

A Gracious Space

☞ Daily reflections to sustain your homeschooling commitment ☞

Julie Bogart





A Gracious Space: Spring Edition

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Spring: A Gracious Space

Preface

A Gracious Space is a collection of thoughts and reflections on home education drawn from personal experience and the lives of thousands of Brave Writer families. The spring collection completes the year's trilogy of daily readings. As you wind up your school year, you'll want to finish strong! This volume supports that aspiration and is meant to help you follow through on your best intentions for your family and homeschool.

All of us seek support—whether in the form of in-person cooperatives or online communities. This series of daily readings is drawn from the daily posts I've shared on the Brave Writer Facebook page. This second volume has 50 entries for spring. Pair one per day with a cup of tea or coffee, and remind yourself of your values and your value. Each entry is accompanied by a comment from a parent like you and a daily sustaining thought. As you move through your day, return to the thought and see if you can make it a reality, one day at a time. Progress is the goal, not perfection.

We like to say in Brave Writer that the homeschooling year goes something like this: Fall—Classical Education, Winter—Charlotte Mason, Spring—Unschooling!

That's a little how it can feel—all that strong, orderly intention at the start of the year slips into relaxed, less accountable schoolwork by year's end. Yet spring is wonderful for precisely this reason! As the weather warms up, you'll all want to get outside to take walks, plant seeds, or kick a soccer ball. It's a great time of year to learn to draw or paint, to do those cool science experiments on the back deck, or to take a field trip to the historical sites in your own city. Take advantage of this shift in energy. Don't fight it! It's a gift. You're all ready for a change of pace. Fall will be here soon enough with its sleek objectives and stiff new book spines. Spring offers you a spring in your homeschool's step. Oblige it!

The topics included in this volume cover a range of principles and practices that apply to any homeschooling family. Feel free to read them a day at a time, or in a rush all at once. You might also find these readings useful at homeschool support group meetings. Read an entry as your meeting begins in order to give parents a perspective to consider for discussion or consolation.

The feedback from the parents who've enjoyed volumes Fall and Winter has given me great satisfaction. It's wonderful to hear how homeschooling families like yours are becoming brave enough to have a homeschool that looks just like them! You've nearly made it through another year. Congratulations! Enjoy these last weeks—in bare feet, with cool breezes blowing across your cheeks.

If you need more support on the journey, feel free to check out the homeschool coaching and mentoring program I offer at: <http://coachjuliebogart.com>. The Homeschool Alliance is designed to give you additional support and help you explore your vision to tailor-make your homeschool.

Enjoy this volume!

Keep going.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Bogart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Day 1

Be Interested in Your Child's Thinking

Be more interested in the thinking your child does than the thoughts he or she shares.

For that matter, we might try this approach with the adults in our lives too! When someone shares a strong opinion—even when unsubstantiated by facts and data—it's easy to feel that it is your obligation to enlighten said person with the “truth” —the truth that has eluded them until they happened upon your smarter, more capable mind.

A child is necessarily younger and less experienced with the world than you are, so their opinions will come from a different (more limited) space. But those conclusions and thoughts are no less logical to the child, no less important, no less “true” in his or her mind's eye.

I don't know anyone who has kept every opinion formed at age ten throughout the rest of life. Kids, teens, young adults, heck OLD adults, routinely revise their notions of what is true, right, and good all the time, as they add experiences, information, and relationships to their lives. Our job as parents isn't to “safeguard” a

particular set of ideas or beliefs (no matter how much we may hope that our kids will adopt a particular set).

Our job is to value cognitive processes that show our kids are learning to reflect on their thinking. We don't do this to manipulate our kids or anyone else into adopting our way of thinking. We do it to enhance the powers of thought that our kids are exhibiting.

Example.

When Johannah first became interested in animal rights, she wanted to find a way to make a difference. For her, that meant adopting veganism as her lifestyle. It would have been easy to forbid it (since I had to cook for six meat-lovers in the family and her choice would be inconvenient) or to combat it with my experiences (I grew up vegetarian and I “knew” that she wouldn't want to be one forever) or to rebut it with my own set of facts about health.

