



## S5E1: Embracing Elements of Home

Julie Bogart with Tammy Kim

**Julie:** [Theme music plays] Greetings, friends, allies, homeschoolers in the trenches. Julie Bogart here from Brave Writer. We're coming at you with season five of the podcast. And we're calling this season, "Ask Julie." Now, that sounds pretty egotistical, but honestly, what we've discovered in the last four seasons is that our help inbox has been flooded with What-Abouts—"Yeah, but what about the kid who won't work hard at math?"—"What about college?"—"What about chores?"—All these typical, homeschool vexing dilemmas that you want help figuring out. So, the point of this season is for me to help you figure it out [laughs].

We're going to talk about all the ways that you can improve your experience of being home with your kids. These wonderful parents who have given us permission to see the insides of their family lives are brave. I honor them for being willing to expose their own insecurities and feelings of inadequacy so that we could grow together. And you're going to *love* these parents, these mothers, they're just so absolutely honest and beautiful and so dedicated to their kids. Just like you! So, each week, I will interview a mother or a group of mothers—those were the ones who submitted their [laughs] questions to us—and we're going to take a look at the principles and practices that they could add to their homeschooling lives and then guess what?

We're going to come back a couple of months later and hear how it all turned out. So, every episode of the podcast has the dilemma, our conversation, and a follow-up communication. So, be sure you listen to the end. For those of you wondering, "Well, how can I bundle all of these ideas into one document?" You're in luck! [Laughs] I have a book coming out! It's called *The Brave Learner*, published by TarcherPerigee, which is an imprint of Penguin Random House, and that book will be published on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. *The Brave Learner: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning, and Life*. You can certainly pre-order it now, I'll tell you more

about that later in this episode, but for now, let's dive in and get to know Tammy Kim. She brings forward for us to consider the most common and vexing of homeschool dilemmas. Can't wait to let you in on the conversation. [Theme music plays]

**Julie:** Today, we're welcoming to the podcast Tammy Kim. She reached out expressing a sense of overwhelm and worry about her effectiveness as a homeschool educator. Here's what she says in her own words: "I'm struggling with managing the time to create fun, interesting lessons the girls can all be excited to learn from, while trying to take our homeschooling to a higher level." You know, she is articulating the dilemma so many parents feel. Yeah, how do you incorporate *a//*the ideas in the Brave Writer Lifestyle from art appreciation to copywork to Shakespeare to nature study to watching movies? I'm sure many of you know what I'm talking about and you still have to quote-unquote "get through the math book," right? By the end of the year.

So along with the normal stressors of everyday life, Tammy's family recently uprooted and moved to Paradise, California, the town where she was born and raised. And she made this courageous decision just to be closer to family and receive more support for herself. Tammy's also got some learning challenges that she's dealing with in her children and even had a child who went through cancer treatments. Tammy is a heroic home-educator and I am hoping that today we can encourage her, so join me today as I get to speak with Tammy and let's give her advice, encouragement, and lots of love. Thanks for coming to the broadcast, Tammy.

**Tammy:** Thank you so much for having me, Julie.

**Julie:** I really welcome your question and I wonder if you would be willing to put it into your words now. Where are you since you first sent in your, you know, submission? What is the most vexing aspect of homeschooling for you today?

**Tammy:** Well, since sending in my request to learn a little from you, I—I have been very mindful of myself and where I'm at on this journey still, and forever. I've noticed that I've really struggled a lot with myself—my own self-worth, my confidence—and being able to be positive and encouraging and supportive to my children, while trying to teach them. But—you know, it's just a really—it's a scary thing, knowing that their education is on me and I want to be able to give them the best I can.

**Julie:** Absolutely. I think all of us, when we take on the task of homeschooling, have no idea just how big that responsibility feels once we're living it full-time. So, that is well articulated, I fully understand that. So, if you could have in a wish, in a fantasy, the homeschool of your dreams, what do you think it would look like?

**Tammy:** [Laughs] Well, a little far-fetched probably as I'm facing reality, but just to be able to wake up, you know, and be ready to go by 9:00 in the morning, that is what I feel for myself and my children is acceptable, and I feel comfortable with that. But I do take time most evenings, when some wrench doesn't get thrown into the evening, where I try to lay out all of the plans that we have for the day and the assignments that I'm hoping that my daughters can get through on some kind of an "assignment sheet" is what I call it. And that way it helps them to maintain a little more independence. They know what they need to get done. A lot of those things need to be accomplished with my support and help, but then there's a lot of things that they can do independently. And I feel really good about achieving that in the two years that I've been homeschooling. So, when that goes smoothly, and you know, I can be helping one child with math and then I can call all three of them together to do a freewrite—thank you to Julie Bogart and her insight.

**Julie:** [Laughs]

**Tammy:** And then I can dismiss all of them to start doing independent work, where one is practicing piano and I've gone off with another to start on helping them with their science project or whatever, and I can keep that circular motion happening throughout our school day and, you know, wrap it up maybe around 2:00 and then we're free to go off and have our ballet lesson or whatever it is we do. And *that*—to me—is a very satisfying day.

**Julie:** That sounds like a beautiful picture. How does that feel to your girls—and by the way, we forgot to mention, you have three, correct?

**Tammy:** Yes! I have a 13-year-old, Adalyn. An 11-year-old, Hailey. And my 8-year-old is Julia.

**Julie:** Yes, so, if they were to be asked that same question, do you think they would come up with the same picture?

**Tammy:** No, and I think that's the issue. They often complain that they're bored or that they're tired of doing this and they're sick of learning or they're sick of school. And so, I'm recognizing that we really need to be able to bring in more love for learning and I'm struggling to know how to get more creative and find ways to establish that love for learning.

