



S5E2: Growing a Mind & Cultivating Curiosity

Julie Bogart with Christa Gregg

INTRO Julie: [Theme music plays] Let me ask you a question, do you feel like it's up to you to make sure that your kids get everything they need in their educations by age 18? Do you wonder what's going on in your kids' brains when you're not in conversation? For instance, maybe they're reading a book or watching a movie, and you want to make sure they're getting the "right message, the right lesson."

Today's guest, Christa Gregg, presented this issue to me. And we discussed ways that she can enrich the family environment and take advantage of her family's happy relationship dynamic to achieve all the learning goals that she has for her kids. I hope you'll stick around for the follow up in this conversation. We got into an issue that I think will resonate with so many of you.

If you're new to this podcast, welcome. If you're a returning listener, we are thrilled that you are back. This is season five of *The Brave Writer Podcast* and I'm Julie Bogart. Let's get started. [Theme music ends]

Julie: Today I get to chat with Christa Gregg, a homeschool mother of three children, ages 13, 9, and 5. Christa has a master's degree in social work and a background in counseling. She loves to read and describes her current hobby as "educating herself about how to educate" [laughs]. Coffee is her morning drink of choice, but she loves to also wind down over some nice craft beer with her husband in the evening, which sounds absolutely awesome if you ask me. Christa sent me the following question, which I know will resonate with many of you. She asks:

“How do I shift from a This Is School Time mindset to a We Can Be Learning All the Time mindset without turning everything into a lesson?” Christa, welcome to the podcast!

Christa: Thank you so much. I am really excited.

Julie: Does this sound like the version of the question you want me to answer? [Laughs].

Christa: That is exactly the right question.

Julie: Perfect. Well, good. So, let’s discuss first what you’ve tried to do to solve this question, where you want to be learning all the time but you’re fearful that you’re turning everything into a lesson. What does that look like? When—when are you doing that?

Christa: When am I *not* doing that is a better question. Like, we’ll be watching—we’re currently taking our kids through watching Andy Griffith, *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Julie: Oh, that’s awesome [laughs].

Christa: It is, but there is so much in there to be talked about. Like, just how they are viewing women, just things that are being said and part of me is like, “Oh, we need to talk about this, this is great.” But the other part of me is like, “We could just watch this.” And so, just balancing that; when is it okay to just pause and talk versus, okay, let’s just watch this and then remember when to come back to it. But we were watching the other night and a woman wanted to run for councilman in Mayberry and there was a whole thing about it, and we had—it was really hard to just sit and watch it and enjoy it.

Julie: Was the whole thing about it related to her being a woman?

Christa: Yes.

Julie: And so, what were you hoping to say to your kids—or what did you say? Because it obviously stirred something in you, so tell me a little bit about what happened when you felt, you know, this time travel shift? I mean, back when *The Andy Griffith Show*, in black-and-white, was popular in the United States, it was probably reflecting the current view of women and things have changed since then. So, what happened for you and what did you want your children to know?

Christa: So, when Andy said, “You don’t want to run for councilman, that’s just silly!” Both my husband and I went, “Oh!” and looked at each other, and of course our oldest picked up on that “Oh!” and was like, “What? What’s wrong?” And so, we paused it and we were like, “Well, you know, there’s no reason that a woman couldn’t run for councilperson in a city, and it’s evident to us that this is an issue in the city and we have to trust that the men will eventually come around, but we’re going to have to sit through a lot of uncomfortable comments, and we need to recognize that it is not okay to say some of the things that are going to be said in the show, like that it’s silly for a woman to want to run and it’s never been done before, they should stick to doing stuff at home.” So, we kind of had that conversation.

Julie: And what did your son say in reaction to that?

Christa: He was like, “Oh, yeah, I know.”

Julie: [Laughs].

Christa: [Laughs].

Julie: So, let’s—this is wonderful. I am so glad you brought up such a clear example of the very thing that we want to discuss. So, there are a couple of levels here that I’m hearing. One is you’re enjoying watching TV as a family, it’s a bonding experience and you’re all doing it together and, of course, *The Andy Griffith Show* is a complete classic, full of humor, lot of wholesome values. But it is also, like I said, a period-piece. It reflects a certain era. So, as you experience it reflecting values that have changed, you’re noticing that it’s a learning opportunity. What I’m wondering is: do you think you would have had the same impulse if your child was in school?

Christa: Oh. Oh, that's a good question. I don't know. Probably not. I really don't know!

Julie: Well, the reason I ask is: families, whether they homeschool or put their kids in school, are going to talk about their values, their beliefs, the way things hit them. And it's possible that maybe you wouldn't even have been watching this show if your kids were in school, maybe you'd be too busy doing homework and you wouldn't have had time. I mean, that's possible. But maybe just consider for a moment that it's not so much that you are turning things into a learning moment. I wonder if your natural reaction is simply your natural reaction and your children are having a moment to share in that experience with you. In other words, part of what I wonder about it is you're worried that you're turning things into learning moments, but what this sounds like to me, is it didn't sound like you were doing anything except having a natural reaction.

Christa: That is brilliant. Yes. That's true. Because having the natural reaction will just—the conversations will happen organically, then, and I don't have to be looking for a lesson, they're just going to happen. That's a huge mental shift for me.

Julie: Oh, good. Oh, wow. Well, that was easy [laughs]. I'm thrilled to hear it! Well, because here's the thing: there's two ways to have that moment. You could either have pre-screened it, come up with a lesson on the history of Feminism and the role of women in politics, and then for the next week created all kinds of lessons for your child to engage in. You know, they could look up dates on the computer, they could have a big opportunity to do an oral report on Susan B. Anthony—I mean, you could think of lots of ways to turn this into a school-ish experience. *Or* we can trust that through our engagement with our children and the world around us, learning moments arise naturally, which foster what I like to call Big Juicy Conversations, which is what it sounds like happened to you accidentally.

