



S4E3: 61 Things I Did RIGHT 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].

So before I begin, I want to say first, without any number attached to it, to be a home educator is to value learning. That is to say, you and I, we put a priority on education. We're into it. We want our kids to be educated. This isn't a light thing for us. Your kids know that you value education without having to say anything because they see their friends in the soccer team and they know that their other friends don't have moms staying home with them to educate them. So even though they might not be able to articulate it, at a core level, they know that their home is all about learning and that it's important to their parents.

It is this gift that creates the platform for all else that you do. And truly, if you come from that space—not fear of public schools—but the valuing of education, your children have already earned a sacred space in their hearts for learning. And that is the core foundation that makes all the rest of it work. You are already ahead of the game is what I'm trying to say. Just by living and breathing the value of education around your children. Okay? So with that in mind, here are my 61 things I feel proud of.

Number 1: top of the list. I read aloud to my kids. Thousands of pages from all kinds of books. Fiction, fables, non-fiction, and poetry. And from other sources as well. Shakespeare, websites, billboards, magazine articles, blogs, fortune cookies, refrigerator magnets, ingredient labels, hand-written cards, field guides, art books, how-to instructions for games and crafts, recipes, greeting cards, and all my children's writing to interested audiences. We read aloud all the time, on the way, by the way, at the bedside, in the rocking chair, driving in a car. We read it all. And we read all the sources you could read.

Number 2: We watched movies. In the middle of the day. Disney, documentaries, good old-fashioned family films. Modern, quirky, new films. Pixar, holiday films. Anything with Meg Ryan. The A&E *Pride and Prejudice* series over and over and over again. Every Jane Austen film, all the renditions. Every Shakespeare film, all the renditions. Especially Kenneth Branagh's *Love's Labour's Lost*. We think that movie is a hoot. Musicals, dramas, fantasy, and science fiction. My kids own the *Lord of the Rings* extended version and I have been subjected to it [laughs] more times than I can bare. Shoot me now. And Harry Potter.

Number 3: We watched television. Children's TV like *Sesame Street*, *Arthur*. Sitcoms like *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, I'm not ashamed to say. *60 Minutes*. Sports, the Bangles of course, my favorite football team. And also soccer from the continent. Every hour of all the Olympics, winter and summer. All those TV shows about cults and exposes about other lifestyles in America. An occasional Oprah episode. Current events. Nature shows like *Crocodile Dundee*. Science shows like *Bill Nye the Science Guy* and the old really antiquated *Chronicles of Narnia* before Disney got their hands on it. We also watched Opera and ballet on television.

Number 4: I'm glad I started out this journey with homeschool family friends. These were women I got to talk to, go out to brunch with, and plan great big homeschool field trips and parties with. And best of all, their children became my children's best friends.

Number 5: We had oodles of parties. The big planned kind like the gold rush that I talked about at length in the Periscope called "Party-School." One for India. One for a medieval feast. We did American Girl Doll parties in a group where we each picked a doll and did one party every month for a year. We did the spontaneous parties like when we had a Moroccan henna party. We did a Pony Express on our cul-de-sac. We had a solar system tea party at night. We had a Japanese tea party. We made bread bears and had a tea party with that. We did art parties and birding parties. So many parties.

Number 6: We played with toys. Legos, Duplos, Blocks, a big wooden castle with Hearth Song dolls, puzzles, pattern blocks, American Girl Dolls, barbies, knitting, and potholder kits, candle kits, dress up clothes, everything nerf. In fact, I discovered that you should always include one nerf toy at Christmas so that everybody has something to run around and do on Christmas day. And games. Oh so many games. Sorry, Risk, Chess, 3-D chess, Monopoly—shoot me now—Scattergories, Catch Phrase, Quiddler, Spinergy, Candyland, Life, Stratego, Yahtzee, Clue—you get the idea? And then we made our own versions of those games. We did Trivial Pursuit games. We made our own version of Clue using the bedrooms in our house. We were all about board games. Noah eventually introduced us to roll playing games, RPGs.