**Julie:** Yes, okay, so this is wonderful. Thank you so much for your question because I think it's a common one. There is, in your mind, a body of information, a set of school subjects, skills that you want your child, your three girls, to study, to accomplish, to complete, to acquire—and then there is a *life* that your girls want to live that doesn't seem to correspond to that same list that you have. Now, when—when we're talking about education—let me ask you real quick, were you homeschooled, or did you go to school as a child?

**Tammy:** I went to school.

**Julie:** You went to school! So, it is quite likely that that pernicious Ghost of Public School Past is living on your left shoulder whispering not-such-sweet-nothings into your ear about what school is. I had the same ghost. "Oh, well, in second grade they should be learning cursive," "third graders do narrative paragraphs," "fourth graders study California history and all the missions." You know, I had all these sort of whispers in my ear, and so as I would trust or be a little freer with my children, suddenly this voice would come back to me and say, "But you only had your child do 10 math problems and I'll bet you in third grade math they're doing 20 a day." Do you ever have a thought like that?

**Tammy:** All the time! Just today my daughter was demonstrating an excellent capacity for subtracting double-digit numbers as a second grader and yet she had gone through five and I was thinking, "Oh, my gosh, but we've only done five problems! We need to practice further! Let's do 10 more!" And I was having that battle within myself as she was there doing these rote problems and I'm trying to get out of that—I don't know, that assumption that they have to do a certain number of problems.

**Julie:** Yes! Because the structure of school doesn't take individuals into account. School is organized to move a large group of children through a system at a predictable pace, managed by one instructor. One of the great joys and mysteries of homeschool is that we get to tailor education to the individual child. But what that means, then, is sometimes we have to sort of let go of the side of the pool and see whether this child is sinking or swimming. We don't have the reassurance of, "Well, we put them through fifteen problems like all the other 30 children, whether or not they're learning it is less important than the fact that they just did it and they're keeping up with the rest of the class." What we want to find out in homeschool is how to make learning come to life for a child. And here's one of the tricks right out of the gate: because you have a memory of school, your house, right before your very eyes, at the moment you wake up in the morning, turns into a schoolroom. You literally have an imagination for the building. Now,

I noticed you said that you've been at this two years. So, some of your kids have also been in school, is that correct?

**Tammy:** Absolutely, our oldest made it through March of her fifth-grade year and then there were some incidents where we realized, okay, it's time, and we yanked her.

**Julie:** And you yanked her, why? You didn't yank her because you thought school was good for her. You yanked her because, why? [Laughs]

**Tammy:** [Laughs] Well, because it wasn't working where she was, and she wasn't—her needs weren't being met. And so, I felt that having her home, in a safe environment where she wasn't up against a system that she wasn't fitting into, would be far more prosperous for her than if we had just kept her there.

**Julie:** Exactly. So, let's pause for a moment and think about how you have imported a vision of the system into the home that you were hoping would be more prosperous for her. Now, I have no doubt that already just being at home, being with you, having this more nurturing environment has meant a world of difference for her, but we want to bring that world of difference into the education, not just into the safety of her social relationships or the feeling of it being an institution. One of the dangers, especially when you're a new homeschooler—which you still are, only two years in—is to start to trust the contours of learning according to the properties of home; not school. So, let's talk for a minute about the difference between a school and a home. Tell me a little bit about school. Does school allow you, for example, to show up once you've had enough sleep?

**Tammy:** [Laughs] No! Absolutely not.

**Julie:** [Laughs] No, you show up when the bell rings and if you're not there on time, how do you get into the school?

**Tammy:** Well, we have to sign in.

**Julie:** You do, and you have to give an excuse. Is it okay if the excuse is, "My daughter was tired last night, so I let her sleep in two hours, and that's why she's late"?

**Tammy:** No, that does not go over [laughs].

**Julie:** No, and if she missed an important lesson during those two unexcused absence hours, what happens to her grade?

**Tammy:** Oh, it drops immediately.

**Julie:** Does that have anything to do with whether she's mastered, let's say, subtraction and borrowing?

**Tammy:** No.

**Julie:** So, let's say she got really tired, she slept in because you let her, you brought her to school, signed her in saying she was tired, she needed to sleep; it was an unexcused absence. She had gotten 100% on the homework but because she didn't turn it in at the right time, and it was unexcused, she got a zero and her overall score in the class went down. Have you learned anything about her ability to subtract?

**Tammy:** No.

**Julie:** And yet, how odd [laughs] that she's being penalized for behavior oriented to her welfare that had nothing to do with her mastery of subtraction.

**Tammy:** [Laughs] Yes. I hear you loud and clear, what you're saying.

**Julie:** Right? Yes!

**Tammy:** Yeah.

**Julie:** So, here's what's crazy: our kids enter the school system and they learn the conditions and rules of school and they bend their health, their sleep habits, their personalities, and their vision of what life is supposed to be to the institutional environment. What happens when they come home? Well, let's just discuss for a moment the properties of home. Let's say you have been out for a few days—you don't currently have an outside of the home job, do you?

**Tammy:** No, I don't.

**Julie:** No. So, let's say you had one. I would assume perhaps your husband does or you're certainly aware of your parents who might have. But when a person goes out away from home and they're working and then they come home, what do they expect to feel when they get home?

**Tammy:** Well, just a sense of relaxation and, you know, "I need to recover and get away from it all. I don't have to work anymore." They want peace.