Christa: Right. Yeah, I think my fear is that—I'm afraid we won't be able to just enjoy something. Like, I'm afraid—and this my fear of my kids, like, "We want to sit down and watch *The Andy Griffith Show*," and then the next comment will be, "But we don't want Mom and Dad educating us at this time. We just want to watch it! Stop teaching me."

Julie: Well, that is absolutely valid. I don't know if you know this story from my family, but when we used to watch movies, my kids' dad and I are both literature-writing-type people, and so Jon would take the remote control and pause in the middle of a Disney film and say, "Alright, who are we rooting for? Who are we rooting against?" [Laughs] "What do we think's going to happen?" Because we were wanting them to be engaged. And my mom tells this story of how

she babysat for my kids one time when we went away for our anniversary, and—you know, overnight, so she had them for a whole weekend. And so, at one point they were watching a movie together, and about a third of the way in Jacob paused the film and he turns to my mom and he says, "This is the point at which we pause the film to discuss it." [Laughs] And the older two kids said, "Mom and Dad aren't here, we don't have to do that." [Laughs] Which was just this big hilarious story in our family. But I think both are valuable.

I think it's valuable to allow yourself to have a natural reaction where you showcase to your children, "Hey, things have changed. Women can run for office." We have daughters, we want them to know that they are just as valid in the political arena as men, and we're not just going to let this television show passively pass on a negative stereotype. But on the flip side, we don't have to be hypervigilant. Some things are already happening on like, that invisible level inside of your child. Your child is growing up in your family. Your child has probably heard you vote for women, sees women candidates on the news, knows people who are running for office possibly. And so, there is a level at which your lack of supervision and their exposure is also being shaped by the bigger context. You're not their only source of information about learning. Right?

Christa: Right. And as you said that, like women running for office—we live in a little village area and we have our own mayor and board of elders and all that stuff, and the mayor is a female and we clean her pool [laughs], and so when you said that I was like, "Oh, yes, that's happening in life around them." It's a trust issue.

Julie: Yeah, it is a trust issue. Oh, that's so funny because the big word I wrote on my prep-sheet is "trust" [laughs]. Look at you! Look at you, getting there without me. I mean, that's fabulous. So, here's what we want to talk about, then, a little bit. We want to think about what is the nature of education and what is a lesson? Part of what happens when we first start homeschooling especially is we think of learning as being an active dissemination of information from the person who has it to the person who doesn't, and so watching a television show, playing a game, making a cake, learning how to do algebra—we sort of picture being the person who knows and our children being the people who don't know, and it's our responsibility to make sure that everything they need before they turn 18 passes through us to them or we will have failed. Do you know? Do you have that feeling at all?

Christa: Oh, all the—yes. That is where, for sure, I have started is, "I have all this information and need to pass it to you," and now trying to switch out of that is challenging.

Julie: So, I want to invite you to think about yourself after 18. Okay, did you go to college?

Christa: I did.

Julie: Okay, so, let's go to age 22 [laughs]. Let's get you out of school. Once you were out of school, how did you make your way in the world? How did you figure anything out?

Christa: Oh, I would research it or ask a question and try to find the answer to it. I'm trying to think, like in my first job... Yeah, I would ask people, "How do I do this? What do I need here?" I would consult people or books or—the Internet was very new. So, the Internet. But that's what I would do is I would—I would gather people who knew, I would talk to them. I had a supervisor. Yeah, that's what I would do.

Julie: What happened when you watched movies or television shows or news cable channels? Did you learn anything when you did that?

Christa: Probably not. Not that I recall. I'm trying to remember what we watched.

Julie: So, in your view, if you're watching a movie, let's say you go out with your husband and you go to a movie, and let's say it's a movie—well, have you gone to a movie recently, in the last year or two?

Christa: I knew you were going to ask me this. Yes, but now don't ask me what the movie was.

Julie: Oh, that's okay.

Christa: It was *The Greatest Showman*.

Julie: Oh, *The Greatest Showman*. Okay. So, after that movie was over, what happened? Do you typically watch a movie and never discuss it, or do you go out for coffee and talk about it?

Christa: Well, now we do talk about it. And especially *Greatest Showman*, we talked about that. But yeah, we do talk about it a lot more now. I think it's a maturity issue that we just talk more about what we're watching, and, you know, what we learned from it and what we could take away from it. And like for *Greatest Showman*, I was like, "Okay, this is not a deep dive on who P.T. Barnum was. It is talking about that everybody can come together and everybody is important and everybody has value. That is what this movie is about. It's less about this particular man and more about that message." And so, we were able to talk about that, even with the kids as I took them later.

Julie: And that was not conducted to you by somebody outside of yourself. You watched the movie, these are the conclusions you drew?

Christa: Correct.

Julie: Okay, let's keep going down this path, I'm hoping we'll get somewhere, so we'll keep going. So, now I want you to think back to like, when you were 15 or 16, were there any views that you had at that age that you changed when you were older?

Christa: Oh. Yes.

Julie: [Laughs] It sounds like you know one. Is it one you're allowed to share out loud?

Christa: Well, probably. I mean, just how I interact with people has changed and being willing to ask questions more instead of going just into my—just how I interact with people has changed dramatically from when I was 15-16 to now older than that. I do a lot less assuming and a lot more clarifying. "Help me understand, can you clarify this for me?" Those kinds of things.

Julie: Which sounds a lot like your counselor training, too, doesn't it?

Christa: Yes.

Julie: Okay, so, this has been fascinating, just listening to you articulate these things. It sounds possibly like when you were younger, you were fairly self-sufficient in your thinking and as you got older, you became more interested in deliberately seeking out input, and you were even saying that now you're starting to talk more about movies maybe than you used to, didn't even do that as a habit. And so, it may be more challenging for you to picture that there's an interior process going on in your children. It's almost like you want to draw it out of them because you maybe didn't have that as much when you were younger. Is that accurate?

Christa: Yes. Mhm. That's—what you just said about wanting to draw that out of them, that's exactly what I want to do. I want to see what's going on in their heads. Not because I need to do anything with it, but because I just want to know what's going on.