But what I could see in her commitment wasn't an opinion about animal rights nearly as much as it was an expression of how she “took in” impacting information and then applied it to her life. She was showing me that when she took something seriously, she would make a corresponding choice to back it with her actions! What an amazing development in a young person—to not just rant about ideas, but to put into practice a highly inconvenient lifestyle choice to back up her convictions.

As a result, our family accommodated this choice. In fact, two more kids chose to become vegans as a result of watching their sister live out this commitment. We had lots of discussions about how we make commitments and to what causes. It was not easy for my three vegans to understand my choice to not be vegan, for instance. Just my own lifestyle provided them with a chance to learn how to peacefully co-exist with difference—different experiences, thoughts, choices, and facts.

Today, only one of the three is still vegan. They have their new reasons for why they live differently now. These new choices show growth in how they identify nuance in their commitments and what they believe. As I suspected, their ideas morphed and grew just like mine have over a lifetime.

When our kids become passionate about a belief, or when they are exploring ideas that may even seem uncomfortable to us, this is a chance to be supportive of the cognitive development happening right before our eyes! It's a wonderful thing to see a mind choose to think independently of the family culture—to branch out to find information, ideas, and commitments all their own. It doesn't mean our kids will stay with these ideas for good. Lord knows most of us shift identities and beliefs again and again throughout our lives.

Rather, our children, teens, young adults are doing the hard work of becoming—becoming people who know how to think for themselves, using the resources,

experiences, and reasoning skills available at that stage in the journey.

All we have to do is buy soy milk, hummus, and Earth Balance margarine, while listening intently to the passionate plea to end violence against animals.

Quote of the day

We have a saying in our house: accept all realities.

Jill Mason Blake

Sustaining thought

Encourage your children's thinking and you will be supporting their growth as thinking individuals.

Day 2

Be Kind, Be Gentle

I spent too much time today reading accounts of child abuse in homeschooling families. I couldn't stop. It was like watching train wreck after train wreck in slow, horrible, inevitable motion. I didn't want to keep reading; I couldn't stop reading.

The dirty little secret in home education is how much control and anger get directed at our sweet young kids (and awkward fledgling teens) in the name of “helping” them to become self-disciplined models of character and academic achievement. Be warned: A habit of hardness leaves lasting scars.

Certainly plenty of parents are the garden variety that offer big love and abundant support mixed with the occasional exasperated outburst and the daily hand-wringing (sometimes turned lecture) about how to ensure a successful education and smooth transition to adulthood—family jostling and bumping into each other as they make their way through the “we all live together” years.

But some of us bring that little bit extra—that zing, that pop, that overzealous, over-functioning rigidity to our homeschools. We scream, we shame, we blame, we

demean, we punish, we prophesy doom, and we herald the end of the world. And sometimes we even succumb to abuse—physical and verbal—in the name of love, in the name of homeschool, in the name of our ideology.

Today I want to say: Shhhhhhhh.

Let it go.

Let your children be children. Let your teens struggle to emerge. Let yourself off the hook.

You don't owe the world a model family. You don't have to get it right. Neither do your kids. Everyone gets better at growing up over time—including you, the parent.

Be the one who stands for kindness in your family. Be remembered for your gentleness. Wait an extra hour before acting and reacting.

Remember the kindness of your parents or significant adult caregiver—the standout memories that helped you through childhood. Be that person for your children. And if you need it: get help. Today's a great day to heal, to start over.

Your kids deserve peace, and so do you.

Quote of the day

“Be remembered for your gentleness.” I love that. I never had that person in my childhood, so learning to be that is foreign and difficult.

Heather Winterbottom

Sustaining thought

Your gentleness will be remembered long after homeschooling is over and your children have gone on to live their adult lives.

Day 3

“I Cannot Give What I Do Not Have.”

I have one of those calendars with useful thoughts for daily reflection. Today’s was a doozy: “I cannot give what I do not have.”

My motto is more like, “I will give, give, give, until I do not have, then I will buckle and cave to your pressure, and give again, until I cry.”

