



S4E2: 55 Things I Did NOT Do as a Homeschooler

Julie Bogart

Welcome to season four of the [Brave Writer Podcast](#): A Brave Writer's Life in Brief [theme music plays]. I'm Julie Bogart your host. This season we are releasing, via audio, our most popular YouTube broadcasts. We're so excited that you can now listen to these on audio while you're running, driving in the car, or folding laundry. We will also sprinkle throughout this season original content. Interviews with people I think are compelling to listen to.

If you get a chance, please help us out by leaving a review at iTunes [now Apple Podcasts] or Stitcher or wherever you listen to Brave Writer's podcast. We really appreciate it. It helps us get the word out and it also gratifies all the people behind the scenes who work so hard to bring these to you for free. And now, let's get going with this episode [theme music plays].

For those of you who don't know, I have five children who are grown. My oldest is 28 and my youngest is 19. The 28 year old Noah lives here in Cincinnati and he is in school for computer programming. My 26 year old is getting ready to go to South America to study Spanish for a whole year. My third child is in Law School at Columbia Law. And then I've got a son who's at St. John's College in Maryland and a daughter at University of Pittsburgh.

Let's just dive in, shall we? Okay. I'm going to shake out my arms [laughs] screw up my courage and share with you all the things I didn't do that I thought at some point in time, I should've done or beat myself up for not doing. Okay?

What you need to know about my children is I'm proud of them. I think they've turned out great. And they have all kinds of opinions about various junctures in the homeschooling journey. And in fact, I've even had kids who told me that they didn't want to be homeschooled and they wish they hadn't been and now as adults have come back and seen it as a really valuable life decision that I made on their behalf. And isn't that the truth? At the beginning, we

make the decision for them to be homeschooled. They don't get to decide! They're victims of their parents' choices. And it's important to honor and respect that feeling that they have of not having been given a choice. That's one of the ways that we ensure a good relationship. So let's go. Let's read the stuff I didn't do.

Number 1: I never used a 15-minute increment schedule with an official lunch time.

Number 2: I didn't use a schedule except for one three-month period which resulted in Noah hating his life. Noah woke up at the end of three months saying, "Mom, I hate my life. I have nothing to look forward to." That's because he was on my book schedule with the highlighters and all the subjects broken into daytime responsibilities. So we did that for three months, never went back to it.

Number 3: We moved to Ohio from California promising our children that we would introduce them to historical sites in the United States. Did we? No. We never went to DC. I still have never been to Washington DC. We never made it to Gettysburg or any other historical site that was more than about 50 miles away from Cincinnati.

Number 4: I never provided a desk to a single child. None of our children had desks. Jacob at one point was frustrated for not having a desk and he got a table [laughs].

Number 5: I didn't ever plan my year over the summer. Ever. We also never did school over the summer. Ever. Even though I always said in the spring, "We're going to keep doing some school in the summer." We never did.

Number 6: I changed visions of homeschool every year and sometimes more than once in a year. In other words, each year I re-evaluated what we were doing and I chased the bright shiny object called "Oh, here's a new vision!" I have since realized that everybody re-evaluates every year. In fact, one of my Brave Writer sayings is "We re-invent homeschool every year." And that's okay! Being bored, being attracted to something new, are perfectly good reasons for switching. Alright, let's see.

Number 7: I started and abandoned radical unschooling. I disoriented my children and I made two of them pretty unhappy because they liked have a stack of things to do each day. The other three liked the unschooling idea but when we put it all together with all five, it fell apart.

Number 8: I never followed the four-year history cycle perfectly or correctly. As a matter of fact, this is yet another one of my points and its number 11 but we'll come back to it, we got stuck in Ancient Greece for over a year and never made it all the way through the Renaissance. Even though there were books that were supposed to be gotten through. We got into Ancient Greece, no one wanted to leave, and we were trapped there for over a year.

Number 9: I never planned a single writing assignment. And I just want you to take that in. I am the head of Brave Writer [laughs]. We never planned a single writing assignment. Now, partly because I'm pretty good at the writing thing. So I was able to draw on my inspiration and we'll talk about that at the end. But I just want you to hear that. It counts even if you didn't plan it in advance. And I never planned them. Next.

Number 10: We did not do a [Friday Freewrite](#) every single week. Even though that's in the Brave Writer lifestyle. We didn't do one every week. In fact there was probably a year where we did them very rarely. Noah hated the timer. Freewriting is all about the timer. So Noah eventually opted out. He didn't like it. That's okay! What else?