Number 7: We played endless word games. Puns, jokes, riddles, foreign languages, listing adjectives or verbs or adverbs for every letter of the alphabet, retelling storylines and making people guess the book or film or play, stumping each other with vocabulary words and using them correctly, parroting our favorite TV shows and movies, all of the quotes out of context in our family experiences and quoting Shakespeare or JK Rowling freely, all the time [laughs].

Number 8: We had a predictable morning routine that got me out of bed and let me know we had quote "Done school." And for some reason, that really was valuable to my family. In fact, it was the loss of that predictable routine that I think shipwrecked our effort to be radical unschoolers. And it was the restoration of that routine that righted the ship.

Number 9: I'm a believer in copywork and dictation. I worried that I was not doing enough most of the time. But I have proof that we did plenty. As it turns out, we were doing it enough that my kids all became fluent in the mechanics of writing without other tools. That's all we used. And they are all quite competent as adults. So I hope that helps. And I did copywork with my kids by candlelight for many years. Several years.

Number 10: Art study. I am so glad we got into art. Thank you Charlotte Mason. Those were some of the best years of our lives. To this day my kids enjoy and choose to go to art museums by themselves or take friends and they can also name certain artists and have paintings that are favorites.

Number 11: Nature. Oh my goodness did we get out in nature. Especially when we moved to Ohio. But you know, when we lived in California, we did an entire unit on tide pools and we went down there I'm thinking once a week for several weeks just to look at what was in tide pools. We tried to take advantage of wherever we lived and we explored it. Now, I have to tell you, Johannah used to be like "nature! I don't want to go on a nature hike!" But she's the one who has the most robust nature journal and as an adult, loves nature. So it was totally worth the investment.

Number 12: I'm glad I read the Charlotte Mason homeschooling series. It formed me in more ways than I can count. Did I read cover to cover all six volumes? No I did not. But I did read cover to cover probably three of the volumes. And I spent several years immersed in her philosophy in a community of home educators and it had a profound positive effect on me.

Number 13: I'm glad that I trusted myself to ditch lesson plans others created for me and to follow my own hunches more and more.

Number 14: This one's really important to me: I'm glad that I helped my kids achieve their big, hairy audacious goals. On another scope, I talked about BHAGs. Big, Harry, Audacious, Goals. It's setting a dream for yourself and reaching out to achieve it. And I believed in that for my kids. So here are some of the things that we did. Both of my daughters never had anyone give them an American Girl Doll. They both bought two of them with their own money. They worked, they saved it up from birthdays and Christmas, it took them each over a year to save money for their first dolls. And they each bought two that ways. They were a part of a vintage dance community, Johannah and Noah. So that Johannah could eventually be a part of a Jane Austen style ball. Jacob ran a cookie business so that he could send himself to Space Camp. We helped him with the cookies and driving him around but he earned the money and it was 850

dollars. He did that ages 10 and 11. What else? They were a part of Shakespeare Camps and a Shakespeare Company, my oldest two kids. Two of my boys wanted to be on a Lacrosse team when they had never played team sports in their lives. Caitrin started a fashion blog and for every day of her freshman year of high school, she dressed up in clothing that she bought at thrift stores. And for 365 days, she never repeated a single outfit. Liam went to Europe on his own after he finished high school. And we helped him! We vision-ed it with him. We did research. He earned the money and then he went. Johannah and Jacob have both lived abroad. And Noah, today, is studying computer programming and we've found ways to support him in doing that. I take a lot of pride in having helped my kids do the things they were the most passionate about.

Number 15: I'm glad we went to Italy as a family and didn't remodel the kitchen.

Number 16: All the poetry teatimes, the sacred core of our family culture.

Number 17: I'm glad my kids are fluent internet users who know social media platforms better than I do, who know how to communicate their opinions passionately online.