**Julie:** Yes! Exactly. They feel relief. They get to show up as the person they are. And so, here's what happens, we think to ourselves, "Okay, I'm going to homeschool," and we try to turn the building that is the symbol of relief from outside expectations into a place where those expectations now have intruded on the home-space. And you know what children do when they feel that? They resist [laughs]. They do not want to give up the right to be who they are at home in order to fulfill an institutional expectation. So, suddenly we're in this dilemma, you know, they may cooperate at the beginning because the workbooks are new, and the pencils are sharp, and, you know, there's a certain novelty to all sitting at the table together but that quickly wears off in favor of, "Can't I just flop on the couch?" "Do I have to get up at 9:00?" "Why do I have to finish 30 problems when I understood the principle in the first five?" Because home allows you to ask those questions [laughs]. Do you see a little bit what might be happening with your daughters?

**Tammy:** Absolutely, and it's so wonderful to have the muddy water kind of cleared as we're speaking. It makes a lot of sense.

**Julie:** No—that’s awesome! So, here’s what’s so exciting: in this, your third year of homeschool coming up, you get to use the properties of home to transform their learning experience. You get to set aside the structure of school and embrace properties of home-life to deliver all the education you want your kids to have. So, let’s start with this wonderful example you gave me of learning how to subtract—such a great example. Your daughter figured out the system in five problems, right? She got them all right, she understood the system. The only tool you could imagine at that moment to reinforce and make sure she really got it was to have her do more of the same. But here’s what’s so great about being at home; you could get to the end of five and you could try some other ideas. You could ask her, “What are ways we use subtraction in real life? Let’s think about for a minute what subtraction actually is.” And so, you could talk about making a recipe and dividing it in half—subtracting half the ingredients, coming up with a smaller amount. Do you see where I’m going?

**Tammy:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Julie:** You get to rip the lid off. When you see your child learning something, you get to rip the lid off. You get to start imagining what this is in our lives—that is the greatest challenge of homeschooling. But it’s also the greatest opportunity. You might have had a child, conversely, who found subtraction really challenging and you did all 15 problems and they were still challenging. Same thing; do we just now assign 20 more? No, now we start thinking, “Well, what makes subtraction show up in my child’s life in a tangible way. Could we play Yahtzee? Or a board game? Could we sit on the ground with a whole collection of seashells and just start grouping them and taking away and touching them tangibly? Can we play tricks where we do it orally in our minds? Could we toss a Frisbee back and forth? Could my daughter make a test for me where she creates the answer key and I have to get them right and she makes the problems really hard?” All the ways that you played with your kids, zero to five, where you had no book and nobody telling you what to do, and you showed them how to roll over and walk and hold a fork and pour the milk so it didn’t spill all over the table—these are the same strategies for everything you want your child to learn at home.

**Tammy:** I think that is beautiful. I think one of the things that I struggle with the most is when I have a second grader who’s learning how to borrow from the 10’s place in order to subtract 3 from 2 in the 1’s place, but then I have a 13-year-old that’s learning Algebra, and being able to keep all of these different curricula interesting for their individual paths that they’re on and, you know, a fifth grader that has spent, you know, probably five months trying to master long division and that’s okay, it’s her pace, but keeping that exciting and interesting and keeping that needle moving. I don’t know if I need to just settle down and just let it be, or do I need to be, “Oh, hurry! You got to learn this,” kind of thing—which is kind of what I struggle with internally.



**Julie:** Absolutely, and you're absolutely right—you cannot download your anxiety onto your kids' heads. That just ups the stakes—nobody can thrive under that pressure. You're not thriving; they're not thriving. But there are ways that you can even support the tasks. So, there are a couple things. One is, when a child is successful, like your younger daughter was with the subtracting, then give her a day or two off while you give concentrated devotion to the child struggling with long division. You can even allow that child who's been successful to use those couple of days and say, "Well, you understand subtraction, you show me now a meaningful use of it and I'm going to give you two days and on Wednesday, you let me know how you thought of ways to use subtraction that I haven't thought of yet in our family, in our house, how it's showing up in real life. Where you've seen it on TV." And then just give her free time while you're *focused* on the child who needs this extra attention. In other words, the school system says an hour a day per subject per child, and now you're trying to teach three different levels, simultaneously all in one day, every day. But what happens if you rotate through the children? Or rotate through the subjects? You have time! You don't have to give an hour to every subject, every child, every day. Sometimes, the greatest lesson happens in a burst. But then the second thing that you can do is to offer support to the struggle. So, if, for example, you decided, "Okay, these three kids are going to work on math. I do feel comfortable with these textbooks. I'm not feeling creative in this season or during this subject," the best thing you can do is at least make the experience of doing math *cozy*. Can you take it to Panera and get everybody hot chocolate? Can you light candles? Can you do it at a different time of day? Or in a different room? Or on different colored paper? Lend support to the struggle rather than toughing it out and treating it like they're in a classroom and they're not allowed to get a glass of water. We have a joke in *Brave Writer*: "When all else fails, add brownies." You know? Like, if you've got a child who's finding it really challenging to work on long division, maybe that's the subject that needs that TLC. A good snack, cuddling, a different experience than feet on the floor, hands on the table, focused attention with a parent hovering in the standing position. Do you see the difference?

**Tammy:** I do, and you are describing what I've been struggling with precisely and I'm—so I'm trying to let go of this formula that I've always been adhering to—it's so structured and you're describing something that is much more relaxed and comfortable, which I am assuming will allow them to open up more rather than resisting me so much with what I think they've got in the given day.

