestow the right to completely withdraw that child from society and fill its head with lies and fears and false beliefs. We have basic standards of decency and morality and education as a civilization, and preventing the abject abuse and isolation of children should be at the very base of that. Children are not possessions, and every single one has the right to live and learn and experience the world in a full and broad way. I frequently imagine how my life could've turned out had I been allowed to experience and develop even remotely normally. I had one good year on a Little League baseball team and could've really been something if my father had not decided he had the right to destroy our family, thrust me into a cult, isolate me, and deny me my right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of even the most basic education and social development. All that lost potential and promise, sacrificed at the altar of fear and ignorance.

Signed,  
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