Julie: [Laughs] Well, and, you know, that's part of that "they're an extension of my body" syndrome. I mean, you give birth or you adopt this child and it becomes like a third appendage, you can't hardly imagine that it'll have independent thoughts from you, and you're worried that it might have some that it shouldn't have, and so we work really hard to try and like, screw down the values, the beliefs, the understandings, so that we have, unfortunately, control over what kind of person they will become.

What I want to invite you to consider, now that we've sort of traced your teenaged through young adulthood journey, is how much people outside of you don't have control over the person you're becoming. Not your parents, not your teachers. You can invite people to give you input, you can invite people to give you ideas, but that's under your control. And so, your children—you know when you're in school, you don't feel like it's under your control. It's people disseminating information and you giving it back to them in a form that gets graded.

But once you're out free from that system, when you've been raised in traditional school, that's when you first start to understand just how much control you have over your own education, over your own self-education, development. And what homeschool does is it hastens that day. Instead of your kids having to wait until they're 22 to feel the expansiveness of self-instruction, they have it as a birthright. It's like what they get just by being in your family and not ever going to school. And so occasionally when we, the parent, move into this sort of teacher-mode, the reason the child reacts is because it goes so against the grain of their own self-concept, which is, "You don't need to tell me things for me to know things."

Christa: Right.

Julie: Children who are homeschooled actually know that they can learn and they feel it on an intuitive level. It isn't something you have to explain to them and they can't explain it back, but

it's what they know. So, what I wanted to invite you to think about—we haven't even gotten to my notes, but this is such a rich conversation—what I wanted to invite you to think about is allowing learning moments to bubble up just like they did in that *Andy Griffith*. But to not worry about seizing every moment. To start to get comfortable with occasionally it just pops out of you. Like, if the whole reaction you had watching *Andy Griffith* with the woman—councilwoman—not being valued was, “Oh, my gosh, how anachronistic and silly is this? A woman not able to run for political office. Well, this should be funny.” Like, getting your perspective out there, but not having to say, “You know, children, over the last 40 years we've gone through quite a revolution in how women are understood in the political system.” Do you see the difference?

Christa: Yes, I do, and that's where my struggle is. The more natural, letting what my thought is just out—just being more natural with it, instead of just more—less didactic with it, I guess.

Julie: Yes. And you can experiment with that. You can even start down that road, catch yourself, and say to your kids, “Wow, did you notice? I just became a teacher out of the blue. Let's go back to *Andy Griffith*, I'm not even going to finish that thought.” You can actually be self-aware in those moments and invite your children in. You can let your children tell you. If your child says before the show starts, “I don't want you to stop the show, I just want to watch it. Please, don't give me any lectures.” And you find yourself getting ready to give a lecture, you find yourself winding up, wanting to comment, you could act it out. You could open your mouth and then zip your lips. You could take your hands and sit on them. You could tell your child to guard the remote because you're tempted to turn it off. And turn it into a dynamic that is not only more playful, but even still underscores that you have an opinion, if it's that important to you.

Christa: That is great, they would love that [laughs].

Julie: You could even ask them to guess. You could say, “You know what? I bet you know I'm rolling my eyes right now, I wonder if you know why I'm rolling my eyes.” And let them guess. Because when we move into a relationship with our kids, every moment is a learning moment. But if we're in teacher-mode then what happens is everything feels like school. And we're trying to move away from school.

Christa: Yes.

Julie: But learning can't not happen. What your kids are learning right now is that when you watch TV and something bugs you, you're going to give them a lecture. That's what they're learning. But you actually want them to learn the content of that information, right?

Christa: [Laughs] Right, yes! Take away the content not, "Ugh, Mom's lecturing us again."

Julie: Exactly. There you go. There you go. That's the big shift. And so, literally everything becomes learning. I was thinking—I don't know if I said this on a podcast or not—but I was thinking the other day about how parents—mothers I would say, in particular, because we're still the ones who typically spend more time in the kitchen—but let's say you're going to teach your child how to bake muffins. We are so natural in the kitchen. We say things like, "Scoop the flour—oh, here, see this knife? You can just slide it across the back of this cup of flour and then it's level." We say it so naturally. We don't say, "Okay. We're going to start baking. Before we begin, let me give you an overview of what the history of baking is and then how this recipe for the muffin fits into the western civilization's story of baking." [Laughs] I mean, that's—you know? We just get in there, we give tips, we talk about what our grandmother did, we let them experiment. You know, they crack the eggs, the whole shell goes in. We say, "It's okay, you'll learn. It takes time." You know?

Christa: Right. Mhm. Yes. Yeah, because I've done it the other way. Not the whole history of baking, but like, where we have a lesson, "And this is what we're going to do," and that is not fun. At all.

Julie: No.

Christa: But when we get in there—like we watched *Nailed It!* on Netflix and there was a cake, and the kids were like, "Mom, we could totally do this." And I was like, "You're right, we can totally do this." And so, over the course of a week, we gathered our supplies, we got in the kitchen and it happened just like you said. I said, "Okay, you can crack the egg." I was just giving tips as we were going. And, honestly, they made most of that cake and they nailed it. Yes, it's the more natural process that, when it flows, it's like, "I rocked this day." But it's the days where I step into that teacher-mode where I'm like, "Ugh, I just want to connect with my kids." That's like—oh, my goodness. Wow, that's huge [laughs].

Julie: And those are two very different felt senses. So, since you know what they both feel like, you can now dial up self-awareness to help you. When you feel yourself shift into that mode

where it becomes ossified and hard, and you can see their eyes rolling up or they're distracted or they're saying, "Oh, Mom, please." You can say to yourself, "Oh, I must have shifted into that other mode." And then you can invite yourself to shift out of it. You can name it, naming it is a great way. You can say, "Oh, my gosh, I must have become the schoolmarm. I must be acting like a teacher right now." And then just like, shake your hands, rattle your head, ask you kid to rub your shoulders, and start over. Or you can just notice inside yourself and make the subtle pivot. You can stop teaching and get curious. Your children will guide you if you let them.

