



The Relaxed Home Schooler®s Newsletter

Nov/Dec, 2014



Coming Up:

[Here is a link to Pat Wesolowski's recent interview with me.](#)

<http://ultimateradioshow.com/relax-and-enjoy-the-ride/>

We will be having a meeting soon to determine interest in a possible new school/resource center in the north Georgia area. If you are in the area, watch our website for an announcement or email Mary at mary.e.hood@gmail.com.

Mary is available to do Relaxed Home Schooling Workshops, talks on Common Core, SAT prep workshops for teens, or workshops or keynote addresses at homeschool conventions. For info, go to our website [URL: http://www.archersforthe lord.org](http://www.archersforthe lord.org) and click on the the "speaker's page" or contact her directly at mary.e.hood@gmail.com

Welcome to all our new readers! Hope we help you to relax and enjoy life at home!

From Mary:

Hello again!

Welcome to the fifth issue of our e-newsletter. This is a replacement for our long-running snail mail newsletter, which started in the early 90s and was shut down in 2006. If you'd like to read the other issues, you can find them on our website, www.archersforthe lord.org.

After working for six years in the real estate business, God has led me to return to working with homeschoolers full time as a ministry. With the increased time, I made the decision to start this newsletter up again. We also have a facebook group if you'd like to join...[relaxedhomeschoolers-ARCHERS](https://www.facebook.com/relaxedhomeschoolers-ARCHERS). If you have trouble finding it, friend me and I'll invite you.

If you have an idea or would like to submit something for our spotlight section, email me at mary.e.hood@gmail.com.

In this issue, I am spotlighting the work of John Holt. Holt influenced my own ideas in several ways at the start of my homeschooling career, although I gradually diverged somewhat from his ideas as my work with my own children gave me some new thoughts of my own.

In this issue, I also write about the differences and similarities between relaxed homeschooling and unschooling. In a recent issue of The Old Schoolhouse Magazine, there was an editorial mistake that read, "relaxed homeschooling is the same as unschooling." (I actually wrote, "relaxed homeschooling is NOT equivalent to unschooling")...So I though it might be time to set the record straight again. Although my oldest son, Sam, was and is an unschooler at heart, I don't consider the two the same, and hope to correct that impression in this issue.

Finally, I'm including a reprint of one of my favorite articles, on how to feel the fear of getting out of our comfort zones and do whatever "it" is, anyway! Hope you enjoy this issue. Feel free to forward it to friends.

So glad you are all here! Please also come and visit us at our website

URL:
<http://archersforthe lord.org>

Also feel free to email me at mary.e.hood@gmail.com

Spotlight On:

John Holt

John Holt (1923-1985) was an American educator, school reformer, writer, speaker, and one of the founders of the modern homeschooling movement. His ideas were a major influence on me at the beginning of my own journey, and I have long wanted to write a biography of him. Maybe I'll still do that someday!

I found Holt fascinating, partly because of the way his ideas changed and unfolded over the years, both educationally and spiritually. During his writing career, Holt was not a professing Christian. Therefore, when reading his works, it is always important to remember that his underlying spiritual beliefs may not have lined up with your own at that time. Nevertheless, he loved and understood children in a way that few people ever have. In my opinion, his books should be required reading for every educator-in-training, including all home educating moms!

Raymond Moore, sometimes called the grandfather of the homeschooling movement, once told me personally that he had corresponded with John over the course of many years, and that they frequently had talks about a wide variety of topics, including Christianity. Dr. Moore told me, "John really always wanted to believe." He also stated that, "The only real educational difference between John and myself is that he never had kids of his own and thought they were perfect. I had kids and know they aren't!"

I also have been given very reliable information that the sister of one of my acquaintances was a nurse who finally led John to take the final step to accepting Christ during his illness. (He died from cancer two years after I started homeschooling.) I certainly hope that's true, because I really want to have a long talk with him someday up in Heaven!

John grew up in New England, and did a stint in the U.S. Navy, where he became convinced that nuclear weapons were a danger that had to be stopped. At that time, he thought that the only way to stop the proliferation was to form a world government. After the Navy, he spent several years working towards that end, but became discouraged and frustrated and quit to become a fifth grade teacher.

While teaching, he noticed that the ten year olds in school were often timid and fearful, while the babies and toddlers he knew were bold and full of curiosity. He himself was, by nature, a curious spectator and student of child behavior. He loved to hang around young children and observe them. From these observations came his earliest books, which won him a place on the national stage as a school reformer. The first of these was "How Children Fail", in 1964, followed by "How Children Learn", a couple of years later.

After several years as a school teacher, Holt began to believe that the schools could not be reformed, because they were exactly as society actually wanted them to be. He began studying the works of several people who had more radical ideas, including George Dennison, Jonathan Kozol, and Ivan Illich, the author of "Deschooling", another book which helped me to form my own philosophy of education.

