S5E5: When Learning Isn't Fun

Julie Bogart with Anne Trott

Julie: [Theme music plays] The number one dilemma in homeschooling shows up everywhere. Go to a homeschool discussion board online and I promise you, you'll find long threads discussing it. Instagram, Facebook groups, text messages between friends. It probably even comes up when you meet with your local friends in person and you're talking over ice cream.

This dilemma plagues every parent at some point in their journey. Want to hear what it is? The question parents ask themselves is this: How can I make learning fun? Because your kids tell you it's not fun! They express boredom, tedium, frustration, and annoyance.

So, the follow-up question to the "How can I make learning fun?" is this: Do I have to? [Laughs] Can we just get on with learning? Can I stop worrying about throwing parties and adding pixie dust? Can I just enforce the parameters of education and we can get through it together?

Yep. That is today's topic and thank goodness for Annie Trott because she's the one who brought this question to us and clearly it's one we need to talk about. So, now's the time. Tune in, maybe call a friend and remind her to listen, too, so you can go out together and discuss what you think at the end of it. Thanks for joining me! Let's go. [Theme music plays]

Julie: Welcome to today's episode of Ask Julie, season five of the Brave Writer podcast. Today I get to talk to Anne Trott, homeschooling mother of two. She's got an 11-year-old daughter named Tegan and 8-year-old son named Joshua. Anne and her husband, Tom, and their children live in a small town tucked away in the California Sierra Mountains—okay, I'm officially

jealous of that—where they are surrounded by family and nature. Anne has a communications degree and worked for a non-profit organization before she chose to stay home with her kids and educate them. She loves to watercolor, hike, horseback ride, and she enjoys a nice cup of tea and dark chocolate when she gets a moment to herself. Anne wrote to me, asking a very particular question that I know is going to resonate with the rest of you. Welcome to the program, Anne!

Anne: Hi, Julie! Thanks so much for having me.

Julie: Oh, I'm excited that you're here! So, can you put into your own words what your question is today?

Anne: Yes. So, my question is how do you get through homeschooling some days when you can't always make it fun? [Laughs] I feel like there's—most of our days are filled with lots of exciting things and I try to always make learning fun, because, clearly, I want to have this amazing love of learning for my kids, but I feel like there are just moments and days when I just can't make everything fun. For example, a math assignment, or sometimes I'll have this great writing project or this great writing thing that I have planned and that I think is going to be super fun, and everyone balks at it.

Julie: Right. Isn't that the worst feeling? You put your heart and soul into preparing something fun and then your kids are like, "Eh." [Laughs].

Anne: No, seriously! And so—and then, there's just—I always feel like there comes a time when there's kind of a fine line between teaching them perseverance and that sometimes in life you don't always feel like doing something, you know? And that you kind of just have to push through sometimes. But I just—I would love just a dialogue with you to find out some ideas. How do you push through when it can't always be fun?

Julie: No, that's wonderful! I love this question, because I think sometimes when people listen to my broadcast, read our materials, they might be picturing that learning is just an endless party and, you know, parties take energy. Creating a quote "fun" experience takes energy. And so, if we are going to put our heart and soul into what we imagine will lead to fun, and then we're met with resistance or apathy, it sort of sucks the life out of us and it makes us even less willing, then, to put in any kind extra dose of magic. We start to turn into like, mini-lecturers:

"After all I have to wash the dishes and I don't enjoy that." Have you ever said something like that to your kids?

Anne: Oh, too many times, probably [laughs]. "Mommy doesn't always *feel* like folding the laundry!" "I don't always *feel* like cooking dinner!" Oh, yeah.

Julie: So, just give me a beat on how effective that is. Do your kids go, "Oh, that's true. Okay, I'll do my math page. Thanks, Mom"?

Anne: No [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs] You're kidding! I think most people listening are thinking, "It always works to say that to my kids," don't you?

Anne: Oh, yeah, wouldn't that be great [laughs].

Julie: Well, the truth is nobody learns by moral lecture. It pretty much fails universally with adults and children. People need to come to an epiphany. They have to come to a point where what they want outweighs the struggle of getting it, so part of what you're talking about when you're interested in adding fun is you are sort of—let's put it this way: you're looking for a way to manipulate your children into liking a lesson so they'll do the thing they're supposed to do. I hate to use the word manipulate, but I'm using it deliberately just to shock you. Do you understand what I'm saying?