**Julie:** Exactly. The thing that you're going for isn't "getting done" or "getting through." You are looking for an epiphany—the "A-Ha!" moment—and when the "A-Ha!" comes, it needs to be celebrated. So, if your daughter does five problems 100% that's a time for a high-five and making a smoothie. That recognition that children need to re-up their energy for all this focus,

helps them sustain good will toward you. Because you're acknowledging that an hour long of sustained focus is too much for kids. The Student Coalition for—I forget, it's Literacy Education or something. Anyway, SCALE is the acronym. They have done studies that show focused attention equals age-level plus one minute. So, if your child is seven, they can give you eight good minutes. Well, when we're focused on making them sit for an hour doing one lesson where they're struggling, they aren't even able to give you the level of focused concentration they need to produce the outcome you are so desperate to see occur. So, we want to both find new ways to bring meaning and usefulness to the lessons they're getting, *and* we also want to give them breaks. Meaningful moments of recovery from exertion.

**Tammy:** Wow. So, I'm trying to revamp my schedule because I get so excited that we start at 9 in the morning and we go until 2:00 straight, right?

**Julie:** [Laughs].

**Tammy:** With a lunch break. And I'm like, oh, my gosh, Julie! I'm killing my poor children!

**Julie:** [Laughs] We've all done it, don't worry! [Laughs]

**Tammy:** I'm going to try and give myself a break because I'm still learning this, and I've been at this for only two years [laughs].

**Julie:** That's right! That's exactly right.

**Tammy:** [Laughs] But I am so *eager* to make it right and to take suggestions and try and revamp this, so that they can find more joy, so yeah—oh, my goodness, I'm—I'm horrified right now [laughs], because they sit for 30 straight minutes reading a textbook of history and then I make them do a narration and—yeah, no wonder they've been griping, because maybe it's a little too much.

**Julie:** They need a vision that they're driving, too. You know there is skill work. I mean, in my family we did copywork and dictation, and we did math books because that helped me. And I had a child learning Latin and Logic, she loved using workbooks for that. You know, those were

practices that were pretty habitual for us, but when it came to science and history, especially when my kids were not in high school, my goodness—the world is just too interesting to subject those subjects to textbooks! I could use a textbook as a reference point, like, “Oh, yeah! I forgot about photosynthesis! That would be great to learn about!” But I wasn’t going to subject my child to reading a textbook when literally we could go outside because we were home. We could get a field guide, we could build a birdfeeder. We could count birds and contribute them to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s bird count every year. You see what I’m saying? This is the opportunity of homeschool.

So, one of the ways that you can sort of invite your children back in, so that you’re not doing education *to* your kids [laughs]—because that’s what school does, they do it *to* the children—you can ask them! So, let’s say you are working on math, since this is the subject we latched onto, you could say to your child in the morning, “How many problems do you think you have energy for today?” and find out! What if your child said only one? You say “One? Awesome! Let’s see you do it!” And then your child does the one problem and gets it right and you say, “High-five! That’s awesome!” Next day: “How many problems do you think you can do?” And you just start allowing them to grow. You might even have a target. “How many would you *like* to be able to do?” You know, treat it like somebody who’s training for a race. Instead of it being about this arbitrary teacher-imposed set that is the correct amount. Do you see?

**Tammy:** Absolutely! And then they’re able to contribute to that amount that we need to work on in order to grow. It’s not me, it’s them being able to contribute to that process as well.

**Julie:** That’s right. And you can give them options. I’m not saying—you can see, I mean, some kids will test you and say, “Zero!” and my advice is always to go with it. Say, “Oh, that’s awesome, I would say zero today, too. Alright, well, we’ll talk about it again tomorrow.” [Laughs] You know? Or you could have—I know a family who did this, which I loved, they had a jar and they put all the basic school workbooks that they had in this jar on slips of paper, and once a week the kids each got to pull out one slip of paper and on that day they didn’t do that subject. So, there was sort of this feeling of there was going to be a Get Out of Jail Free card. This is for parents who still feel tied to workbooks, feel like they have certain things they want to get through. It’s not easy to just let go of the side of the pool if you’ve never learned to swim. You have to have—you know, I like what Rita Cevasco, *Rooted in Language*, says: “You don’t learn to swim by drowning.” [Laughs] So, I’m not saying get rid of all of your crutches and resources that help you know what education is or what you want to deliver to your children. But what you can do is you can enhance the experience of what you’re delivering by drawing on the properties of surprise, mystery, risk, and adventure.

**Tammy:** Switching it up, it sounds like, yeah.

**Julie:** Yes! So, one of the things I noticed when I was reading through the notes you sent us is that you had a list of morning chores to check off before you start homeschool, and so I wondered if you minded if I commented on that for a moment?

**Tammy:** Please, do.

**Julie:** Okay [laughs], you ready? You're not going to like it [laughs], so I'm warning you. I made a decision early on that I would never have my kids do chores before they started the homeschool day. So, we only did them on weekends and here's why: I did not want to spend relationship equity and good will towards learning on making a bed or vacuuming. I needed that energy for math, so we started our day by hanging out. I usually got up—we got up when we got up, after we'd all slept. And, you know, you have three kids; I had five. So, imagine; sometimes some of those kids didn't get up till 10:00 [laughs]—especially when they were old. But we would get up when we got up, and then for about a half hour I would listen to the radio and drink tea and read online, and my kids would read or play a game or, you know, build with Lego, and *then* we would start the day. So that the beginning of the day was fueled with their own energy reserves, rather than me depleting them before we started. What do you think that would feel like in your family? Does that seem feasible to you as something to try?