Now, I know that there is a body of information that you may want to communicate that's educational, and we're going to talk about that in a minute, but let's just for a moment stay with this notion of teacher versus collaborator. The way to shift out of that sort of schoolmarm feel is curiosity. Curiosity about what's going on with your kids. So, I'm going to just stick with this *Andy Griffith Show* because I think it's such a brilliant example. You had a very natural reaction, "Oh, my goodness!" So, did your husband. You could have just let that stand. And you could have watched your children, too, to see if they're having reactions, facial expressions, if they're making comments. If nothing is going on, you might ask a question at the end. "You know we have a lady who's a mayor in our town. How do you think she got elected?" You know? "They're making it sound like no woman can get elected, why do you think our lady got elected?" You can move into curiosity rather than teaching. You can ask a question, you know, "How did that strike you?" Because the funny thing is for a lot of our young kids, they are so used to women having so many more opportunities and being treated with so much more equity than generations past, they may have actually seen that show as anachronistic and not been influenced by it at all because they don't even have the capacity to see that as believable.

Christa: That's true. That's very true. I love the "get curious."

Julie: Yes. Yes. And, you know, if you watched a movie about slavery, your kids know slavery is no longer legit. Like, there is no chance your kids are going to watch a show about slavery and think, "You know, I'd like to go down to the store and buy a human being." We've moved enough past that, that we can certainly teach about slavery and should, we can even use that as a pivot to show the lingering effects of racism that we're still dealing with in this 21st century. But there's no danger that they're getting the wrong message about slavery. I mean, in most families that would be the case.

Christa: Right.

Julie: So, as we're watching our kids, we have to remember that they're born in a different era, they're coming with a different set of assumptions based on the culture of your family, and they

can be trusted to have a reaction that is probably going to somehow comport with that culture they're being raised in. Now, when they reach their teen years, they'll start experimenting with some beliefs and thoughts and ideas that are not your family's, which is why I asked you to think about being 15. Because at 15 that is part of the job of a teenager; to have thoughts, ideas, political beliefs that don't match parents', and by 25 or 30, they're going to change again. So, you can just trust—use that great word “trust”—that this is all about growing a mind, not establishing beliefs.

Christa: Yes, I love that “growing a mind.” That’s what we want to do. Yeah. I’m really resonating with “get curious.” That’s—even in my counselor training, that was something that I had a hard time with, was the asking the questions because I felt like I have to ask the exact right question. And, honestly, I’m realizing that just asking a question opens up communication.

Julie: Truly.

Christa: Just trusting that process and it’s going to be okay. And if it’s not the exact right question, like you said, it’ll bubble up, and it’ll bubble up again and again if we need to keep discussing something.

Julie: That’s exactly right. In fact, I love how my mom puts it. She says, “You can start the conversation and if it dead-ends, then you can have a conversation about that. And then, if that conversation is complicated, you can have a conversation about that.” So, there’s no end just because it didn’t go anywhere. You know, if a child says, “Oh, I don’t want to talk about it.” You can actually have a conversation about that. “Oh, why don’t we want to talk about it?” So, we can always find out more information if we need it. So, when I think about your original question, then, about how do we shift from this is “school time” to “we can be learning all the time without turning everything into a lesson,” I wonder if it is just dropping this attachment to being the person who conveys information.

Christa: Yes, I think it is. And helping them see that I’m also learning and growing.

Julie: You don’t have to help them see that.

Christa: This is true.

Julie: There's the language to drop. [Laughs]

Christa: Oh. Excellent!

Julie: You can be a curious person who is growing in their presence and you don't have to help them see that. It's unavoidable.

Christa: Right.

Julie: But when you move into helping them see, you're in the schoolteacher mindset.

Christa: Yes, and I've put on something. Like, "Oh, now I'm going to do this and make sure my children see it," versus, "I'm just living my life."

Julie: Exactly. And trusting that because you're all in the same square-footage, 24/7, that's exactly what's going on. They can't help but see what your priorities are. You know, it's sort of like when a parent says, "I'm going to teach my children how to keep house." And then, the parent doesn't at all on her own. Well, then your kids are learning two levels. One is the kids have to keep house and the parents never do, right? They're not actually learning the values of housekeeping. But if you are the kind of person who makes it a priority to clean up after yourself, etc., even if they don't adopt it, they'll know that was your priority and they'll know it's a value that is someone's in this family and that it's sometimes beneficial to them. So, we want to keep stepping away from, "They must adopt what I believe in order for them to learn from it," and we also want to step away from helping them see. I think that's a really good—I'm really glad you said that, I feel like that's a really good phrase for you to notice when that comes up.

Christa: Yes. Yeah, because it—that "help them see"—I envisioned myself putting on a costume almost, you know? Or a different—I'm putting on this Curious Adult mindset, you know, or this Curious Adult persona. And the reality is that's just how I am all the time.

Julie: That's right. That's already who you are. Inescapable.

Christa: Yes.

Julie: I love that you talked about putting on a costume. I think if even for yourself you could create an image in your mind of what that person looks like when you're in teacher-mode versus what you look like when you're in peer-collaborator-mode, where it's an adventure you share together, where you're next to each other, rather than you standing in front of the fireplace with your children sitting at your feet. You know? Think about what image helps you stay sort of joined at the hip rather than standing in front of them with a microphone.

Christa: That shoulder-to-shoulder time, I guess. Like, it happened today actually, when we were doing science and I asked my 13-year-old, "Do you want to just write out the answers to the questions of your study module, or would you like to go over it together?" And he immediately said, "Together." Now, part of that was there were 32 questions [laughs], but we did. We sat down, he had his book, and we had like—I asked the questions, but we just had a conversation and we were talking about it together, and I—now that I'm going back looking at that, I remember asking him, "Now, what is it that an axon does? Like, I really don't know, can you tell me?" And he kind of looked at me like, "Wait a minute, are you testing...?" "No, like for real, I don't even know what—like, you've read this material, can you explain it to me?" And he was like, "Oh, sure," and he flipped back in his book and was talking about it, and *that's* the image that I want, where we're doing it together instead of *I* have the book, you know, and "Okay, this is what this does and you need to memorize this, now repeat it back to me and in a complete sentence, please."

