

From the beginning, homeschooling, gender roles, and religion were linked in my family. My parents followed a fundamentalist interpretation of the Christian faith. Once I was old enough to realize that my life was different from other kids, my parents constantly referenced God as the reason: "We're homeschooling you because public school is secular and amoral, and we want you to grow up to love Jesus." Whenever my mom worried about our lack of education, as she struggled to juggle her many roles in our family, my dad would console her by saying not to worry and that the most important thing is for our kids to have a strong relationship with God.

Because of my parents' religious beliefs, they wanted a big family and were hesitant to use birth control. By the time I was seventeen, I was the second of six kids. My mom spent all her time cleaning the house, doing laundry, and cooking; she didn't have time to school us, but when she complained to my dad, he refused to help. Gender norms were strictly enforced in my family. Dad worked and earned a paycheck; Mom was supposed to do everything related to the house and children. When she didn't have time to teach me, no one stepped up to take her place.

Throughout my childhood, my parents told me over and over that it was a sin for a woman to work outside the home. Only selfish women chose to make money and buy nice clothes instead of staying home with their children. I wanted to be a good woman, so of course I decided to follow the path they set out for me: I would get married, have babies, and homeschool them. I felt a great apathy about education and college. The only reason for me to be educated was so I could homeschool my own children someday.

As a result of my parents' religious beliefs about gender roles, my education suffered. My mom's biggest role in our family was to please my dad. He was the head of the family, and she was supposed to submit to him. He wanted more children, so my mom gave him more children. Every time she had another baby, she needed more help around the house, and that extra help had to come from her daughters, not her husband. So my education was completely neglected from middle school onward. The most important thing was for my mom to be a submissive, helpful wife to her husband, and for me to one day fulfill the same role for my husband. Education was an extra bonus; my parents were not opposed to educating me, but it was so low on their list of priorities that it almost never happened.

By the time I was eleven, I had two younger siblings in the house, and one of them was a toddler. My mom had no time to school me. She had a college degree and a teaching credential and had done a decent job of teaching me in the elementary years, but now I received no help at all. I don't have a single memory of my mom teaching me anything in middle or high school. She gave me textbooks and expected me to do the work on my own. Because of my undiagnosed ADHD, I couldn't focus on a Biology or Latin textbook without instruction or aid. I gave up at

the start of each book. My parents weren't worried about my lack of education, because I was only going to be a mom.

When I was a senior in high school, my dad sat me down and told me to stop doing half my subjects because my mom needed more help. It was the same pattern as always. My mom would have another baby, struggle to keep up with everything, ask my dad for help, and he would refuse. It was the job of his daughters to help his wife; he would not bother himself with women's work.

When I graduated from high school, I had never completed any middle school or high school science; I had only made it through Algebra 1; for history I read out-of-print books my mom had bought at a used book store, and I never studied anything past the American Revolution. I had never studied a second language, I had never written a paper, and I had never taken a timed test (beyond the SAT).

I actually fared better than some of my other siblings with more severe academic disabilities. I was able to go to college, but my younger sister with dyslexia struggled to finish high school. My only brother, nine years my junior, received completely different treatment. He was not expected to help around the house, and my parents sent him to public school for high school so he could wrestle. When my youngest sister, who also has ADHD, asked to go to public school, my parents said no. My parents had six children and only permitted their one son to attend public school.

Homeschooling can be a blessing or a curse. Parents can be a child's biggest supporters or a child's biggest abusers. No one has ever hurt me like my parents did. I lived a lonely, isolated childhood, where I felt like a second-class citizen because I was a girl. I had no hopes or dreams for the future.

Signed,
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