So, you have an agenda: my child needs to learn math. It needs to be the kind of math that will prepare her for college. She seems disinterested. I will turn it into a game, or let her use colored pencils, or I will tell her I'll do two handstands for every problem she gets right—you know, we make up something that will create this notion of fun. And the child we hope, then, will sort of take this spoonful of sugar and her medicine because we've added fun. Why do you think a child would resist fun at that point? What might be the reason your child isn't tricked into liking math?

Anne: Gosh. I mean, I think…I'm totally at a loss with this one. You know, I think it's just that it could be they just don't feel like doing it, right then and there, which, I mean, as an adult I can relate. I mean, I don't always feel like doing the thing that needs to get done. I just feel

like with the other areas that I invest in and try to make learning come alive, it's like I hit these walls when I get the attitudes with the subjects—oh, this one isn't as fun as maybe going outside and getting to watch birds. It's like, how do we push through—I'm not totally answering your question, right? But it's just—Ah! I know it can't always be fun, but it's not—I don't want my homeschool just to be all fun and games, because it can't be and it has to be serious sometimes, but I just feel—

Julie: Okay, well, let's talk about that. Let's talk about something that you have persevered to do. What is an objective that you've had in your life at any point in time where you pushed yourself beyond what you thought you were capable of?

Anne: Oh, my goodness, that is a really good question [laughs].

Julie: It's okay to take a minute. I'll give you an example from mine, so that you have something to hang it on.

So, I am a marathon runner, people know that about me. When I first took it on, I had never run more than four to six miles, and my friend who invited me to train for a half marathon told me it was going to be 13.1 miles. What would motivate me to put in the pain and suffering to run an increasing number of miles each week, to get tired, to get sick to my stomach, to get sweaty, to give up time I could've been watching *Friends* reruns, which are always more fun than running, what might have motivated me, do you think, to take on that project?

Anne: Maybe just because of the accomplishment, you know, once you did it. That's such a huge accomplishment and not everyone says I've run a marathon.

Julie: So true. That definitely was part of it. Another part of it was that I was already a runner and it felt good to have a challenge, because then I could find out if I could be an even better, more effective runner. I also found that running had been something that I enjoyed, but I knew that there were people who *loved* it, and I wanted to feel what it felt like to love running.

So, I gave myself this task, this achievement that I had to live up to, and I did it in the company of other friends who were also eager to prove something to themselves. So, I made a personally meaningful goal, and then I had a strategy to get there, and I had support for getting there.

Now, what I've noticed is, I have a lot of friends who don't run. And the ones that don't run, I have not successfully persuaded to run. It's really shocking. Like, when I say to them, "Hey, I

could hold you accountable. You could persevere. You could have better health, you could lose weight, you could have mental health benefits," they don't just jump on that and say, "Yes, I want to be a marathoner, too!" Isn't that interesting? And if I say, "You know, not all of life is fun, and running isn't always fun but it's rewarding in the long term," it's amazing how few of my friends have jumped on that bandwagon. It takes a really unique person.

Part of what I want us to grapple with is what makes a challenging goal personally meaningful enough to persist through struggle? Right? What we do as parents is we say, "I have a goal on your behalf. My goal on your behalf is that you will complete 4th grade math and my goal on your behalf means executing it at this rate, for this number of pages, this number of times a week. And then I'm going to supervise you into it and if you don't cooperate then I know that you're not having fun and I feel guilty that you're not happy, so now I'm going to blame you for not having the right motivation to do this." Like, that's the strategy that we use if we're just being stark about it.

Anne: Yeah, no, that's so true, yeah.

Julie: So now, let's back up and think about how to help a child have a long-term goal that is not personally meaningful to them yet? Because the only way forward here is either carrot and stick; you can reward him with bubble gum or you can smack them with no TV time. But what is another vehicle that we have available to us? What if we were able to help our kids to experience some level of ownership and personal value or meaning in the subject that right now just seems irksome?