Number 18: I'm glad we tried to study math on our, but I'm even gladder that we hired tutors or took advantage of co-op classes or even the public schools when the time came.

Number 19: I'm so happy that I jotted down their words, phrases, or stories for them. I recorded their misspellings in baby books along with their misspoken words because both are equally precious to me. I treasured their speech and celebrated it at all stages of development.

Number 20: I'm glad we went to the library every single week for years and my kids got to read whatever they wanted.

Number 21: I'm glad my two older kids joined a poetry slam group hosted by our local library in junior high. It changed the trajectory of their writing overnight. Just being in the company of other passionate writers.

Number 22: I am glad we dabbled in Latin roots. Vocabulary books. The red herring books. Riddles and tongue twisters. Knock-knock jokes and codes. These were essential to a playful and rigorous approach to English. And yet we never completed any of those books and I don't think that was a problem.

Number 23: I'm glad I took my friends out to coffee sometimes alone just to talk.

Number 24: I am proud of how we learned to write together. I'm proud of freewriting and the topic funnel and the snip and pin revision strategy because it was my kids who drove me to figure these out. I'm proud of our Groovy Grammar Workshop that Brave Writer offers because I developed it first in my kitchen with my children and when I saw what great results it got, I knew it deserved to be a Brave Writer class.

Number 25: I loved Winston Grammar even if my kids at the time were lukewarm about it. Weirdly, several of them have thanked me for that program now that they're adults.

Number 26: I am glad that Jon, my ex-husband and I, spoke well of other cultures and visited them virtually online and through books and then introduced our children to as many people as we could that were not American.

Number 27: I am glad that during graduate school I shared my passion for social justice through conversation, DVDs, writing papers, and readings I read aloud from my books to my kids when it seemed relevant. It is because of those conversations that Jacob, who has told me this specifically, and Johannah, perhaps implicitly, caught a vision for human rights and social work, those are their careers [theme music plays].

You're listening to the Brave Writer Podcast and I'm Julie Bogart. If you're one of those people who wishes there were more podcasts than I can get done week to week, well you're in luck, the [Homeschool Alliance](#) is my homeschool coaching community. There are over 400 members and three coaches. There's me, Stephanie Elms, and Jeanie Faulkner. All three of us together have over 75 years' worth of home education and coaching experience.

When you join that community, there are audio lectures very similar to podcasts, monthly telecommunications, webinars, we meet in this Zoom chatroom so you can talk and I can talk at the same time. We provide you with readings every single month to challenge and stimulate your educational strategies and we provide you with what I call One Thing challenges. We pick some extracurricular activity like movie viewing or art appreciation or water play and we give you challenges that help you implement that in your homeschool. There's even a self-care spa where we remind you to be good to yourself and a space for community conversations where you can ask your most vexing homeschool questions to the community.

If that sounds like something that you'd enjoy, go to [bravewriter.com](#) and scroll down to the band that says the [Homeschool Alliance](#). You can join on a monthly basis or an annual basis. Start and stop any time, no questions asked. I'd love to meet you and have that in service grad school for homeschool experience you're craving [theme music plays]. And now, let's return to the podcast.

Number 28: I'm glad Shakespeare was our pal.

Number 29: I like that we read so much historical fiction.

Number 30: I like that science study in our homeschool was about the body, the night sky, birds, the seasons and weather, natural disasters, and any question I couldn't answer while my kids were young. I loved the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for bird watching. And if you don't know that place, you need to go there. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. We did the backyard bird count for years and it was one of the highlights for my relationship with Liam. I'm also glad that we bought a zoo pass one year and literally went one day a week for a whole year.

Number 31: I'm so glad I found Family Fun Magazine in the formative early years of home education. It helped me keep the fun in our homeschool.

Number 32: Hey I'm glad I stayed home! I didn't travel to build Brave Writer. I was home for performances and games for all of my kids on the weekends. I did not go to conventions and conferences. I was here. I'm a mother, not a father, and I am glad that I didn't miss those dates with my children.