Number 12: I'm skipping to 12 because we did 11, which is that we got stuck in Ancient Greece. Number 12: I never taught modern American history to anyone. Not in elementary school, not in junior high school, and not in high school. In fact, the only exposure my kids had to modern American history was through documentaries that I was watching because of grad school. And we'll get to—and yes there it is.

Number 13: I traumatized Caitrin with those documentaries. She was too young for them! I had no idea. So that's something that I did.

Number 14: Even in my most ardent Charlotte Mason years, I never read *Plutarch's Lives* or *The Fairy Books* or *Land's Shakespeare* or most of the Charlotte Mason living literature that you will find online in all of the booklists that everyone's supposed to read.

Number 15: We hated—HATED—*A Child's History of the World*. We hated it. Ooga booga? Really? Is that how we want to think about our cave ancestors? This is why I wanted to update Charlotte Mason because why are we reading that stuff? It was just not right for us.

Number 16: Ready? I never followed a Sonlight schedule or completed a single Sonlight writing assignment. So I never did any of the Sonlight schedules. In fact, I tried to do that during that three month that killed my child and that's when I said "never again." So we never did that. And all their writing assignments, I didn't like. So I never did a single one.

Number 17: Okay here's a big truth bomb: I never used a consistent, real math program. I'm admitting the biggest truth of all. I had no money and I didn't like math so I was unwilling to invest money in math. That sounds really, really horrible. So we used Miquon Math which was paper—you know, those little work books. And we used the Keys Two series in junior high. And that's about it.

Literally I think someone loaned me a Horizons textbook at some point and my kids hated it. So we just used math games like Math It so work on our facts. We did Family Math—oh I loved Family Math. And then we used these workbooks. I eventually bought Murderous Maths which was wonderful, my kids really enjoyed that and I thought those books were all great.

And then my kids had to start doing more advanced math and they weren't really all that prepared, to be honest, so at that point I swapped with a smart mathematical homeschooling mom who became my math tutor for my kids and I tutored her kids in writing and that's how I got it done.

I never successfully taught math. And that's the truth. And if you want to hear even more, my daughter Caitrin, who went to high school in a public school, her freshman year of math was kind of brutal. During the beginning, like the first quarter. And then she caught like [snaps] that. And here I'm watching her go in and I'm thinking "oh my gosh, she's really failing." But you know what? She was a smart kid. She just needed daily, consistent teaching from someone

who knew what the heck they were doing. And once she got that, she did great! She went all the way through calculus in high school. So I hope that's encouraging to those of you who are finding math this torturous thing. I didn't want to spend money for Math UC. Or Making Math Meaningful. I wanted to spend it on the stuff I loved and that's what we did. Okay. Moving along!

Number 18: I didn't teach Liam to read. He taught himself. I was too busy! I had too many kids and he figured it out. I don't even remember how. I can't remember if we used a program with him. I was wracking my brain. I don't think I taught him. Okay next one.

Number 19: We did not keep track of any hours for any subject. So when I get like an email from a mom who says how much credit is something worth for high school or for junior high, I wasn't on that path. I was not about that life. I was about completion of subjects or ideas. Like, you know what, they worked hard this year at math. One credit. They read six books and they wrote a paper and we had great conversations and we watched the movie versions. Credit. I wasn't about that life.

I do not want to be a school at home-er. I'm a homeschooler. So my way of evaluating I decided could not be the way the school evaluates. I wanted to evaluate based on what I saw happening in my kids. So yeah, I didn't keep track of a single hour. Okay next—and I still gave them credits. What's next? I'm losing track here. Okay.

Number 22: I didn't teach any history in high school to Johannah or Noah. When Johannah got ready to apply to college, she needed to have something for American history and we didn't have it. So I went and bought the SAT II book, which was US history and we spent six weeks with me sitting in front of her on a couch, me reading the book, her narrating back, me quizzing her, she asking my questions—I was a history major so this was heaven for me. I was like oh I remember the Monroe Doctrine. I was having a blast. And at the end of it she took the SAT II test and we submitted that with her application to Notre Dame. That's how we handled it. And I counted that as a full credit of US history. That's how I felt about it.

It's like you know what? This was not her focus in high school. This is enough to get her into college. And then she took more history in college and she's got an interest in it independently and has taught it to herself. But I refuse to be a slave to this prescription if I can see evidence that my children are thriving and learning and will get all the things that they need. So that's what we did. But I'm getting ahead of myself. What else didn't I do?