**Tammy:** Absolutely. I would absolutely be willing to try it, because I've heard so many that have kind of gone in that direction, but I've always been this, "Oh, I have to have structure and I have to make sure that we have a schedule that we adhere to!" And my children do need schedule and routine, but I think it might be choking them a little too much, so if I can branch out a little bit and also recognizing that I'm needing to kind of reprogram. I don't think I shared this with you, but I did teach in the public school system for about four years before I had our first child.

**Julie:** Ah.

**Tammy:** And so, I'm kind of programmed that way, and yet I'm realizing that it wasn't necessarily advantageous for me to have that background, because when it comes to homeschooling I answer to it a little too much and I'm trying to let go of that, so what you just described as far as, you know, getting started in the day, it doesn't have to have—well, it doesn't have to look like a school. If I could try that without freaking out and thinking I'm going to fail my children and they're not going to make it to a university because we don't have a

schedule—that sort of attitude that I have, I want to benefit and support my children the best way I can, but what I know, I think, is sabotaging us. And so, I’m so open to trying something that will benefit my children.

**Julie:** Absolutely. Listen, it’s so easy to worry about the future and miss the moment, and I’m here to reassure you. Four of my five kids went to college, the fifth one who didn’t taught himself everything he needed to know to become a computer programmer and has a lucrative career as an adult. So, he didn’t even need college. And then one of my five just graduated from Columbia Law School, an Ivy League university. I want you to just keep that in mind.

Interestingly, my kids all say that what they remember the most from their homeschool experience as adults is time. Time to read, time to do the things that were interesting to them. My daughter, when she was little—my youngest daughter—she took up sewing. She spent hours a day sewing on a sewing machine. By ninth-grade, she had a fashion blog. She ran a cookie business to pay for her thrift store shopping and she dressed in a different outfit every day for a year. We took a picture and then she would blog about it. And she had quite a following, actually. I remember one time being out with her and someone came up and said, “Oh, my gosh, I’m obsessed with your fashion blog!” We didn’t even know who this person was! These are the riches of homeschool that my kids take with them. Poetry Teatime, all the fieldtrips, the fact that we had a membership at the art museum and the zoo, the fact that they could pursue their interests with time. *And* they learned math. *And* they learned to handwrite. But we can’t get there if we are hanging on so tightly to the school schedule that we actually don’t have time for those rabbit trail trips into what they’re really passionate about.

And one of the things that you asked me—and I wanted to mention it because I made a little list for you, so the first thing was: Let’s see if we can let go of the chores in the morning and warm up to the day with a little more coziness. So, you’ve got that one. Then the second one is to allow your kids to have more say in how much of these assignment practices you have. So, do they do math every day or every other day? Do they decide how many problems? If we say, let’s say, over the course of the week it’d be great to have 25 problems done, can they decide how many per day they do? Maybe they’re going to do all 25 in one day and then they have nothing left to do for the week or they’re going divide it up five a day, or they’re going to do two on Monday, three on Tuesday and build up, but maybe giving them some room to make choices around these assignments, to take breaks, to add brownies, to light a candle. Maybe they only do math when they light candles and drink tea. Something that helps enhance the experience would be the second thing.

And then third idea I had for you was this: Don’t go past noon. Use the afternoon to pursue the things that live in your both mother and teacher imagination. You know how when you became a teacher, you had this vision of learning that was far more exciting than filling in worksheets? I mean, I don’t think anyone goes to college to become a teacher so that they can supervise worksheets. They’re picturing, you know, some kind of immersive experience where they’re

really doing the science experiment. They're really going on the fieldtrip. They're really building the low-tech habitat in the backyard. They're crossbreeding fish, you know? Like, that's what they're thinking about. So, keep the afternoon open for those kinds of opportunities. Create them, seek them out. Keep some wasted time open for something new to emerge that doesn't look like the 9:00-2:00 schedule.

**Tammy:** Right. Got it.

**Julie:** How scary is this?

**Tammy:** It is terrifying. I'm ready to try it because I know what I'm doing isn't working. I think what I'm processing right now is how do I get my children from where they're at right now—me cracking the whip—to, "Okay, let's be more free. Let's go to the library and we can check out books about things that you're interested in," and I'm fearing what if they don't know what to do with that? They don't know what they want to start learning more about.

**Julie:** So, that's a fantastic question. So, I have an answer for you that I think will help you. Don't announce it. Don't say, "We're going to be more free!" You don't need to do that. What you need to do is simply let some things go, so when your kids get up in the morning just—I don't know how rigid the chore schedule is, but you may say, "You know what? I'm just realizing when I get up in the morning, I need about a half hour to wake all the way up and I bet you do, too. Let's just move chores to the weekend and see how that feels for a while." Like that, like feather it in. Take it one thing at a time. If you go to the library, instead of making a big announcement, "Go check out books of things you're interested in," hand them their library cards and say to them, "I'm going to go check out some books I'm interested, feel free to do the same if you want," and walk away. Stop hovering. Give them a little room to start to feel that freedom of self. And they may not come back with anything initially because it may feel unfamiliar, they might say, "Well, Mom, I don't know what to look up." Say, "Well, I noticed earlier this week you seemed kind of interested in—" fill in the blank— "*Phineas and Ferb* the TV show. I wonder if there's a book about that." It doesn't have to be academic. Pay attention to who they are and validate—maybe even just be subversive like that and pick something totally non-academic, so that they're like, shocked that you actually think those things count [laughs], you know?

**Tammy:** Yes! And paying attention when they start trying to tell me about Minecraft or whatever, which I have no interest in, but I have to have interest because they like it [laughs].