Julie: That is fantastic. You actually have everything you need going forward. In fact, the only homework I would have for you is to maybe make a note on your calendar when you move in and out of those modes. So, today I would write down, "Here's an example of when I was in collaborator-mode," and then, let's say tomorrow you guys are, you know, watching the news on television and you suddenly think, "Oh, I have to teach them about what this is," and you go into schoolmarm-mode. Just maybe keep track, you know, once a week, or when some moment strikes you as being the kind of moment that you really want.

And I want to just momentarily address this idea of the school subjects, because those tend to put us in teaching mode, and there are some things that our kids don't know how to do that we have to sit down and model for them or show them how. The way to get there with this collaborator idea is the model you just said: shoulder-to-shoulder. So, instead of setting a big agenda about how much material to get through at what pace on what schedule, think instead about meaningful collaboration over the skills and the information you want your children to learn. So, instead of sort of assuming—it doesn't mean they can't do some things at the table

without you sitting next to them, but when you are evaluating it, talking about it, reviewing it—it's a collaborative experience, not a "check the boxes, make sure you did it right, okay, we're done." And see what that feels like. Weave some of that into that educational framework.

What it may mean is that you'll have to move a little bit slower. But I think it will give you a sense of depth, and part of what is behind this question that you asked at the beginning is depth. You don't want to just race through material, do information. You're a deep person and you want your children to learn more than just that *Andy Griffith* is a fun show to watch. You want them to learn more than here's how you make a cupcake. You want to see their imaginations firing. You want to see their ability to analyze develop. You want to see them have the skill to complete tasks. And all of that comes from this rich soil that you can create through curiosity, collaboration, and taking time.

Christa: Yes, that sounds beautiful. That's what I really want. And when I do that, when we take the time to do that, like with my 9-year-old, when I take the time to get in the kitchen with her and let her create something. And I'm honestly just there for if she needs something cut or needs something hot to be dealt with. The way her eyes light up and the feeling she gets at the end and that I get at the end when we're done, it is priceless, to use a phrase. I mean, it just really is amazing. So, yeah. I mean, yeah, it's great. That's the ideal right there.

Julie: Perfect. Well, then you know exactly what you're looking for, so between now and when we talk next time, I would like you to just sort of on a weekly basis—I see that you're a member of the Homeschool Alliance, so you already know about Scatterbooks where you write down inspirational thoughts and notes about your family and then the written narrative where on a monthly basis you record a single day to sort of get a sense of what the learning journey is like in your family. All I want you to do in that Scatterbook is maybe make notes on a weekly or semi-weekly basis where you can recall the difference between when you go into "uh-oh I got to turn this into a lesson" mode versus that shift to curiosity, collaboration, and taking time.

Christa: Alright. I can do that.

Julie: Wonderful! Oh, that's awesome. And then we can meet back in September and just see how you're feeling then. And I'm imagining you'll have new questions, which is perfectly appropriate. And there is no solve the problems once for all time that we're aiming for. We're just looking for peace and progress in that homeschool journey.

Christa: Yes. Exactly. And I will say a lot of how we've grown and changed, how the homeschool has, is a direct result of me finding you initially [laughs] and getting that breath of fresh air of, "Yes, this is what I want it to be like." So, I will say a lot of the things that have changed and the way our school has changed and evolved over the last couple years has been a direct result of Brave Writer and getting that more shoulder-to-shoulder and collaborative approach. And it's been great for all of us, but now just, you know, figuring out what that looks like for math and the things that have to get done—and science and some of those subjects—is more of a challenge.

Julie: That's fabulous. Well, yes, and things like math and science, which feel sometimes more linear, content that we don't engage in as naturally every day. One of the ways that I found worked for me, and I'll offer this to you as sort of a bonus tip here, is that I would toggle between skill-work and something that made it feel practical and enriching. And so, for instance, with math we might use a math book and do math work, math pages, but then we would use Yahtzee or Family Math or a board game or cooking or quilting or gardening to encounter math in a new way, or in a lived-in-your-old-blue-jeans way, so that I could go between those two and not just sacrifice math on the altar of skill work alone.

And the same is true with science. You might study these principles, but then can you dissect a flower, can you visit the observatory, can you go look at the actual animals at the zoo, not just read about them? Can you watch birds in your yard, not just study their biology? And those seem to help keep that alive. You can do skill work and then enrich it, and that would be what I'd offer you as a way to sort of balance those two roles.

Christa: So, that means it's okay to spend the afternoon with our binoculars watching the hawk family in our backyard?

Julie: Oh, my goodness, a hundred times over. You *know* the answer to that question!

Christa: [Laughs] I do.

Julie: That is a fabulous way to spend the afternoon.

Christa: It is. Now we just want my husband to climb up the tree and put a hawk cam in, and he keeps saying no. So, he keeps sending us YouTube videos. "This is not our hawk, but it's close enough." [Laughs] But, yeah, that's what we did this morning, and I just need to capture

those times because that's what we did this morning, just looked through the binoculars at the nest, watch the mommy and daddy fly back and forth. My older two chased the big, black crows away so that the hawks could come down. That all "counts," in quotes.

Julie: A hundred percent it counts. A hundred percent. And the thing of it is, I think what happens for most parents—and actually, this is something I wrote down to share with you, so I feel good that we're going to cover this part—what happens with most parents is they have a vision of a natural lifestyle of learning, and then they enter it and there's a certain moment where they panic because they don't feel like they are covering the skills. So, they pendulum swing back to skill work, and then they get this sterile, stale, dull life going and that feels awful, so then they pendulum swing back to the other.