As he began to speak on these topics, Holt began to get letters from people who told him that they agreed, and had pulled their own children out of the public schools to form small alternative schools. For a few years, he poured his efforts into helping people who were trying to start such schools, which were often referred to as "free schools". However, over time, many of these parents found that the inherent problems of a group of individualistic reformer-types getting together in a group and trying to do everything by consensus were also leading to difficulties. Holt began to suggest that these parents just take their children out and teach them at home!

In 1977, he started a newsletter called "Growing Without Schooling", which continued until shortly after his death. His colleague, Pat Farenga, eventually had to shut down the newsletter due to lack of funds, but has continued to speak and write on similar topics himself.

The only book Holt wrote that specifically addressed homeschooling was "Teach Your Own." While some of this book is now out-of-date, the middle chapters are some of the best I've ever studied at summarizing the needs of children and how best to work with them. Pat revised this book in 2003 and it is still available.

My own personal favorites are "Never Too Late", where he describes his own efforts to learn cello late in life, and "Instead of Education", where he describes programs that might be developed in a cooperative manner, rather than the traditional school structure.

One book of John's, "Escape from Childhood", goes pretty far out on a limb talking about the rights of children, and will not fit with the world view of most Christian parents. I personally found that John's ideas evolved over time, and, like me, he sometimes wrote while he was still thinking, and may have changed his mind later on. In this particular case, I think he just lost it for awhile! Please forgive him for some of the ideas he expressed here. I don't think they really fit with the rest of the man!

John's ideas are often called the forerunner of "unschooling", which is why I included him in this issue where I'm discussing the differences between relaxed homeschooling and unschooling.

Whether you agree with his ideas or not, I strongly recommend that you read some of his work, especially the middle chapters of "Teach Your Own." He also had two books published posthumously. One of these, "Learning all the Time", is also particularly interesting to me. In addition, if you can ever find "How Children Fail", and "How Children Learn", they are very worthwhile reading. I also have most of the back issues of Growing Without Schooling and hope to be able to make them available again soon, if we get a new facility to house our library.

Relaxed Home Schooling Versus Unschooling

Recently, an article I wrote in The Old Schoolhouse Magazine had an editorial mistake in it. I originally wrote, “relaxed homeschooling is NOT equivalent to unschooling...” The editor must have read “is equivalent to”, and changed it to “relaxed homeschooling is the same thing as unschooling. Unfortunately, it was a particularly good article, and is being reprinted all over the place!

Therefore, I once again feel the need to make some distinctions between what I refer to as relaxed home schooling and unschooling. Way, way, back, I once wrote an article called “Can a Christian be an Unschooler?” In this article, I basically said, “yes and no, depending on how you define unschooling.” Pat Farenga, the successor to John Holt, whose work is described in this newsletter, took my article, chopped it to ribbons, and wrote a rebuttal based on half the article! (He actually chopped some sentences in half!) His emasculated version, along with his rebuttal, is still floating around in hyperspace somewhere. (By the way, if anybody has my original article, please, please send it to me! I can’t find mine anywhere.) Incidentally, Pat is actually a friend of mine and knows exactly what I believe. We’ve buried the hatchet long ago, but I have felt like I have been fighting the whole “Is RHS unschooling or NOT” question ever since.

So...once again...here are the differences and similarities as I personally see them. I want to emphasize that, to some extent, this is all about semantics. I’m sure there are some people out there who call themselves unschoolers who are very similar to me. I also know of people who say they are relaxed homeschoolers who look nothing like I did when I was homeschooling! So the following is a very personal discourse on what I see to be the differences.

First, unschooling is a parental philosophy. It is a way of life that the parents have chosen, intending it to be followed by all their children. Relaxed homeschooling, to me, is less of a parental philosophy and more of a mindset. As you already know, I believe the key to being relaxed is to recognize that you are a family, not a school; a dad and head of the household, not a principal, and a mom, not a teacher. You also have individual relationships with your children, not a classroom of students. Recognizing that helps you to set your own goals as a family and get away from the assumptions you have been carrying around from your own days in school.

When we first began, my oldest son used very little in the way of curriculum materials, and spent much of his time outdoors, thinking and digging in the dirt and reading.

As I was writing about him, it probably sounded a lot like we were an unschooling family. However, when my middle son came along, he was very structured. If you had met him you wouldn’t have thought I was relaxed at all! If I didn’t give him a schedule, he made up his own. He asked for money to purchase workbooks; he arranged his books by the Dewey Decimal System, and he asked me to teach him how to grade so he could grade his own work!

As usual, I learned much from my kids. From Dan, I learned that each child learns differently, and that I couldn’t expect Sam and Dan to do things the same and still be willing learners. (From here on I’ll use US and RHS to save space.)