**Julie:** You know what helps? Remember that you're interested in your children. If you're wanting access to the deepest part of who they are, then the thing they're the most obsessed with is the thing filling their minds. They're literally thinking about Minecraft while they're doing that grammar worksheet. So, if you actually want them to grow, knowing their mind about Minecraft might even help you eventually teach grammar. You just have to think about Minecraft through grammar. Sometimes in our effort to be so disciplined and diligent, we are missing the fact that the subjects we want to teach are all hiding in the interests our children already have.

**Tammy:** Hmm. You know, I love everything that you're sharing with me and I just had an experience this morning that I wanted to share with you about my second grader. She came to me and had created slime because she looked it up online, she found the recipe and was able to put together this concoction of slime because she was interested in it and found it—I think on YouTube. And I am *so* excited that as a second grader, she had the ability and the capacity to be able to pursue that on her own. And now, after gymnastics class today, we're going to the grocery store so that we can buy all the ingredients for the other recipe that she just found. So, my point in bringing this up is I have hope that they can pursue their passions and find that freedom of self—which I love what you just said—that freedom of self. I want to facilitate that in all my children. At this point I'm thinking, "Okay, how do I do that?" To sit back and say, "Okay! Go find something to learn and I'm not going to hover over you like I have been."

**Julie:** You don't need to announce it. That would be my biggest thing. If you say, "Go find something to learn," they're going to think you're looking for them to learn something. What you want to do instead is come sideways. Sidle up. Like, I love that your daughter found that YouTube video and now you're taking her to get that material that she needs to make whatever the project is. You want to sidle up. Think of yourself as looking not at your child but at the same thing your child is looking at. Gaze in the direction your child is gazing. We can educate our kids through whatever means they offer us if we pay attention and sidle up.

So, the first thing for you is just becoming comfortable with the notion that you're at home. Helping yourself really be home. What does it feel like when you're home? You know, imagine a day when your kids and your husband are gone. What would you do at home? How would home feel home-y to you? Would you walk around barefoot? Would you sit with a cup of tea and read the newspaper? Would you read a book in one sitting? And what would happen if sometimes you actually just lived that, in the midst of your children? So, you're into a novel and you just couldn't put it down and you woke up and you had breakfast and you said, "You guys, I can't put this book down, so feel free to live however you live, but I've got to finish this book." What lessons are your kids learning when they see you have that kind of self-care, that kind of passion, that kind of flexibility? That's all part of homeschooling.

**Tammy:** Beautiful! Amen [laughs].

**Julie:** [Laughs] Good.

**Tammy:** So excited Julie to go with it—just to go for it and try this. I think it's going to make it totally different.

**Julie:** You're going to do great. So, here's what I would like us to do Tammy. We will call you back sometime in the fall, September or October. I realize summer is coming up at the time of this recording and so don't try and keep homeschooling going in the way that you have or even in the new way just because we've had this conversation. Just feather in a couple of these ideas, see how it feels, even over the summer, you can experiment with some of this going to the library, sidling up where you don't have the pressure of workbook pages sort of staring you in the face, and see how that transition feels. If you have a child who shows suspicion or says, "Mom, aren't we ever going to do real school?" You know, they've been brainwashed into thinking there's real school and not-real school. Go belly up. Just say, "You know what? I didn't know what I was thinking. We're at home! We're not at school. There are so many ways to learn, I'm sorry I gave you that impression. We're just going to experiment, we're going to keep going forward and learning together. You let me know when you love what we're doing and when you don't, so we can make good adjustments." Just enroll them in the program.

**Tammy:** Sounds wonderful.

**Julie:** Awesome. Well, thanks for joining me, so much!

**Tammy:** Thank you.

**Julie:** We will give you a call back soon.

**Tammy:** Thank you, Julie.



**Julie:** Thanks, Tammy.

[Theme music plays]. So, let's take a break. We need to give Tammy a few moments to apply some of these ideas, and I'd really like to talk to you about my book that's coming out, and then we'll return and hear what happened in Tammy's family after she took some of these suggestions to heart.

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**Julie:** I'm excited to share with you about my new book, [THE BRAVE LEARNER](#). Each week of the podcast I'm going to pick a quote to share with you and then we'll talk about it. Here's this week's quote from the Introduction:

*"Pretend it's the end of a school year, you and your children share happy memories, love being together, academic progress is clear. Wouldn't that feel great?"*

You know, that's all I wanted out of my homeschool when I was raising my five kids. I wanted to know that we got along, that we were building this nice history together that we could share for decades to come, but that while all that was going on, my kids were growing in academics, so they'd be ready for college or ready for whatever adult life they chose. If you're looking for help to make that experience come to life in your family, my hope is that my book, *The Brave Learner*, can help. It draws on the experiences of my own life, as well as the thousands of families I've had the privilege of knowing over these last 20 years.

So, what I wanted to tell you about today is that if you pre-order by February 5<sup>th</sup>, you're also going to get a couple of early-bird bonuses that will help you have that life that you're looking for. The first gift is called "Hard Cases: Q&A with Julie." In that exclusive digital download, I tackle the hard questions about parenting and educating that I've received by phone and email, at conferences over the last 20 years. These are questions that so many of you have and I wanted to give them sort of patient, extra attention. So, if you pre-order the book, that will come to you, winging its way into your email inbox on the day of publication, February 5<sup>th</sup>. The second bonus is the opportunity to be a part of the very first meeting of the Brave Learner Book Club. We will be meeting over the course of the next few months after the book is published, but that first meeting is free and available only to pre-order purchases.