Home education, parenting, marriage—big hunking depleters! Then the family comes back for that little bit more—and I’m digging through the couch cushions for any spare emotional change.

Daily family life is relentless. No scheduled recess, no breaks—heck no sleep! Yet we’re supposed to be:

- Pinterest-level creative,
- unschool-level relaxed and trusting,
- classical-education-level dedicated,
- weekly-therapist-level emotionally healthy, and
- homeschool-mom-level sex kitten (which means you might wash your face and brush your teeth before bed).

If it's true that I cannot give what I do not have, what is it that I am giving when I am totally out—spent, done, exhausted, blank, empty?

I thought about that this morning. I'm no longer giving. I'm extorting—I'm taking energy from what would be my own interests and putting it towards the interests of others. Over time, I go into debt to myself and eventually, bankrupt myself (if I don't pay attention).

Bankruptcy looks like breakdowns, the blahs, depression, loss of joy, low energy, fatigue, craving sweets, needing space, resentment, fear, anger, detachment, uncertainty about what I like and don't like.

We owe it to ourselves and our families to pull energy-creators into our lives. It is not selfish, it's not off-topic, it's not a distraction, it's not too time consuming. In fact, if you home educate, you have a moral obligation to keep growing for your own sake. You are your children's primary role model of what it means to be an adult. Your kids need to see you BE an adult in your own right (apart from parenting) so they know to what they aspire. Yes, they will want to parent (most likely), but each of us has a unique contribution to make as an adult outside the family, too.

When you take the time (necessary time—that will not be squeezed in around the edges but will be explored smack dab in the center of your homeschooling day) to be that adult, your kids catch the spirit of adventure that adult life can be!

Meanwhile, *you* expand your brain, refresh your eyes, stimulate your imagination, amaze yourself with your creativity, and use your body for good! You deposit insight, good feeling, pride, optimism, and satisfaction into your emotional bank.

When your kids come running to you with all their needs, you literally have a fat wallet of ‘happy’ to draw from! You’ll be throwing dolla-dolla bills at your kids, because you will feel topped up with energy from your own rich explorations.

You want to know more about knitting? Knit. Even ten minutes a day will change your life.

You miss running? Run. Get a running stroller. Or find a running partner and take turns watching the kids in the playground while you each run a few miles.

You need to expand your brain? Sign up for a MOOC or start grad school one class at a time or read through the classics for yourself.

Your house feels oppressive, tiny, cluttered, and dark? Take it one room at a time and peel wallpaper, paint, add artwork, declutter one drawer per day.

You want time with friends? *Get it!* It is essential to be with other adults. Involve babysitters or spouses and get out of the house, dressing up, laughing, and talking. Even once a quarter is better than nothing.

You deserve to live your adult life in addition to home educating and spouse-ing. In fact, you must. It's how you stock your emotional tank and your mental resources to help you be all those people who clutter your head with their perfections.

If you are giving what you do not have, go get some.

“Get to give, to get to give.” (A wise man once said.)

It's a dance. Learn the steps.

Quote of the day

Thank you. I was nearly suicidal before I came to realize that 'self-care' is my #1 responsibility (and not anyone else's job). It is the OPPOSITE of what it feels like: selfish. Without self-care I am not well enough to GIVE to anyone else.

Alicia Gurnee

Sustaining thought

Take care of yourself first so you can give to those you love.

Day 4

Focus on the Child, Not the Project

I want to let you in on the fruit of a lot of late night reading and middle-of-the-night insomnia. The question pawing at me like a nocturnal kitten: What works in parenting? I'm plumb worn out from the sad accounts of kids who are clearly bright, sharp adults who rendered the verdict on their childhoods: thumbs down.

I know that we parents come into the task completely green. Sure, we were parented, but we rarely feel qualified to be parents on that basis alone. We head off to websites and books, retreats and conferences, looking for models that will ensure that *our* children will have good lives and grow up to be responsible, cheerful people. We want guarantees, because life is fraught with chaos and surprises (both welcome and unwelcome).