Number 33: I'm also glad I never relied on my kids to help with the business. They had their childhoods and had no responsibility to be great homeschooled kids or to help with me vision or to learn how to do a business ostensibly but really they're just packing books. I never wanted that for them, they never had it. And I'm happy about that.

Number 34: I'm glad we had our kids pay for their own stuff and they all did. Noah bought a unicycle, a computer, his first guitar for Rock Band and he helped pay for his first car. Johannah bought her own American Girl Dolls, clothing, and paid for her phones and some of her travels, like going to Guatemala. Jacob paid for Space Camp at age 12. He owned and bought multiple Apple devices and he paid for a fancy lobster dinner in Italy and he went with his dad and took him. Liam paid for a computer he built and he paid for his trip to Europe. Caitrin paid for her American Girl Dolls, all her clothes for her fashion blog, and her participation fees for color guard—she contributed, not the full fees. But all of my kids know that they can earn money to pay for things they value.

And you know, I'll just pass this along, I grew up in a family that paid for everything. The only new car I've ever owned was my first car at the age of 16 that I got on my birthday. And the one thing I wanted for my kids was that they'd grow up middle class and know what it felt like to buy their own stuff. And we were overachievers, we were broke [laughs]. But it worked! And they know today that they can earn money and they can pay for their own stuff. I'm very proud of that actually.

Number 35: I'm glad we were a part of a homeschool co-op. We actually loved our co-op and we were there for over 10 years. I taught acting not just writing and so my kids got to see a different side of me and I got to know their friends in a completely different way and it was one of the richest experiences I've had in teaching, being at that co-op. So if you have a great co-op I totally recommend it.

Number 36: I am glad we did so many crafts even though I'm not naturally crafty.

Number 37: I'm glad I read about classical education. It helped reinforce my understanding of developmental stages of growth and it also enticed me back into ancient history which I had been resisting before that.

Number 38: I'm so glad that we studied Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Gilgamesh, and Beowulf. These are still favorites for my kids.

Number 39: I'm glad we took our kids to rock concerts and to see musicals performed live.

Number 40: I'm glad we used candles and roaring fires, hot chocolate and blankets in winter, I'm glad we used the back deck with picnic blankets and lemonade in late spring. I'm glad we know that seasons bring different styles of education.

Number 41: I love Betty Edwards' book: *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. I also like Mona Brooks' book: *Drawing with Children*. We did them both in full, great seasons in our homeschools.

Number 42: I loved the Sister Wendy Series called "Story of Painting," which takes you on a tour of art throughout history all over Europe. Fabulous.

Number 43: So glad we invested in annual passes to Disneyland one year.

Number 44: I'm glad I let my kids teach me how to play their computer games, video games, and that I let them make me mix CDs so I could learn their music.

Number 45: I'm glad Noah and I did NaNoWriMo: The National Novel Writing Month together one year. So much fun.

Number 46: I don't regret learning to play Yu-Gi-Oh cards even though I never mastered the rules and I lost every time.

Number 47: I'm super glad I read aloud to each child alone at some point in that child's childhood. I didn't do all of them at once but I can look back and remember reading one book aloud—at least one—to each kid at bedtime or cuddled up on a couch and that was really meaningful for us.

Number 48: I don't regret the parade of pets. The bunny, the two rats, the two ferrets—holy smokes they were awful—and the one dog. I'm super glad that I made that concession. I'm not a pets person but I'm glad I did it. I had a homeschool friend who said "Julie, it's not a natural childhood for children if they don't have a dog." And you know what, I came to love that little rascal.

Number 49: We bought homeschool ski passes one year and it was the best winter investment we had ever made so we did it for the next four years.

Number 50: We had literature clubs at home that went great. Johannah did one with 5th graders one year and then Jon held them for older kids multiple times.

Number 51: I'm glad we invited college kids into our lives. They came from Xavier and hung out at our house and played games. My younger children then had the opportunity to see what college life might be like and that was a great invisible way to promote college.