Anne: I really like that idea especially, because the other area was going to be writing, you know, for my little guy who's 8. My daughter is fine, but he's still—that would be another really awesome thing to think, how I could help him see kind of a more big picture goal, because I know right now he just sees something to copy, or I say, "Hey, write one sentence." And it's just throw the pencil meltdown, can't do it. So, I think that's great. Let's talk about how we can set—help him kind of see a goal, a future goal for himself.

Julie: Well, wonderful. So, writing is a great place to start since that's my specialty, but we are going to tackle math, too, because math is the other great shame-producer in families. Parents feel guilty their kids don't like it; kids don't like it. You don't know how to get over this hurdle.

So, let's start with writing. For writing to be meaningful, we have to first strip it of its responsibility in the homeschool. We have to stop and appreciate where is writing happening in the world that's valuable to me as an adult? So, let's start with that. Where do you find writing that is valuable to you?

Anne: Books, because I love books [laughs].

Julie: Oh, that's great! So, you're a reader; you love books.

Anne: Yes.

Julie: Do you find yourself using the function of reading to do recipes, reading recipes to make food, do you ever do that?

Anne: Mhm.

Julie: Okay, do you read billboards?

Anne: Yep.

Julie: I'm assuming you read articles and internet posts and things like that online?

Anne: Yes.

Julie: Do you ever get mail? Do you read mail?

Anne: Yep.

Julie: Have you ever kept a journal?

Anne: Yes.

Julie: So, right now I've just illuminated for you ways that writing is already showing up pretty naturally in your own life that causes you to value it. Tell me a moment in time when you used writing to do something that mattered to you.

Anne: Gosh. Writing letters, writing emails, recently just started a blog so that's been really cool because I've just been able to write a lot about processing—a journal, so processing through this journey and kind of getting to really express how I'm feeling, and so I guess it's been really important for me to be able to express things because it's easier for me just to write it down.

Julie: That's beautiful! That is absolutely beautiful. And you know, we use writing even in ways that we don't even credit. We make shopping lists, we write a note to remind ourselves to do something that we don't want to forget, we make a to-do list for our kids. We think, oh, okay, well, here are the things I have to have ready to go before they start spring soccer. You know, all of those are the ways that writing shows up to serve us. When we start teaching it in school, however, we take a left-turn and we treat writing like it's all about the college essay, and so we're just going to back it all the way to 8 years old where we're focused on the topic sentence, and a child at that age has absolutely no connection to their future self that is ten years away. I mean, it may as well be a millennia away, correct? You know, 18 means nothing to an 8-year-old.

So, if we back away from just the strict academic agenda before a child even has a sense of what it means to be an academic person, and we focus instead on this powerful exciting tool called writing, we start to think about how could writing show up in my child's life that would entice my child to be interested in it.

So, one recommendation that I sometimes give to parents, especially with reluctant writers, is to begin by valuing their speech. So, your child is talking to you, you'll be stir-frying dinner, he'll come along. He'll start to tell you a little story about watching *Spongebob Squarepants* on television, and while that child is quickly telling you the story, they're excited to tell you about the story, you stop stir-frying dinner, you grab the back of a supermarket receipt or an envelope, and you start jotting down your child's exact words. And those words become a record of the mind-life of your child in that moment.

And later that night at dinner or the next day, you pull that out in front of the family and you simply say, "My son Joshua yesterday told me this great explanation of a funny event that happened on *Spongebob Squarepants*, and it was so good I didn't want to forget it, so I wrote it down and now I want to read it to you." And we begin by putting our children's thoughts into writing for them so that they can discover that what lives inside is what we preserve and value on paper. Because that's what writing is for.

Anne: Yeah. Yes. Oh, I love that. I love that. I mean, we have in the past—I mean, I love the spontaneity of that. You know, when he's talking just write it down. Because I know just by using Jot It Down we've—he'll tell me a story and I write it all down, because there's no way that little story in his mind—it just goes on and on and it's so beautiful, but there's no way he'd be able to write it all down, and that's been so fun for him. He'll go back and he'll read his stories and so he loves to see it down. But I love that just kind of day by day. Because you know I'll stop and listen, but I love letting him see me write it down because it switches.

Julie: It switches it, that's right. And if we want to motivate him to use a pencil, well then, we need to give him opportunities where we aren't hovering with expectation. I think one of the challenges we have as parents—especially educating parents is that we take a Stand Over Their Shoulder position too frequently.