Number 22: I never did science experiments. Never. The only science experiments we've done in our house are baking soda volcanoes, making blubber from borax, and dissecting a flower. That's it. Next one.

Number 24: I bought several science programs and never opened the books.

Number 25: I used Family Fun magazine as my primary homeschool curriculum for three years. Didn't buy anything else. I went to the library. I had Miquon Math and Family Fun Magazine. That was my curriculum.

Number 26: We never used a single textbook.

Number 27: We didn't keep records. Seriously. I did though keep a booklist. I will tell you that. We always kept a booklist.

Number 28: I never taught cursive or manuscript. I opted Getty Dubai Italics and my kids hate me for it.

Number 29: We never used a science curriculum and therefore I am a proud member of what my friend calls HENSE: Home Educators Neglecting Science Education [laughs]. So that's what we did. Now, when I look back, we did a lot with science but I'm going to share that at the end. Okay? But we never used a program.

Number 30: We did not do dictation every week or even every month.

Number 31: We didn't do any systematic CM practice. In other words, when we did art, nature, narration, copywork, dictation, they were ad hoc. I did them when I felt internal pressure mounting or when I was inspired. That was how we ran our system. Now, I had—and you'll know because I've shared about routine and schedule, I had a routine and I relied on my routine but I didn't have a schedule. I didn't have a plan. I remember hosting a Charlotte Mason meeting in my house and women would come and they would show me their plan for the year. Each month a different artist. Each month a different focus in nature. I didn't any of that. Alright, next.

Number 32: None of my kids wrote research papers before college. Not one.

Number 33: We really didn't teach grammar every year. We really didn't. In fact, we only taught *Winston Grammar* and *Grammar Songs* out of all their years at home. And two of my kids, when they got to college, have asked me to send them *Winston Grammar* because now they get it and think it would be fun. Both of them by the way were linguistics majors so that makes sense [laughs] [theme music plays].

You're listening to the Brave Writer Podcast. Today I want to tell you about Instagram. It turns out Instagram is my favorite social media playground. I love to share photos of my family, inspirational photos about homeschooling and writing, and sometimes I even share your photos with our community. My goal for my Instagram account is to provide you with inspiration, a belief that you will get there some day, that you're doing the right things to bring about a quality education for your family, and I also like to share writing advice.

If you are looking for a place where you can hang out and experience a lot of support, join me [@juliebravewriter](#) that's my account. [@juliebravewriter](#). I also like to share photos from your poetry tea times at my other Instagram account, [@poetryteatime](#). Please come follow along.

If you want me to see what you're sharing on Instagram, use the [#bravewriterlifestyle](#). Or, simply tag me in your photos. I love to comment, send hearts, smiley faces, the whole nine yards. So let's get this thing going. And now, let's return to today's podcast [theme music plays].

Number 34: Noah wrote one essay in high school before college.

Number 35: I didn't teach any of my kids how to tie their shoes, how to type, or how to tell time, or shower.

Number 36: I didn't double check on co-op homework. If they did it, they did it. If they didn't, I didn't know about it.

Number 37: I let my kids read Harry Potter each day.

Number 38: I didn't give piano lessons to most of my kids.

Number 39: I didn't bake homemade bread or raise chickens or plant a garden like except once. In all my years. And I was told that homeschoolers had to do that. And I thought they had to grind their own grain, too. And I was pretty sure they were support to serve organic strained carrots to their babies, as well. Ready for Number 40?

Number 40: We did go a whole year one time without doing [dictation](#) because we were all sick of it.

Number 41: I never taught health or sex ed. Nope. Never did.

Number 42: Johannah's India report never got copied over and put in a report folder. In fact I still have it and it is in notebook paper with all of our markings and it never got finished [laughs].

Number 43: Caitrin never did an elementary school report. And as a matter of fact, neither did Liam. So I felt obligated with Noah, Johannah, and Jacob. Liam and Caitrin, we never did it.

Number 44: We never completed one of those history timelines or the *Book of Centuries* or *Story of the World*. We did some in all three and then we ran out of steam.

Number 45: We never came up with a season that worked for good for technology or television. We tried so many. None of them ever worked. You know what worked? Children moving out of the house and less competition for all of the various devices.

Number 46: No child ever did 10 writing projects in a single year. Most of them did one or two that got revised.

Number 47: I didn't teach my kids how to get up early to prepare them for real life. They slept till they woke for their whole time at home.

Number 48: We also didn't have bedtimes.

Number 49: I didn't really monitor computer use.

Number 50: I didn't do any tests or any quizzes.