So, if you go to [thebravelearner.com](http://thebravelearner.com), you'll find links to the sale pages, and it's the place that you can enter your receipt to prove that you pre-ordered, so that we have a way to send you the digital copy of "Hard Cases" and to invite you to the webinar. The webinar will be available live and on replay to anyone who pre-orders. We will be learning how to implement the 12 Super Powers of Learning, which is what I teach in the book, *The Brave Learner*. So now, thanks for listening, and let's get back to my conversation with Tammy. [Theme music plays].

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**Julie:** Hello Tammy! Welcome back to the podcast! It's great to follow up with you.

**Tammy:** Thank you so much, Julie!

**Julie:** Wow. So, tell me what's been going on? Did you take the summer off?

**Tammy:** I did, and it was an amazing experience and a learning opportunity for me. You know, I've been homeschooling for two years, so I'm now starting my third year and learned a lot from you before starting—well, I guess it was the end of my second year that I basically visited with you and had just a little time to kind of apply it while I was full-on homeschooling still. But then, once summer break kicked in, I decided that I needed to take that time and revamp. Refresh, recover. We were completely burned out. And I don't know if you recall, we had just gone through a major move, which is a major life change and I could tell that, not only was I about to have a nervous breakdown, but my children were really showing signs of that as well. So, the homeschool break over the summer was very needed and very beneficial. So, we have been homeschooling again. Let's see, we are officially in the middle of our second full week, and I am absolutely delighted.

**Julie:** Oh!

**Tammy:** I'm almost emotional.

**Julie:** Oh, my goodness!

**Tammy:** With how wonderful [laughs]—yes. It has been such a huge transformation from where I was at the beginning of summer to what I'm seeing or foreseeing for this, the beginning of my third year. And I owe you a huge debt of gratitude for the things that I've been able to learn from you. Not only when we started with this podcast discussion at the end of the school year, but I took a lot of time to research and learn. I listened to a lot of YouTube videos that you provide. I did the Homeschool Alliance and I just learned so many things. And I am putting them into application and it's a huge, huge come around for our whole family. It's been awesome [laughs].

**Julie:** I'm so, so happy for you. That is everything. And sometimes just getting that moment, you know, pausing after a crisis or a feeling of really being stuck and giving yourself time to process allows you to sort of distill what you're learning into the valuable implementation

practices that you will carry out later. So, tell me, since you are almost to the point of tears over these first two weeks, tell me a little bit about what feels different compared to last year. How do you feel in reaction to the way the days are going? What is different for you?

**Tammy:** Well, first of all, I think the children's outlook is completely changed. They are more positive, more self-motivated. I think they know that they have more of a voice in our homeschooling process, which is something I think I was robbing them of.

**Julie:** Wow.

**Tammy:** So, that was a huge goal and it makes a huge difference. That they are able to contribute more of what their needs are. And I have ears now to hear what they have to say, and I can't believe what a difference that makes for all of us. So, yeah.

**Julie:** Oh, my goodness. Now you need to give us an example [laughs]. I'm dying to hear. What's something that one of your children voiced that you found yourself responding to?

**Tammy:** Well, I don't have the greatest example, but I'll give you one and it happened just today.

**Julie:** Great.

**Tammy:** Math. That has been our huge challenge and trying to keep it fresh and new and interesting and so that it doesn't get monotonous, you know, I'm still trying to figure that one out, of course. And you know, when we get farther into the school year, I'm sure that I'll have opportunities to try that out. But I noticed that my daughter was expressing today—one of my three daughters—that it was overwhelming. She didn't want to do the math and I had, I think, provided 10 problems that she needed to do for practice and in listening to her express that she didn't want to do it and it was too hard, and that was sending a message to me that, "Okay, you know what? What's really happening right now is she's feeling overwhelmed. I need to step back and allow her to have maybe five problems, instead of 10." And so, that was a suggestion that I made to her and I asked her, "Would that make a difference? If we did just five instead of 10 problems." "Oh, my gosh!" She says "Yeah, yeah, Mom, that would be fine." Totally switched it around. And so, she was able to do the five problems, got them all right, and I felt

fulfilled that, "Okay, good, she's gotten her math practice in for today." She was feeling good because she wasn't overwhelmed and weighed down with 10 problems. That was too much for her and she let me know and I was able to hear, and you know, that's not a "Wow! Oh, my gosh," but you know what, it's those little things. By small things, great things can turn out. I'm sorry—[laughs].

**Julie:** No, you're exactly right. In fact, that goes with the principle that I like to express: Lower the bar to experience success. So, when you're at this logjam like you were with someone who's feeling overwhelmed, we don't know why 10 problems sounded like too much for her today. And from an adult perspective, sometimes we think, "Well, just buck up and do them, it can't be that bad, you did 10 problems yesterday, why is 10 suddenly an issue?" And yet, all of us know that we have fluctuating needs even in our own lives. If I'm going to go out and exercise, one day I might run for 30 minutes, another day for an hour, and the next day I only want to run for 20, I don't know why, it's just one day my body is up for it and another day it's not. So, similarly for kids, they're going to have fluctuating abilities and fluctuating willingness to sustain that focused attention. By honoring them and helping them become self-aware, we actually leave the door open for them to go past their limits on other days because now they know they're not going to be forced, they know that they're able to pay attention. So, what you did for her is you lowered the bar, you allowed her to feel completely successful. I mean, to do the five problems, get them all right, and know that you have your mother's approval? Could there be anything better in education? So, that now creates space for her to take on a bigger challenge when she's ready, because she knows that you aren't just going to force her into something that she can't do. So, that's fantastic! Great example.