So, the child is sitting at the table and we're literally above them looking over their shoulder, waiting for a product. The amount of pressure is enormous on 8-year-old little shoulders. But what would happen if for instance, you took a stand of Post-It notes at night and you wrote notes to your child all over these Post-Its and stuck them to his bedroom door while he was asleep so that when he woke up, the door was covered in notes. It might have the day, temperature; it might have how many miles the sun is from the earth. You might even write him a little love note like, "I love the way you cuddle the dog when—." You can do any kind of information that would be interesting to your child all in bite-sized chunks on Post-It notes, and then leave the stack of Post-It notes and a pen at the foot of the door and see what happens.

Will your child write notes back to you? Will he ignore it? Will he read it? Will he ask you to come upstairs and read it to him? Will you leave a knock-knock joke partway finished and he has to try and guess the ending? We forget the power of leaving our children in the midst of their curiosity and surprise. One of the ways that we entice children into the arenas we care about is to stop treating them like they're a duty and instead look at them as mysteries.

Anne: Yeah, that's so good. I love that.

Julie: So, our goal isn't to make it fun; it is to make it meaningful, because meaning is what is valuable. We will strive for meaning.

So, you know, your kids are 11 and 8. I don't know if they've hit this moment yet, but you know, I've had kids who've been in sports and they will get to that point where they want to practice scoring a goal in the soccer net all afternoon in the backyard while it's hot. Why? Because there's personal meaning attached to successfully scoring a goal. I could never tell a child who wasn't in soccer, "Someday when you play sports, it'll be important for you to know

how to kick a ball." That doesn't do it! There is something about them feeling connected to the meaning that motivates exertion beyond it being fun.

In fact, anybody who has a videogame-playing child knows that they will click that mouse over and over and over again, tediously, to beat a level, and will throw a fit and punch a hole in the wall if they lose again, right? But what do we have there: We have the very thing you're asking them to do, which is persevering even when it's not fun.

Anne: Right, right. Yeah, it's so true. It's funny that you say that, because Joshua right now is so, so into baseball and I can hardly get him to come inside sometimes because he's practicing pitching, practicing throwing and, you know, and it's—and so, it's interesting—you know, I think you're right. Sometimes we treat writing or math, we treat it so differently than something like that. You know, look at that, him persevering through because he wants to catch that ball, he wants to do a good pitch, and how I think—and probably because I was public schooled, too, so I have this public school mindset still a little bit and how each subject is—it's so—I can't remember what you said, but we just—we have such a different focus. We don't look at it as just this meaningful develop—thing they're going to develop and nurture as they get older.

Julie: That's exactly right. And so, if we're going to look at math; so, we've talked about making writing a little more meaningful for that 8-year-old, you know, there are other ways to make it meaningful, too. There's he writes a word, you write a word. He traces what you handwrite for him.

One of the things that we want to pay attention to is the level of challenge. Kids want to be challenged, but they don't want to be exasperated, so there's a difference between asking a child to take a risk and to push themselves a little bit, and asking them to do something that feels herculean, or completely overwhelming, or feels like they will be a puddle of exhaustion and unhappiness at the end. Nobody wants to do that.

And yet, you will see a child on these online games repeatedly playing a level, and for a while the levels are pretty easy, but they are having just enough success to be enticed to try again. So, we want to borrow some of that psychology into writing or into math.

So, let's talk now about how to make math more meaningful. How to see math as a part of the fabric of the universe, rather than just this isolated school subject of skills that they have to master for the workbook, but has no relationship to anything else they're doing in their lives.

So, here's something that is interesting. You have a son who loves baseball, loves pitching. Wouldn't it be interesting to spend a day looking up pitching speeds of major league pitchers? Of watching those pitches online? Of understanding something about the difference between the speeds of the slow ball, the curve, the fast ball, you know, the knuckle ball? Starting to actually see—you can look up the science of pitching on YouTube and I promise you will find a

ton there. What we're looking for is math as a description of real world experiences, because that's what math is. Math is just a language describing real world experiences.

So, we've got money, we've got weather—you know, temperature, velocities—we've got physics, you know, we have flight, we have gravity, we have pitching, we have so many places where math actually shows up and describes the world back to us in a meaningful way.

