

I was educationally neglected on account of my parents' religious beliefs while being homeschooled in the states of Colorado and Missouri from ages 5-18.

My parents were members of a fundamentalist, anti-government cult associated with the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn when I was a child. We lived in a remote area, off the grid, without identification documents. They believed that sending me to school would invite government interference into our lives and introduce me to dangerous indoctrination, making me vulnerable to governmental control, so they elected to homeschool me using a curriculum that aligned with our religious beliefs. The church subscribed to a strict patriarchal interpretation of the Bible which denied the rights of women to have agency over their own lives. The church also prohibited members from seeking professional health care, choosing instead to call the elders of the church to pray for healing.

School was a source of suffering for me, as I struggled to learn mathematical concepts independently or from the textbook. My mother was my teacher, but she had only a 6th grade education herself, as well as an undiagnosed learning disability, so her efforts to help frequently ended in frustration. As my struggles with mathematics increased, I sought help from my father, who had graduated from high school. Rather than helping me, he ridiculed my struggles and beat me with a leather belt when I displayed the frustration I felt. When I was twelve, my sibling was born and I had to stop my studies to care for a newborn full time while my mother worked day and night to care for our off-the-grid homestead and help my father with his contracting business. When my sibling was old enough to not require constant care, I attempted to resume my school work, however, my father determined that I had "enough education for a girl" and refused to purchase any more curriculum for my use. I baked and sold bread to purchase my own school books, but without anyone to teach me, I was not able to be successful and gave up in dejection.

We never had enough money to buy food or other necessities like shoes or warm clothing. Without access to the sort of services that are standard in school, like food assistance and health screenings, my sibling and I developed health problems, both physically and mentally. My natural vision is 80/20 with severe astigmatism, and without routine vision screenings such as those provided in public schools, no one understood that I was nearly blind until I attempted to get a driver's license at the age of twenty one.

In my family, educational neglect coincided with other forms of abuse. I was always very clumsy as a child and my father used my disability as a reason for abuse— he would hit me when I ran into things, tell me that I was stupid because I could not see an animal across the road or read a street sign, and call me disparaging names when I struggled to tell the time from the wall clock. My sibling struggled with digestive health from birth, likely due to malnutrition and food sensitivities, but instead of understanding that something was wrong with her health, my father

would brutally beat her (once with a section of a 2x4 stud board) for vomiting or having a bathroom accident. She was two years old.

My father also verbally and sexually abused my mother—our nights were filled with terror as my sibling and I heard him assaulting her and her pleading with him to stop. We had nowhere else to go, no one to run to, no one to help.

Had we been in school or if our homeschooling had been monitored in some way, my father's abuse may have been caught and punished. Had we had access to health resources, my sibling may not have struggled with suicidal ideation as a teenager. I went on, as an adult, to get my GED and eventually even a graduate degree, however, my lack of confidence and social skills has made it extremely difficult to become successful in society. Yet, my homeschool story is a successful one. Other homeschooled children I knew from the church have died from easily treated diseases or simple infections because their families were too ignorant to see that the children needed medical care, or because their illnesses were seen as God's punishment for their family's sins.

Signed,  
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