Number 51: I never got to do a single high school graduation. My only true candidate was Noah and he didn't want one. Sob. Heartbreak.

Number 52: I didn't homeschool for an entire year one year because I was going through a crisis and even though I still had Caitrin every day, getting up, doing her copywork and we did some reading, there was actually no plan and no preparation and no real content and that was for a whole year.

Number 53: I put Liam in high school against his will.

Number 54: It gets a little sober here. I got a divorce.

Number 55: Our family were not volunteers. We didn't work at a soup kitchen. We didn't end up in some kind of an old folk's home singing Christmas carols. We didn't get around to volunteering.

That's my list of all the things that I didn't do as a homeschooler. But you know what? Despite all of it, the lack of projects, the lack of science, the fact that we didn't write as much as maybe even you imagine that we wrote, the fact that I got divorced, the fact that we were changing every year what we did, I have amazing kids. Just like you!

And here's what we did do right: we had rich family conversations around literature and film. We spent time together. We went outside. We saw plays. I facilitated their big, hairy, audacious goals. I helped them imagine a life that would make them happy, not one that would match the criteria the school told I needed.

Someone asked about our end of the year narrations and I'm just going to tell you right now, those were fun for me. You know why? I showed up with narratives. I didn't keep track of hours. I wrote a page about each child and what they learned that year and conversations we had had and how they had grown in a way that I observed and validated. That's how I measured growth. And that's why I felt okay not teaching American history in high school to kids who weren't interested. I'm like, when they're interested, everything they learn is at their fingertips and I've seen them take it into the future. Right? So if they're not ready for it, just because the local high school is telling me I've got to do it, that just wasn't a good enough reason for me. At least not then.

Now when I had a crisis, the big crisis of my life occurred and I felt I wasn't doing a good job that's when I asked Liam to go to high school and he went, not willingly. But you know what happened? We designed high school to match his personality. He only went two and a half years. He didn't take the really hard classes. He went to fulfill a responsibility to himself, to simply complete high school. And when he graduated, he graduated early and he took a trip to Europe and that's how we figured it out. We put him on the chess club and I didn't expect to get A's. That wasn't our deal.

So there are ways to think about home education or education period and your family. Because the priority is your relationships. The priority is their capacity to engage a subject and make it meaningful for them in a way that lasts into their adulthood.

You know I was just being interviewed by Mackenzie Monroe and it wasn't until we were talking that I realized, out of my five kids, three of them are on editorial boards for literary magazines they've created as adults. One of them is Johannah and that is a literary magazine that they've

created in New York for 20-somethings and they do poetry and creative writing readings at a bar once a month. Caitrin and her best friend at the University of Pittsburgh started a magazine together and she's got a whole little editorial board that they do. And then I just found out that my son Liam, the dysgraphic who didn't write for three years, he just started a poetry slam and a literary journal at his college and they meet weekly and they receive submissions and evaluate which ones to publish and release. Three of my kids! Tell me that isn't homeschool in action.

We were the [Poetry Teatime](#) family. We valued publishing. That's what we got out of our homeschool. And Noah, who loves math and hated math books, is going into computer programming and is completely self-taught as an adult. That's when he got his math solid. You know. Kahn Academy and all these complicated forums that I didn't know anything about. So don't worry too much about what you're not doing. I just gave you a list of 55 things you don't have to do. Or at least, they're 55 I didn't do.

So Noah as a great example, never took two lab sciences or two years of foreign language when he was in high school. And yet he wanted to be a linguistics major at the University of Cincinnati. What did he do in high school after he quit and didn't finish? Well he sat around learning constructed languages and teaching himself Klingon. Yes, the Star Trek language [laughs]. So when it was time where he thought "Oh I do want to go to college after all." Sort of an afterthought for Noah. We talked about it and I said "Well you know, I don't know if you have enough classes. We need to call admissions." So being that he was my firstborn and I was his mother, I made the call.

And secretly, do you know this feeling? Secretly I was sort of like I hope they tell me he can't get in so I can say "See I told you that you needed chemistry. Of course you need two years of foreign language!" Right? And so here's the crazy thing: I call University of Cincinnati and I said, "I don't know what to do with my son. He wants to apply to your college but he doesn't have two years of foreign language or two lab sciences." And the admissions director said, "Well what does he want to major in?" and I said "linguistics." And he goes "Oh, well they won't care about the science so don't worry about that."