So, the way I like to think about it is toggling between the two. Never getting so deeply into the skill work that you have no enchantment, no aliveness, no sense of practicality, no application of what you're learning. So, don't get so into skill work that you lose touch with the bigger world. But then, when you've been out following inspiration, having these big immersive experiences, it's alright to pull in for a time or a part of each day or a season and build the underlying architecture of what an education is. And you can talk about it in that exact language with your own kids. You can say, "We are now going to work on these skills, because we've had this amazing month where we partied, and we traveled, and we did all these things, so I need us to hunker down, but I'll make brownies to make it a little more painless." Right? Like that.

Christa: Mhm, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, what was telling was my 13—we're getting ready to go on a family cruise—and my 13-year-old was like, "What are we going to do about school during that time?" And I looked at him like, "We're not doing it during that week, is that okay?" And he was like, "Oh, yeah, I was just really concerned," and I was like, "Uh-oh." I don't know where that came from, but I was like, "No, we're not doing school on the cruise. We're not going to bring our math book with us." I said we might learn stuff, but we're not *doing* school, and I want to drop that phrase.

Julie: Yes, and that is a fantastic conversation to have with your son. That would be the kind of thing you could have over pancakes at breakfast and say, "You know, I feel I have given you an erroneous understanding of what learning is. And what do you think of when you—" (go into curiosity-mode; not lecture-mode) "—what do you mean when you say, 'doing school' and what was your concern that we might not do it for a week?" I know with one of my kids, that she became so used to whatever our daily practices were, to take a break meant she might get, quote-unquote, "behind." She had built this belief system based on friends who were in school. So, sometimes it helps exposing those sort of underlying anxieties and then just being able to

reassure them. But, yeah, that's wonderful. I think you've got a wonderful plan ahead and I'm excited to hear how it goes.

Christa: Thank you, I'm excited to put it into practice and report back.

Julie: [Laughs] Thanks, Christa.

Christa: Thank you, Julie. [Theme music plays].

Julie: Before we get back to Christa and find out how it all turned out, I had a couple things I wanted to share with you.

First of all, are you on Instagram yet? If you're not, or if you are, I would love you to follow me. My identity on Instagram is [@JulieBraveWriter](#). So my username is @JulieBraveWriter, not just @BraveWriter. I hope you'll follow me, I love hanging out there. Everything that gets posted is posted by me and I would love to get to know you and your family.

Second thing I want to tell you about is our online class program at Brave Writer. Did you know almost every Monday of the year we have a new class starting? Often we have many new classes starting. If you're interested in helping a reluctant writer, check out our movie or book club discussions. So easy and enjoyable, your kids hardly even know they're writing. If you have academic needs, check out our high school classes. If you have creative writers, look at things like Write for Fun or Writing Your Own Greek Myth.

Our classes last anywhere from three to six weeks long. They give your kids the opportunity to interact with other homeschooled children. They get to read everybody's writing and the instructor feedback on everyone's writing. Truly we create a writing support group atmosphere. That's why we like to say, "We grow writers; we don't grade them." So, check us out, go to bravewriter.com/online-classes and see how we can help you grow your young writers.

The last thing I want to tell you—and I will be reminding you every week—is that my book is coming out! Super excited. It's called [THE BRAVE LEARNER: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning and Life](#). I promised you a quote a week, so here's this week's quote:

"When your child feels connected and happy, your child is learning the most."

And that's really what the whole book's about: creating connection, making them happy, and seeing learning blossom. Go to thebravelearner.com for more details, free downloadable excerpt, learning about the two free bonus gifts if you pre-order, the whole nine yards. Head over there now.

Thanks so much for listening today, let's get back to Christa. I'm curious—and I bet you are, too—what's going on in her family now. [Theme music ends].

Julie: Welcome back to the podcast, Christa!

Christa: Thanks, Julie.

Julie: I'm so glad you're here and I really loved hearing back from you after some time went by. I thought we would just dive right in. So, tell me what worked, but then I also want you to tell me where you came up against the limits of some of the ideas I shared with you.

Christa: Alright. Well, overall, it's been magical [laughs], let me just say that.

Julie: Wow.

Christa: Just for me, being aware of when I switch between being teacher-mom versus collaborator-mom has been *huge*.

Julie: Wow!

Christa: I mean, my kids even notice. And my oldest has even started going, "Uh, Mom, I think you switched."

Julie: Wow. So, they're even in on it? Oh, that's amazing.

Christa: Yes. Yeah, and that's been big. And instead of being like, "Ugh, I did switch, you're right." I can calm down and go, "Oh. Right." And just regroup and start collaborating again, instead of preaching. I call it preacher-mom. So, we go out of that.

Julie: I love that. So, you go from being preacher-mom to collaborator-mom. That's amazing. So, tell me a little bit more about what that looks like. Give me an example, if you can think of one, where you were in that mode and you shifted. Do you have one to mind?

Christa: I do. It's with my 13-year-old. And he and I were talking—he had asked me a question about something and I just sort of continued talking. And I stopped and said, "Wait a minute, am I getting too preachy?" And he said "Yes! I forgot the answer you gave me to my question."

Julie: Wow.

Christa: I stopped and was like oh, okay. And what stopped me initially was I saw the look on his face. His eyes were starting to get clouded over, you know, glazed.

Julie: Yes.

Christa: And so, that's what prompted me to stop and ask. So, just being aware of my kids' faces and their demeanor, it's worked with my 10-year-old, with my daughter. I can tell when I'm talking too much, and I just stop and say, "Okay, what do you need from me right now?" And she's able—like, she physically just gets lighter. Like ahh, breathes. Then she can tell me. And so, that's been really big. So, that's the one example that I have. There are several, but that's the one that I wrote down [laughs], that I wanted to be sure to remember.