Number 52: I'm glad we didn't require our kids to get done with any year's worth of school by a specific age. My kids performed all at different levels and some finished high school by 16 and some finished by 18 or 19 and it was all okay.

Number 53: I'm glad I allowed my interests to catalyze activities and subject matter for my kids. I'm glad I let my passions guide my homeschool.

Number 54: Oh my goodness it's a long list [laughs] you're still with me? You're not bored yet. Okay. 54: Here we go, just take a minute, shake out the shoulders. I feel like I'm all tense and I don't want to be tense. I'm glad we tried oral reports, oral exams a la Charlotte Mason. We did some freewrite timed exams and we did narrations. I'm also glad we didn't continue any of

these practices as rigid systems or rules. I like that we tried all kinds of methods to demonstration learning. Projects. Oral, written, making a movie, pretending to run a podcast, having a family dinner, performing for relatives. We did it all! And I'm happy about that.

Number 55: Oh I love this one. I love this point. Okay ready? 55's long. I'm glad that our family tried all of the following things: ballet, Tai Kwon Do, lacrosse, soccer, baseball, gymnastics, swimming, acting, sign language, Latin, French, Spanish, Chinese, Greek, sewing, woodshop, gardening, birding, Klingon, computer programming, baking, piano lessons, saxophone lessons, American Girl club, indoor rock climbing, basketball, unicycles, bicycles, skating, skate boards, making movies, making podcasts, library clubs, Barnes & Noble Harry Potter parties, Zoo classes, cake decorating class, horseback riding, ocean swimming, audio books, badminton, choir, color guard, marching band—I could go on.

This is what your story is going to be. You don't have to do all of those today but if you have more than one child, maybe even if you have just one child, your list is going to be like this. Can you believe how cool all that is? When I started writing it down I was like giving myself high-fives [claps] good for me! Okay. Did we master them all? No. We tried them all. They've had a rich varied diet of opportunities.

Number 56: I'm glad that I took it upon myself to direct a Shakespeare scene with Noah and Johannah in it. At the peak of their fascination with Shakespeare, they loved the fight scene from *Taming of the Shrew*. And they were sad that they had nowhere to act it out and I said if we block the scene and you memorize the lines and practice it, performance opportunities will come. So we met in the backyard, they memorized all the lines, and I do teach acting so I know how to block a scene. And we made it hilarious, I mean it was pulling hair and piggyback riding and dragging under a table. They had the whole thing memorized. They got to perform it like five times that year. They did it for family. They did it for my very first retreat of gathered homeschool friends at my house. They did it for their peers. They did it at a recital we had for our co-op. It was awesome.

Here's the thing: you sometimes feel like well unless I know what we're doing with something we shouldn't do it, but in this case, it was like if you build it they will come and that's totally what happened and they still know some of those lines and they trade them when they're together. And they're 28 and 26 now. That was a highlight of homeschool for me. Alright. Another one.

I'm also glad that we held little performances for oral reports and memorized poetry, the Gettysburg address and so many more for friends and family. I used to call my aunt and uncle, who live nearby, and they would just come over and I would put my kids in front of the fireplace and they would recite their little thing and then we would have banana bread and my aunt and uncle were like oh your children are geniuses. It was perfect. It was just enough sort of formality to make it worth memorizing but nothing intimidating.

Number 57: I'm glad we made the Big Farmer Boy Breakfast one time. You know apple pie and ham for breakfast. They love that. I also like that one time we did a Colonial Times dyeing party where we took muslin and we dyed in like yellow from an onion and red from a boiled beet. That was super fun. We also made stocks and anyone who didn't do what they were

supposed to do had to sit in the stocks for like five minutes so everyone broke a rule that way just so they could have a turn being in the stocks, it was awesome.