We trust experts and friends and religious leaders and therapists and anyone who seems authoritative and successful in their own right. We trust methods untested. We hope we are doing right by our kids.

What I am starting to see, though, is this odd trajectory. The kids who claim to have had happy childhoods were not their parents' projects. Rather, the children who grow up to be successful, happy adults are the ones whose projects were absorbing to their parents.

See what I did there?

In other words, if you focus more on the stuff that you and your kids care about (the big wide world of learning—books, birds, boats, Beowulf, beauty, bobcats, Broadway, battles, buoyancy, bodies, baked goods, Barbies, Bilbo—and those are just some of the subjects starting with the letter ‘B!’), you will create a much more bonded relationship with your children and they will learn how to be competent adults. All the character training you impose, expect, exact, and create through whatever parenting method you choose can never result in the kind of child, and eventual adult, that you and they truly want.

As it turns out, focusing on how to parent your child is less powerful than joining your child in the shared adventure of living. In the end, what leaves the best impression on your kids is your hearty, enthusiastic participation in the stuff of life—and sharing those experiences with them as though they are welcome and a constitutive part of your own experience!

Some of that exploration will be parent led, some of it will be child led, but all of it will be experienced with wide-eyed wonder, a lack of judgment (no more, “Does Minecraft really count?” “Are Barbies dangerous?”), and an investment of the time that really matters, not the time that could go to other stuff like chores, bedtimes, math pages, and baths.

Our homeschools thrive when learning is what we care about more than parenting. Ironically, being a good parent gets tossed into the bargain, when we do. Punishment, teaching responsibility, lectures about character, holding kids accountable to adult standards of behavior—these don't seem to produce the results we think they will.

But jumping into the middle of an adventure—reading, playing a video game, building a bonfire, hiking, calculating to produce a quilt, joining a dance company, visiting the zoo every week, playing with words, baking cookies, acting out scenes from Shakespeare—these do more to “parent” your kids than you realize.

Go forth and be interested in life. Bring your kids along. They'll thank you for it when they get older.

Quote of the day

I've been struggling. This is so perfect. Simple is best. Real life is best. Thank you.

Kelly Rae Nolan Morgenweck

Sustaining thought

Share your interest in life—and spark that interest in your kids—and you'll all be the richer and happier for it.

Day 5

Once They Catch On, Look Out!

“My kids are getting it!” I’m seeing this theme come through on Facebook, in email, and during phone calls. What are they getting? That what is going on inside (their mind life) deserves a home on paper.

As parents hear their children’s thoughts expressed in oral language and help those thoughts get to paper, more and more kids take the risk to cut out the parent-step and try it for themselves.

It’s crazy, really. We spend all this time explaining how important writing is, we tell them to follow X model or imitate Aesop or just write three lines, and they show us their sad, uncooperative faces instead. The brilliance of their quirky personalities is hidden behind attempts to sound like someone else. Everyone is demoralized.

Yet if we flip the script—start hearing what our kids are saying in that spontaneous not-school moment, jot down what they say out of our own enthusiasm to preserve the insight, thought, joke, or snatch of story—they perk up.

This is what you wanted me to write? is the thought.
You think what I have to say is important enough to
write on paper? is the next thought.

Young children, especially, will respond with, “Well
in that case” behaviors. They will scratch images and
misspelled words onto sheets of paper trying to impress
you again! You will be impressed. This child who “didn’t
know what to write” suddenly has things to say—on paper!

The spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the
words will seem so much less important (and rightly so)
when you see the child taking such initiative. Your only
task is to fan the flame! Enthuse, supply cool writing
utensils, create little booklets (paper folded in half,
stapled between a sheet of construction paper), and *read*
the results aloud to the child and anyone else in the
family who will listen.

The momentum this process creates is entirely
different than required writing at a desk every day.