And my jaw—I mean I still remember where I was standing. I said, "Wait excuse me? He goes "Oh yeah they don't care about that." And I said "He was homeschooled and he doesn't have a diploma." He goes "Oh yeah, we don't care about that." He goes "But what about the foreign language?" And I said, "Well, here's what he's been doing. He's ready these 30 books on constructed languages. He's been in two constructed languages online and he taught himself Klingon for the last three years." And the admissions guy said, "Oh they're going to love that. Put Klingon on the transcript and include the book list of everything he read."

So we did that. We made his book list. We filled out all of his transcript. And we mailed it in and as Noah was mailing it, these were his parting words to me which I will never forget and I loved: he said "Mom, if not taking chemistry keeps me out of college, I'm going to be so mad at myself." And I thought, yes! That's the spirit! I did the right thing. He's not mad at me. He owned his decision. He's going to be the one who will face whatever that consequence is. And of course, what happened? He got in [laughs]. And that's a whole long story of once he got in.

You know, it shattered my notions of what my expectations should be. When I did my portfolios every year in Ohio, I met with a certified teacher who happened to be sympathetic to homeschooling and I would just bring a list of the books we read. I would bring some of the curriculum pieces that we had. I'd bring any craft projects that we did. And we would just sit there and it was like Mommy show and tell. I'd be like "Look what Johannah did! Look what Caitrin did!" And then I would hand her these narratives. These page long, detailed accounts of the growth and my amazement at my kids from that year. Anything I could remember.

And I would take notes during the year. I might write them on a calendar or—I kept at one point a private blog just for me that kept track of some of that. But you should know: none of my systems ever last. I get excited about them. They go on for a few months and then I lose my energy. And I would just be drawing from over the course of the year the things I remembered. I do think it's a great idea to keep track of big events on a calendar because you forget what you did in October when May rolls around.

But other than that, I wasn't a big, big record keeper, just to be honest. I knew my kids. I hung out with them a ton. I had a very strong sense of their vocabulary and their development and how they spent their time. And you know we spent time doing things that are not curriculum oriented.

When Jacob had a cookie business, it took time to bake cookies and to deliver them and to go to stores and sell them. When Johannah was preparing for this big vintage dance ball that took time.

SO just remember that the things you really, really love and really want to do with your kids are going to take time away from the standards of education everybody keeps telling you you have to hit. And at some point, you got to choose. You got to decide. Am I going to give my energy to this thing they're passionate about? You know examining the solar system. Learning how to build my own world in Mine Craft. Figuring out how to use a video camera. Or am I going to just focus on the next math program? Or more science experiments? I don't know. Your family has a culture already embedded in it. That's what's so cool. And your kids are picking up that culture without you saying a word.

And the more that you invest in that—in what your family is about and good at, the more your children will develop this internal pride in being a Bogart or being a Smith. They will start to know this is the special gift that comes from their lineage. From their parents.

Like if you are those people who garden and bake bread from scratch, how awesome for your kids! My kids wanted parents like that, right? They wanted a math major. They wanted a science teacher. They didn't get it! That's not who we were. But man are they good at literature and writing because that's who we were. Man are they interested in being global citizens and travelling the world and helping the unfortunate and making a difference. Because that's what we were all about.

So you be about who you are and the rest will sort of sink in, it'll all fit. And remember, even if you have a year of crisis where the unthinkable happens, someone dies, you get a divorce, you lose your house to foreclosure, even then: homeschool can survive. And the benefits of homeschool will outlive even those crises. I believe in homeschool so thoroughly. People ask me

at times because I even had kids in high school who went to public school and yet I still believe in the foundation of homeschool. It helps everybody become their best selves. That's what I love about it. At least it gives us that opportunity. You know? Not everybody succeeds at it because of all kinds of neuroses and things that happen.

Do what you love with your kids. Invest deeply. Have that connection around learning. Be into it. You know take the time to do a pony express in the neighborhood with all your friends. Take time away from the workbooks to have a full day of play. That's going to lead you to a great homeschool experience [theme music plays].

That's it for today. I hope you found some ideas you can implement even this week. I'd love to hear from you. Follow me on Instagram [@juliebravewriter](#) or you can follow us on Facebook. [Facebook.com/bravewriter](#). Every Monday morning at 11:30 EST, I do a Facebook Live broadcast [no longer a regular broadcast]. Feel free to join me then as well. In the meantime, live honestly, write bravely. I'm Julie Bogart, from Brave Writer [theme music plays out].

[THE BRAVE LEARNER: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning and Life](#)

How do we help our kids experience the same level of passion/excitement for school subjects that they bring naturally to their personal interests?

[THE BRAVE LEARNER](#) answers that question!

