

My siblings and I were severely educationally neglected due to my parents' religious convictions. I was raised from birth in the religion known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I attended public grade school, and because of the isolating nature of the religion that had been imposed on me since birth, I was often a pariah at school because of my beliefs, which caused me to try at all costs to hide the fact that I was a Jehovah's Witness. At the end of the 8th grade, my parents moved to rural Tennessee and began homeschooling me, as they had my two older siblings. Soon, they elected to homeschool my three younger siblings as well.

By the time my parents started homeschooling my three younger siblings, they stopped any attempt to provide a structured education. They instead claimed they were "unschooling," although their definition of unschooling was idiosyncratic. Their choice to "unschool" was religiously motivated because they believed that Armageddon would happen in the near future, and that subjects like math, science, and language arts would be unnecessary for my siblings to learn. The unschooling lacked any kind of structure and consisted mostly of taking walks outside and "reflecting on God's creation." On the rare occasions that they required us to study a book, it was always a religious text published by the Watchtower organization which provided no educational value.

This has a profound effect on my younger siblings' lives. My youngest sister did not learn to read until she was nine. She has never had a friend that was made outside my parents' church, and she still lives with them, suffering from crippling anxiety and depression, unable to get a job due to her severe educational neglect. CPS did not help her, and she is eighteen now so there's nothing that can be done.

In my case, I experienced comprehensive educational neglect under the pretense that I was self-directing my education, and pulled me out of school to homeschool me, like they had done with my two older sisters before me. In the four years I was supposed to have attended high school, I did not receive instruction in any subject. My older sisters had gotten a real homeschool curriculum, but my parents, deciding that was too expensive, opted instead to buy a random assortment of used school books on eBay and told me to read them for credit. My parents did not once check up on my progress, provide me any exams, or mark grades. I was simply to read these textbooks cover to cover, and if I told my parents I had done it, they would mark me with all A's at the end of the year. They asked me at the end of every year what my grades were, and wrote them down and mailed them off to the "umbrella school", run by fellow JW's in our area called New System School.

I was the first of my six siblings who left the church, leaving home with little more than the clothes that were on my back. My parents have not spoken to me in close to ten years. I had never been allowed to drive, never been allowed to have a steady income. I had the equivalent of

an eighth grade education and absolutely no concept of adult social skills. I had to learn how the world worked entirely by myself with the education and emotional intelligence of a twelve year old.

I had always been too scared to reach out for help, because my parents had insulated me in a bubble, telling me that the entire world was against us and that everyone who wasn't part of our church wanted to take me away from Jehovah. If someone had come to check on us when I was a teenager, they would have seen that we weren't being cared for, we weren't being educated, and maybe my younger siblings could have been spared the lifetime of hardship they're certain to face due to the lack of education they've received.

As a whole, the purpose of homeschooling me and my siblings was to isolate us from outside influence that could cause us to stray from their religion, which has a profoundly harmful impact on the lives of myself and my siblings.

Signed,  
SB