**Tammy:** Oh, and it was fantastic, and by the end of the math lesson she came to me giving me a big hug because she was feeling all that positive energy that was allowed for her. So, yay!

**Julie:** Wow. Can you imagine? I just want to pause and notice that a mother got a hug at the end of a math lesson [laughs].

**Tammy:** A math lesson! Yay! [Laughs] That wasn't happening last year, Julie. For sure. [Laughs]

**Julie:** No, not when we last talked at all. I just want to say that, to me, is just the perfect cherry on the top of this sundae.

**Tammy:** Truly.

**Julie:** You know, so often the thing that we are experiencing in our homes is this kind of tug of war on a rope. One person is pulling, and the other is pulling back, and we're trying to figure out who's got more power to drag the other person over the line, right? That's—Am I going to drag you into 10 problems or is my daughter going to drag me down to five? But one person loses in that scenario. What you created with your daughter was such a win that she felt like you both succeeded and that's why you got a hug. I love that. I just think that's fantastic.

**Tammy:** I love it, too! I'm loving the hugs. And that she's happy and feeling fulfilled. And then there's the other two as well. And it's just a lot more freedom that's happening and I've noticed that just in these last two weeks and it's been great.

**Julie:** Did you happen to try not doing chores before the day gets started?

**Tammy:** Yes! Thank you for bringing that up. I did try that and I'm still kind of experimenting with it, but I did really feel like when I gave them too much freedom from—I don't want to say, "their chores," it's more like a morning routine where they can get up—and I'm sorry, I have to have beds made. I don't want them to look like—their rooms to look like they've been trashed, so that's part of the morning routine.

**Julie:** That makes sense.

**Tammy:** Yeah. So, they made their beds, they brushed their hair, they would get their breakfast, take their vitamins, that kind of routine that just needed to happen.

**Julie:** Perfect.

**Tammy:** But I wanted to step back and not be so controlling of it, and when I did that I kind of felt like they were just dinking around and the whole morning was just getting away from us, and I was having a hard time with that, and we weren't getting the things done that we really needed to accomplish in a day, so I kind of ramped it up and decided you know what? No,

we're going to have to do our morning routine. And that's something that I learned in watching some YouTube videos is routine versus schedule and all that kind of thing.

**Julie:** Exactly.

**Tammy:** I love that. So yeah, I'm still trying to figure out, "Okay, is it really important that we start right at 9:00 or can I kind of let it go a little bit?" So, you know, still trying to figure that one out.

**Julie:** Well, you know, for me there's a difference between the things that you do when you get up and you get yourself ready for the day and assigning your kids to vacuum the living room. Do you know what I mean? Like, for me, the chore thing sometimes when I'm talking with parents, it's like the child gets up, they have to get ready, they have to eat their food. Then they're going to go vacuum the living room or clean a bathroom or, you know, unload groceries or whatever this sort of household task is, and that's when I've seen it sometimes sap the energy for homeschool. On the flipside, there can be benefit to exactly what you're talking about, a child sort of preparing for the day. It doesn't always work this way and every now and then it's kind of nice even just to be in pajamas all day or whatever, but what I have noticed is there is a certain preparation comes through taking care of yourself. You know, getting ready, coming downstairs alert. And what I think you're doing for your kids is just teaching them that as a good habit.

I sometimes caution parents, if what you are noticing is that the start of your homeschooling day is filled with angst or resistance or willfulness or silliness—poking each other, not interested—it could be that they have already expended their quote-unquote "cooperation energy" and that's the thing that we're looking at. We're trying to discover; are we spending that capital, the instruction that we are asking our kids to cooperate with, are we spending that before we even get to the things that are our highest priority of the day? Whether that's math or reading aloud or handwriting. And so, it sounds to me like you did exactly what I love to see: you were Detective Mom. You took your own needs into account—made beds, a feeling of everyone greeting the day prepared with their hair brushed, a routine that you can count on, starting at an hour that doesn't feel like the whole day has gotten away from you—so those are your needs. And then you're paying attention to your children's needs—how many math problems, what voice do they have in the order of how they do their schoolwork or a perspective about what they should focus on. This is how you dialogue between parent and child to gain momentum in your homeschool, and what I'm hearing from you is happiness and relief! So, there's the proof! So awesome.

**Tammy:** Yes, and gained momentum, indeed that's what we've achieved. And that has just been so invigorating.

**Julie:** So happy for you, Tammy!

**Tammy:** Thank you, Julie.

**Julie:** Thank you so much for joining us and sharing your story. I just know that you have benefited so many parents out there.

**Tammy:** Oh, I hope so, because it has for me! [Laughs].

**Julie:** That's fantastic. [Theme music plays].

**Julie:** And that's it! Thank you to Tammy, especially for opening her heart and home to all of us. Thank you to you for joining me today. It's a privilege to speak into your homes and lives every single week. Remember what I tell my guests; test my suggestions, enjoy them, apply them, explore them, modify them. You can even discard the ones that just won't work for you. I promise I won't mind.

What I'd like you to do is share your stories with me. Your stories of successfully applying the suggestions or completely rearranging them to suit your family. You can do that on Instagram. Follow me first @juliebravewriter, and then tag your picture and your description with my name, @juliebravewriter, so that I can find you and read your story. Alternatively, if you prefer, you can send us an email at our help-line. Use this email address: [help@bravewriter.com](mailto:help@bravewriter.com).

I would like to share your tips and experiences in upcoming episodes, so just know that may happen if you do share your stories with us. See you next week, happy learning and loving. I'm Julie Bogart from Brave Writer. [Theme music plays to its conclusion].

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