Julie: No, I just love that, because a couple things I just want to highlight that you said that really stand out to me. One is your own self-awareness. You have now a sense of what it feels like to be a collaborator and because those experiences have had a good pay off, where you feel connected and close and your kids are learning, you're more willing to let go of the side of the pool, where you used to always cling to preaching and a lot of verbiage to prove to yourself that you're a teacher. Do you feel like that's a little bit what's going on?

Christa: Oh, absolutely. Just changing the form of the dialogue, I guess. Like, even just letting them in on what's going on in my head has been helpful, too.

Julie: Yes! Isn't it funny? There's sort of this notion that we have to go offstage to concoct a lesson or an explanation. We have to do it where it's behind the curtain and they don't know how we got all this information, and then we come up and we just sort of download all of this concocting on their heads and they have no context—no experience—to understand why we consider the method we're using or the thoughts we're having to be the most important. But if we let them in on the journey, it has like, a dual purpose. On the one hand, it just invites them in. They feel much more involved in the experience of learning. But secondly, it humanizes you. It helps them see you going through your own learning process, which is sort of a meta-message about what it means to learn, anyway. You're doing great! This is awesome.

Christa: [Laughs] It's been fun for sure. And, I mean, even in just parenting stuff, there was a time when we just were—everyone was going bonkers, like just crazy bonkers. And I just was like, "Okay! Everybody in the car!" And they freaked out. They thought that I was going to drop them somewhere and be done parenting. And I was like—at first I was like—what? So, when we got there—we were going to get donuts, that's what we were going to do. And I realized on the way to get donuts, oh, our emotions had just escalated and, of course, if I say, "Everybody in the car!" They're going to freak out because they don't have the benefit of knowing that I have realized in my brain that we need a change of scenery, we need to go do something light and fun and be able to just be together. And so, when I said that, my oldest two were like, "Yes, that would have been so helpful!"

Julie: [Laughs]

Christa: And I was like, "Oh, I was trying to make it a surprise, but I guess me yelling 'get in the car right now' was not helpful."

Julie: Well, and you're reprogramming them to relate to those kinds of outbursts as anticipating something pleasurable. So, I think this is a really good principle to highlight for those listening. Sometimes when we make the pivot, our kids don't yet trust us because the track record that we've already proven to them tends in a different direction. So, it may take them a little while to rely on a "hey let's get in the car" as meaning something good as opposed to something punitive. So, I love that your kids were able to articulate that to you, you could receive it, and now you can make that adjustment. It's great.

Christa: I mean, it's just—it's been very good for us overall. It's made me start keeping a word document open on my computer during the day, so that when I have those homeschool paydays, I can immediately write them down.

Julie: What a great idea! I love that!

Christa: With the date. Because, you know, at the end of the year it's hard for me to go back and remember, shocking. So, I was like, I'm just going to do this. It's going to be open and that way if they walk by they can see it. I have paper in the front of all my kids' note booking notebooks. It's where we keep all of their flat stuff that we want to keep, and I just have a blank piece of paper that is what I've seen, and so if there's something specific to that child, like a growth or a strength or whatever that I've seen that I want them to know that I've seen and acknowledge, I write it down in that, so at the end of the year, they won't just have all the work that they've done but they'll see how they've grown and how I as their parent have seen them grow and what I'm noticing about them.

Julie: Christa, this is all just brilliant stuff. In fact, in my book, *The Brave Learner*, I talk about a practice we call Scatterbooking, which is very similar to this. It's this whole notion that we are taking notes, we are capturing paydays, we are making sure that we see and annotate what is going on in our homeschool, so that we can reassure ourselves of our children's progress. And then, simultaneously remind ourselves we're doing a good job. So, I love that. But you've taken it this other step, which is recognizing that when we are affirming our kids for the education they are creating for themselves through our methods, we can also affirm that growth in descriptive language and provide it to them. So much better, right, than an A or a B or a minus 3? In fact, there are colleges in America, St. Johns being one of the more notable ones, where they do a version of this every semester with students, and they actually do an oral narration of that student's strengths and places that need to grow in front of the student among the professors. And, you know, that's sort of a sophisticated version of what you're talking about, but what that does is it lets the child know that you're personally connected. This is not just some, you know, objective scientific education that we are downloading on the heads of our children. We're actually engaged with them as human beings and we are able to provide them with that mirroring that lets them know that we see them growing. So, thank you for offering that. I can just picture parents all over the country and around the globe jotting that down right now as a possible technique to adopt for themselves.

Christa: Well, great. It helps on the hard days.

Julie: Yes!

Christa: Which you know, we've had those. It has not all been unicorns and rainbows, but—

Julie: Yes! Let's pivot to one of those—or two of those. Share with me some of the struggles. Things that maybe haven't resolved yet that you're still thinking about and wondering about.

Christa: The biggest thing for me is—[laughs] this is hard. Is accepting what—like, who my kids are right now, today.

Julie: I think we need to take a big breath right there. That's such a big admission and so honest. Thank you.

Christa: Yeah, it's really hard and—because, of course, I love my kids, you know, I just don't always like what they're doing. And, of course, as you have said in the past, like I hear you in my ear going, "You're prophesying doom! Prophecies of doom!" But I just can't stop myself, you know. "Someone's going to punch you in the face because you don't know how to interact with people!" And—or, "You're going to be living in my house playing video games!" You know, just all the things.

Julie: Yes, yes.

Christa: And so, in those moments, it was really dark for a while, it was just hard. I was really struggling with just how do I love this child? But it went beyond that, because I love my children, how do I *like* this child right now? Which I think is different because we don't always have unconditional like.

Julie: You're a hundred percent right. The love is part of what makes us not like them, actually [laughs]. You are so devoted to who they were as babies, the imagined vision you cultivated in your mind about who they would be, that when they start showing up as individuals, often in the tweens and teens, there is a loss. You're actually grieving the loss of the person you thought they were going to become.

