

Just a moment ago I stood in the Patrick Henry Library Study center surveying the books that had been discarded and dumped into the book sale: 50 cents for paperbacks, a dollar for hard covers. I thought perhaps I could analyze our homeschooled population by what they disdained to read. I chuckled at *How to Survive Your Teen's Pregnancy* and *Real World 101*. The members of our population know little about pregnant teens, and certainly don't plan to have any themselves (who does?), and in our paradise of bricks and columns, bards and ballrooms, the real world does sometimes seem a disinteresting matter.

I have lived on both sides of the homeschool—public school divide. My parents stopped homeschooling me before the second grade, and I received the rest of my education in the public school. Because I lived near a community of homeschoolers, they became my dearest friends. From homeschoolers I learned to climb fences, wear costumes, be kind, share the gospel, cherish the family, open the home and celebrate everybody. In a sense they lived in a small world because they had chosen to stay home, and in staying home had chosen exclusion from the public halls of my high school. But as the saying goes, though their houses were small God knew where they lived.

I treasured my public school as a mission field. I would raise my sweaty hand in class and string together eloquent arguments for truth. I befriended the unlovable on the school bus. My first claustrophobic love affair eked itself out in anonymity within the walls of my classrooms – an embarrassing life experience I wouldn't trade for all of China's tea or Turkey's turkeys. Though I came home every day exhausted, I genuinely liked school.

I remained ambivalent about homeschooling. I saw that homeschooling, done well, becomes a mission field of its own; but I still held my homeschooled friends in some contempt for failing to be as socially aware as I considered myself to be. I combined my junior and senior years of high school, claiming that once I graduated I would attain a truer education. Little did I know.

I broke boldly backward and wore a skirt like my homeschooled friends every day of my senior year. Don't ask me what everybody thought - the chain-smoking underdogs, the drunken car-flipping football stars, the band geeks. I certainly never asked them and they certainly never told me. I was convinced, largely because of my homeschooled friends, that the point of life is not success, attainment or popularity. It is raising a family and achieving an education for the heart.

I remember the first time I set foot in the Patrick Henry dining hall as a prospective student, with Rachel Heflin (Government, 2010) as my tour guide. As the students bustled around I asked, "Isn't there a divide between the homeschooled and public schooled here?"

"It makes less of a difference than you think," said Rachel. I felt her words sharply, and have thought often of them since.

Like many of the girls in my wing, I spent the beginning of my educated life crying on the basement steps over an A Beka math book. Unlike them, I understand deeper than my bones that the worst thing about public school isn't Evolution; it's that you want to be loved, and no one really loves you. But God has called us all to various crucibles, and I cannot complain of that.

One of the girls in my wing has a cultural alacrity quite different than the kind I learned in school, where girls have perfect hair and take out loans for prom dresses. Her chief influences, her mother, father and brothers, imbued her with a deep prayerfulness and Biblical literacy that bleeds from her every remark. From her I have learned to pray aloud in all places – and sometimes do it by mistake.

The homeschoolers here have had opportunity and courage to do things we think only adults can do. They have written books and excelled in impressive internships even before arriving for orientation. I hardly know the treasure I encounter when I walk into the cafeteria.

I enjoy the PHC's 80% homeschooled statistic most when I sit on airplanes with strangers. It captures their imaginations that so many have learned at home. I answer their befuddlement with the good news that the homeschoolers of Patrick Henry College have provided an environment in which I could really flourish for the first time. In coming to college my creativity skyrocketed. I found I could draw, paint, dance, whistle and run. Having come into this culture of kindness and value for truth and humanity, I paint prolifically now. Though in high school I finished every race next to last, I can now sprint like a jackrabbit. God has set this lonely person in a family. This body of homeschoolers knows truth that sets them free. Their truth frees me, too.

In my estimation the most negative way homeschooling has affected this college has been the insularity of its students. We find it easy to remain in our sequestered world. As I walked tonight along on our sidewalk I heard roaring applause at an athletic event at the Purcellville high school down the street. I thought, *if only I could get to those people now – go back to a high school, I would spread my brand-new freedom by replacing contempt with kindness.* If

only I had had these Patrick Henry allies on the school bus and in the classroom. If only we knew a few more pregnant teenagers.

That said, I expect my transition into the next phase of my life will only be improved by my association with homeschoolers. I am certain the Patrick Henry network of students will be indispensable to me.