A couple necessary caveats:

1. For reluctant writers who don’t trust you (because
they feel the weight of pressure coming from you),
adopt a bored gaze (this is for parents whose kids
get suspicious when they effuse too much). When
you hear them expressing, show enthusiasm and jot
it down. But when they write on their own, simply
acknowledge it matter-of-factly and then ask hours
later if you can read it. Ask plainly without over-
stating how proud you are so there is room for

this child to enthuse or even dislike his own work. Then, when you do read it, praise the content by engaging it—“I love how the princess gets out of trouble” or “I didn’t know that about amphibians.”

2. Writing programs that teach kids to copy other writers (imitation) sometimes stunt the writing voice. Initially your young writer may look like he or she is imitating a style more than showing his or her natural writing voice. Time will heal this, the more you support and encourage the natural speaking voice to show up on paper by capturing and recording it.
3. Pictures are writing too! Any attempt to symbolize language is writing. So if a child is writing “picture books,” without words, affirm the child as writer! As we know, there are loads of wordless books on the market (we find them in libraries). Ask your child to “read” the book back to you. You’ll discover so much thought life and language happening in those pictures. As the child gains skill, words will begin to emerge too.
4. Passion for writing comes in bursts. It’s a creative activity. A child may write sixteen little books in a month and then nothing for six months. Do not treat writing like an onerous task. Treat it like the creative outlet that it is! You can always gin up more enthusiasm for writing by changing the setting (write somewhere else, use new utensils, add brownies, change the time of day to write).

5. Read what they write during the read aloud time. Put the finished products in the library basket and read them each day. Most kids love this! Those who don't, honor their choice to not be read aloud.

Above all: value what your kids express and get some of it into writing.

Quote of the day

Thank you for sharing! I have found this method to be true with nearly any subject! It is way more fun and inviting.

Heidi Marie Gillihan

Sustaining thought

Discover the writer within your child and his or her true voice by encouraging self-expression on topics of interest and putting those words on paper.



If you enjoyed these first five essays from *A Gracious Space: Spring*, you can purchase the entire book of essays (50 in all) from Brave Writer!

Visit our store: BraveWriter.com/gsspring

A Gracious Space, the series, comes in three volumes: one for Fall, one for Winter, and one for Spring. You can purchase them in digital format (to be read on Kindle or smart phone) or in trade paperback from Amazon.

Kindle Format: \$9.95

Paperback: 14.95

Join Julie Bogart in the Homeschool Alliance (a coaching community for home educators) for readings from *A Gracious Space: Spring*. Learn more about the Alliance here: coachjuliebogart.com.



If you enjoyed this volume, you'll love Julie Bogart's homeschool coaching and mentoring program: The Homeschool Alliance. Here's what parents have to say about it:

"The HSA has provided a wonderful safety net for this new-to-homeschooling family. Making the leap to homeschooling was nerve-racking for me, especially without a strong homeschool community in my area. This community has offered such a wealth of wisdom and experience that I've had the support to navigate some of the twists and bump of the first months of homeschooling. Julie is an active presence within the HSA, providing a constant stream of wisdom and perspective. I've copied bits and pieces of what's been shared in the HSA onto post-it notes that dot the insides of my kitchen cabinets, keeping me centered and goal-oriented. I've both expanded and refined my own home education philosophy and priorities through the Master Class in Learning. The Just One Thing thread provides me the accountability and inspiration to keep homeschooling interesting. I'd enthusiastically recommend the HSA to all new home educators."

Amy Collier

"The HSA and Julie have been a great resource for fine tuning my philosophy of homeschooling and parenting. Often I've found myself lost in the logistics of schedules, lesson planning, and curricula purchases that I have almost lost the original intent. These past two and half months I've been able to really focus on the essentials of learning as a family, and finding a more organic rhythm that has nothing to do with a curricula publisher's arbitrary schedule. What Brave Writer has done to give freedom to language arts, the HSA has for all of family life. I love that it is not set up in a forum format. I can just simply read and reflect, or interact with other members as much as I like. After spending time on the site, I feel as though I've accomplished a task rather than simply lost track of time."

Rebekah Byson

For more information about how you can get the support you need in homeschool, check out the website for *The Homeschool Alliance*:
<http://coachjuliebogart.com/>

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