And the thing is, that vision that you have is part of what builds this feeling of love. You become very attached to who you think they are, who you think they might become, who you hope they'll be. And that spurs you on to stay up all night, to deal with spitting up, to breastfeeding or bottle feeding, to ensuring their welfare, to keeping them from running in the

streets. That vision, that little sparkling, glittering ideal of who you think they are, is part of what creates that bond, and so as they individuate, as they tell you in so many different ways “Actually I’m not who you think I am,” there’s a loss. It’s letting go of that original conception that helped you bond in the original way. And I know for me that if I didn’t face the loss squarely, I continued to manipulate and prophesy doom. What I almost noticed I had to do—and I have five kids, so I had five times to practice this [laughs], when they were teens—is I had to almost reintroduce myself to them as new people I want to get to know. And the only way I knew how to do that was to enter into teen-life on their terms. And *that* is not easy, because it’s often—the way they individuate is almost designed to go against the grain of what you were hoping they’d become.

Christa: Exactly. Right. It’s to get ready to like, have them leave [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs] Yes.

Christa: It’s all good and right and proper but, please, it’s so challenging. But even though it’s been a challenge, that I remembered circling and underlying and starring the last time we talked that I need to get curious.

Julie: Yes!

Christa: And so, it—that has been a touchstone or an anchor for me to remember—okay, I just need to ask questions, I don’t need to solve this.

Julie: Yes!

Christa: I don’t need to fix it right now.

Julie: Right.

Christa: I just need to hear—I’ve always wanted to know my children’s hearts, why don’t I start asking about it?

Julie: [Laughs] Isn't that so funny? That is such a great point. There is this idea, I think, because the bond of—maybe if you've given birth to this baby or this baby has been adopted from some unknown origin, there's an invisibility to the original form of the child and our bond is tethered through non-language. You know, through touch, through cuddling, through holding, through sleeping with, during those early years. And it's almost like it creates this foundation that the deepest intimacy is without language. I remember reading that by Alain de Botton, I think is how you say his name. He says the reason that we feel insulted that we would have to tell our husband, for example, you know, "You need to bring me flowers to show me you love me on our anniversary," because we feel like they should already know that. If they don't already know that, that means we're not as intimate as we thought we were. And so, if we play that out with our children, it's kind of the same thing. We feel like we should know who they are and what their hearts are without a lot of talking, and so we're constantly scanning the horizon for clues that reassure us, and yet what reassures us *is* that curiosity that leads to conversation that allows us to be open to being surprised.

Christa: Right.

Julie: You know? I mean, I don't know, I can't remember if I shared this with you before, but my youngest daughter was interested in horror. Horror movies!

Christa: Oh, yes.

Julie: I hate horror movies!

Christa: Yes!

Julie: So, if I'm going to know my—

Christa: I'm nervous I have one of those [laughs].

Julie: Yes! So, you know, that was not in the sparkling vision of who I thought she was at age six-weeks-old [laughs].

Christa: [Laughs] No.

Julie: So, sometimes it really does mean exiting your comfort zone to know your children on their terms during this transitional season.

Christa: Yeah. And like you said, the scanning the horizons for clues to assure us, a lot of times what I'm looking for are the clues that reassure of the vision that I have for them.

Julie: Exactly. Right.

Christa: And not who they really are. And so, taking the time to get to know, to take a step back, to really listen and make eye contact and be present—I mean, it's kind of overused. But I'm not a multitasker, I have accepted this, and so when they're talking to me, like having them say, "Wait, I need to finish this one task and then I can give you my full attention." Or putting down what I'm doing and turning and facing them has been big. And it opens—it opens the world of conversation and they can just talk and we can dialogue, and as long as I am managing my own judge-y-ness and my own expectations that I'm carrying that burden, and just shoving that aside and allowing just that curiosity to come out, man, some of the conversations that we've had have been surprising. In the best way, like, oh, wow, I didn't know that about you. Or asking them, just even talking about books. This happened just yesterday. I asked, "Which character in here do you really identify with?" And the child was able to tell me, and I was like, "Wow, yeah, you *are* really like that."

Julie: [Laughs].

Christa: You know, so it was kind of neat for both of us to realize—it was just neat for both of us. That they're insightful.

Julie: I have the biggest smile on my face, I wish this was video because I'm just beaming. What a *fabulous* question. You know, it's ironic that literary analysis could be conducted by asking a child which character they identify with, but you end up with so many layers of understanding. So, insight into your child, insight into how they analyzed and understood the character, insight into the relationship between those two things. And literally when people are writing novels, that's what they're hoping is happening. That those of us who are reading the

story find points of connection or disconnection with the characters because that's what draws us forward even in the storyline. And so, for you to ask your child that question and have it lead to insight into how the child's mind works, what the child's like—to have all those boomerang effects—now, *that's* what I call a Big Juicy Conversation. Well done! That's fabulous.

Well, Christa, you sound great. Do you have any lingering questions you would like to ask me before we wind up here?

Christa: I mean, probably, but [laughs]...

Julie: [Laughs] You'll listen to the rest of the season, is that what you're saying?

Christa: I'll listen to the rest of the season, yeah. Yeah, no, it just has—thank you for being my guru and for hundreds of thousands of other people. I know just your voice and what you are bringing to the homeschool community, I am really valuing and trying to share with others to help them get to the same peace. [Laughs] You know?

Julie: I'm really, really impressed with how you've embarked on this journey and embraced it so completely, and I appreciate you sharing your children and stories with us, as well. So, I wish you a great fall and please stay in touch!

Christa: Alright, great, thank you! [Theme music plays].

Julie: I'm so glad you listened along today. I love this season. I'm touched by our guests and the way they open their hearts and struggles to us for our benefit. *So* inspiring. I'm also inspired by the team that produces this podcast every single week, just for you. Thanks to Podcast Masters and a big thank you to our Brave Writer staff trio, Jeannette, Amy, and Beth. Finally, thank *you!* Your reviews on iTunes and Stitcher, your emails and direct messages. You may not know this, but we literally read them all. The team loves it. It's great to know the ways this show makes a difference in your life. So, now, until next week, go forth learning and loving. I'm Julie Bogart from Brave Writer. [Theme music ends].

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