Number 58: I'm glad we made blackberry pies from freshly picked blackberries at the riverbed near our house. I'm glad we made scones to learn fractions. I'm glad that we ate brownies and cookies. We have the best chocolate chip cookie recipe ever. I'm glad we made butter from scratch and tempura for our study of Japan.

Number 59: I personally enjoyed our experiences with public high school. Not all my kids went for all four years in fact only one did that. But each one of my kids had an involvement that advanced their growth. Even Noah who wound up quitting and didn't really like high school. But you know what he did? He took American Sign Language while he was there and he got to perform in this one event to music where he signed the whole song and it was this like death metal song and it rocked the house. Like literally people were cheering at the end and it was him all by himself on stage. That moment was so significant in his development. It was stunning for us.

Johannah got to be in the *Diary of Anne Frank* and had a meaningful role in that play. Jacob was in the marching band and got to go to the Rose Parade in California with the band. Liam was on the chess team and by his senior year was first board—they call it. And then Caitrin was a member of a world class color guard that performed in the Macy's Day Parade. These would not have happened without our connection to the public school. So I have great things to say about our local public school. I'm not saying you should go to it, all I'm saying is we discovered a whole new bandwidth and family joy through it and I did not feel like less of a homeschooler as a result.

Number 60: I am proud of the fact that we welcomed challenges to the status quo in our family. Johannah giving up Christmas gifts one year because she wanted to give all that money to charity. We had three kids who were vegan. I had kids who loved heavy metal and it was on in my house. They were big gamers, three of my kids. They read materials I would not have selected for them. For all our failings at attempted control, I'm super glad that Jon and I saw the light while our kids were still at home and we welcomed their growth and curiosity. To me, that's our greatest success as parents and educators that we caught on before it was too late. And now, 61.

Number 61: I'm glad I gave myself permission to change gears. To learn about learning. To be responsive when they showed displeasure. That I kept learning and growing along with them. That I learned to trust my own homeschooling voice, not someone else's. That our homeschool is an original not a copy. I am so, so, so, so, so I didn't let someone else define what kind of homeschooler I am and tell me whether or not I was a "real ____" fill in the blank kind of homeschool. I'm also glad that I learned what it means to establish a home that kids want to return to even now. I'm glad that our memories are bound up in all of these activities [crying].

Okay. I feel like I should hang up [laughs] because I miss it. So. You know. Johannah just flew to Cartagena, Colombia today. She just landed at 1:30 and she has already sent pictures to everyone in the family. It's pretty cool. And it's really cool if you can like your kids when they

grow up and you want to lay a good foundation and you do it when you put the relationship first and you put joy in learning first and you support them and you help them see that their ideas and their imagination and their words are valuable to you. That's it! Any system will work if you do those things. You can be a classical, a Charlotte Mason, an unschooler, a structured schooler. I really don't care what philosophy.

It's all about connection. It's all about everyone finding their way, and you're going to make mistakes; you're going to find things that don't work, and you're going to regret some things. I have some big regrets. Right? And there are some things I wish I could have had a do-over, you know, like certain things I wish I had done differently. But gosh, why? I have 61 amazing things that I got done in 17 years of home education and beyond. Because as we already know, it doesn't end when they're done with high school or college. It doesn't even end when they're grownups like me. My mom still has a meaningful role in my life and she's in her 70s and I'm in my 50s.

So, we can all contribute online. That was my life force and my staying power during all those years at home. I loved having my online friends. Do you know my best friends to this day, I met online and they were homeschoolers and we are still close? Just last year, a year ago in October, a group of 14 of them came and stayed in my empty house and we all just reflected on our journeys which were varied, you just can't even imagine all the things people go through in 20 years. But I met them in the late 90s and we're still friends. And that's what I hope happens here, I hope you become friends with each other and you share this journey and then you'll have your own list of 61 at the end that you can read and it will make you cry and it'll be all good. Because this is a sacred task [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](https://www.instagram.com/juliebravewriter) or you can follow us on Facebook. [Facebook.com/bravewriter](https://www.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].

