

I support homeschooling, but no child should be homeschooled like I was. I was homeschooled from K-12 in Surry, Virginia. My parents followed a strict interpretation of the evangelical Christian faith and, as a result, they wanted to protect me from the outside world – “sex and evolution,” my dad said, when in my twenties I asked about his decision to homeschool me for twelve years under Virginia’s religious exemption statute. James Dobson told him homeschooling was the best educational option available for people like our family, likening it to “private school for poor people.”

However, beyond keeping me away from bad influences, my parents did not have a plan. My mother taught me and my two younger brothers reading and basic math, but neglected to teach us anything further in basic subjects like reading, math, science, and social studies afterwards. This is because, due to their understanding of their faith’s teachings, my parents thought that marathon prayer sessions and studying the Greek words in Bible verses constituted a complete education because “character is more important than what you know.” I was left with gaps in basic knowledge that I had to fill on my own.

People noticed. When a public librarian innocently asked what we did at home, my mother stopped taking us to the public library. I was taught to lie about what I did for school.

We were part of a loosely organized local homeschool group; some used the religious exemption, but many did not; many parents planned a structured school year. No one in these groups challenged my parents to have more organization or planning, although I believe if they had asked for help, they would have received it. My parents did not think they had a problem with education, even though they did not order any books at the beginning of the year and did not teach us typical school subjects. During middle and high school, I attempted to advocate for myself and told my mother which books I wanted her to buy for me. Though she would usually comply, my parents did not help with instruction, and shut down my several tentative attempts to ask for further educational assistance from classes or tutoring outside the home.

How are children raised like this supposed to live on their own? Would you have chosen this for yourself? Homeschooling can be great for children, but the parameters are too wide and children are punished by these gaps in the law.

Signed,
MB