One of the biggest similarities between US and RHS is the emphasis on the importance of the individual taking responsibility for his or her own learning. Greg Harris used to call this “delight-directed learning”. However, I believe that in RHS, there is more emphasis than in US on the parental role. In particular, I tend to emphasize an underlying structure to the household, and to help parents learn to set goals for their children.

As the children get older, I think it is also important that they set their own goals, and that parents work with their older children in a cooperative manner. One major difference I see between US and RHS is that unschoolers tend to continue a laid-back lifestyle all the way through, whereas RHS tend to get a little more structured as the high school years approach. However, unlike traditional schools, RHS families tend to recognize the individual needs of the students, and still give leeway for an untraditional approach to subject matter, or perhaps allow certain subjects to fall by the wayside when students really see no need for them in their lives.

Unschooling families come from many walks of life, and those with Christian beliefs are certainly apt to be more like a typical RHS family than those who have a different underlying world view. Some secular unschoolers I’ve known have very lax disciplinary standards. The kids are sometimes allowed to do pretty much whatever they want, and even call their parents by their first names! However, there are also Christian unschoolers, whose underlying structures and beliefs may be very similar to my own.

What we all seem to share is a disdain for the typical classroom environment, a basic dislike of purchased curriculum packages, and a desire to experiment more with a family-based way of living, that recognizes the individuality of our children. As homeschoolers, almost all of us like to challenge the educational establishment and find our own way of doing business. So in some ways, we may all be much more similar than different! To learn more about unschooling, check out the books I’ve listed in the article on John Holt. To learn more about my ideas of RHS, look for my resources available on our website.

From the Archives:

Feeling the Fear, Following the Thread, By M. Hood, Ph.D.

Excerpted from Real Authentic Women (RAW), Fall '09

Five years ago, I started a new path, becoming a real estate appraiser. Although I have recently stopped appraising, I learned a lot from that whole experience. This article was written when I was just breaking out of my comfort zone and feeling a lot of fear:

When was the last time you did something that was seriously out of your comfort zone? I'm there right now! Two days ago, I was faced with something that scared me senseless. It may seem silly to some of you, but I have a deep rooted fear of getting into trouble. My supervisor told me to go out and get some pictures of "comps"...houses to use for comparison purposes when determining value. Sounds easy, right? Not for me!

When I go out on an appraisal appointment, I have the time to be courteous, to make an appointment, and to greet the client at the door. When I take pictures of comps, I have to pull up in front of someone's house, take a picture, and then screech my tires getting away again before someone comes out with a shotgun or sics their dogs on me. I found so many ways to procrastinate it wasn't funny.

First, I made some cute little cardboard cutouts to hang on the mailbox explaining who I was. Then I went to Office Max and bought a credential holder. Then I went on-line to get directions, and, of course, detoured to make sure I didn't have any new emails. Then I had to get gas. All of this sounds very productive and laudable, except that I was doing everything except actually go out and take the pictures!

Finally, I had to come to grips with the situation. I either had to take the pictures or quit, and I had too much money invested already to do so. So I had to feel the fear and do it anyway. I started talking myself through it..."baby steps", like in the movie "What About Bob?" Baby stepping to drive to the first neighborhood...baby stepping to take the picture...baby stepping back to the car without putting the cute cardboard cutouts on the mailbox...hitting the gas pedal and getting the heck out of there.

Eventually I got all the pictures and wound up at home, where I took my dog and went for a walk at the predictable state park, heaving a sigh of relief. I started thinking, though. What if I hadn't been at that park every day for the past three years? Would I be out of my comfort zone there? Would I be worried about snakes and being alone on a path with imaginary bad guys lurking?

There's a lesson to be learned here by every mother of young children or teens. So many things we once feared are now commonplace to us. Reading a book. Doing simple arithmetic. Picking up the phone to make a call. Writing an essay. Taking an SAT test. Filling out a college application. Applying for a job. We accuse our kids of procrastinating, or not caring, when most of the time, they are really just frozen in the headlights, like a deer. It is hard to do something when you are afraid of it! What if the person on the other end of the phone is mean to us? What if we don't get the job? What if our essay and SAT score aren't good enough to get into college? What if we fail?

The problem here is not only that we fail to recognize the fear that is preventing our children from succeeding, but in many cases, we have never stopped to teach them that there are steps to take to overcome the fear. You can help them role play, you can talk to them about your own failures and reassure them that they are a part of life. In the end, though, there is only one way to overcome procrastination and fear. As Winston Churchill said, "The only thing to fear is fear itself." The Bible tells us, "Fear not, for I am with you." At some point, you simply have to walk boldly into the unknown, realizing that even if others think you are foolish for being afraid, you have to embrace your emotions before you can overcome them.



All of Mary's talks are now also available as MP3s!