So, yes, the skills are important, but if all I did was ever run on a treadmill, the tedium of treadmill running becomes overwhelming. Part of what motivates me to run a marathon is I'm outside, there are measurements that mean something in the greater world, and there is this wonderful achievement of a medal at the end, and the celebration that comes from doing it in a group. We sometimes treat these things so, so isolated from the rest of their education that they have—our children have no grasp of the value. They don't see how it relates. You can't persevere when you don't see the point.

Anne: Right, that would be really helpful. That was something with my daughter. Probably it's funny, because it's my son where we struggle more with the writing, and then my daughter it's definitely the one where we struggle a little bit more with the math.

Julie: Well, so, tell me about her life. What is she interested in?

Anne: So, she's super interested in animals. She is my total animal girl, so horseback riding; we are in 4H, she raises a rabbit for 4H. Just anything animal really makes her come alive. So, one thing that I have tried when talking to her about math, because she has shown some interest—we've talked about if she goes to college and what we might want to study, and I went to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo and they have a great animal science program, and so I was telling her about that and how—this was over math one day, you know—how if you were to study animal science that would be so cool, and told her all the things she could do if she wanted to go that route, but how important math would be because if you had to administer medicine, or you needed to keep track of—if you're doing a breeding project or anything like that. So, it kind of got—it did a little spark. "I'm going to need to know some math if I want to be able to maybe do animal science or pursue a career in any kind of veterinary," that sort of thing.

Julie: Which is all true, but very far away when you're 11 years old.

Anne: Right.

Julie: So, what we want—we want to help her experience meaning today. So, if you have animals, if you are raising animals of any kind, you could actually start that journey now. She could be keeping track of her animal's food, how much the animal eats, weighs, temperature. I mean, it would be interesting to find out what some of those practices are that go into animal husbandry, or even if she's a 4H girl what some of those practices are that she's preparing for to see them in mathematical terms.

Now, that isn't going to solve the daily-ness of the worksheet. I understand that. One of the ways that we help things have meaning is to situate them in this larger context of value to their daily life. But then the second way that we help something have meaning that doesn't quite feel tangible yet is to rethink the context for how we master that skill.

So, you can supply the emotional imagination for why math is valuable that your child doesn't quite have yet, but you can then lend the support your child needs despite their not having that imagination yet.

So, one of the ways to do that is to involve your child in setting goals. I like to give this example about exercise. We've discovered that people love to exercise more because they wear a Fitbit watch than because their doctor told them that they would die of a heart attack if they didn't keep their body healthy.

Anne: Oh, gosh.

Julie: I mean, think about that! Right now, if you go to the doctor and he says, "Look the important thing is, eat healthy, run, walk 10,000 steps a day because you don't want to die of a heart attack." People just go home and they go out for ice cream. I mean, that has almost no impact. Even though we are full grown adults who understand the importance and truth of that information.

But put a Fitbit on someone and suddenly they're at like, 9,500 steps at 11:30 PM, and they're like, "Honey, I'll be right back." And they take one more lap around the neighborhood. Just to get those 500 steps. Why does that silly bell and whistle work on a full grown adult more than the rational information? I don't know [laughs]. But I do know it works.

And so, what we want—we're not so much rewarding, because literally three lit up circles on my Apple Watch isn't even a true reward. I mean, it doesn't do anything for me. What it is, is: it's a celebration of an achievement I committed myself to.

So, let's unpack those principles. We want our kids to pick a goal, commit to it, and then have an immediate tangible representation of having made it to that finish line. So, if your daughter gets the big picture, "Yes, I might want to go into animal science. Yep, I believe my mom, math

is an integral part of it," and then wakes up tomorrow and is like, "Ugh, I hate fractions. Why do I have to do fractions today? Animal husbandry is 10 years away." The next step isn't to think of more ways to use math necessarily today, although I think we should do that at least a few times a month—play *Yahtzee*, get out the family math book, do something creative and fun.

But on the daily, can we appeal to that Fitbit mentality? Could we say to her, "How many problems do you think you could do today?" Instead of, "You're assigned all of the evens between 1 and 30. You know, let me know when you're done, I'll be over here washing dishes."

What if we asked her, "How many problems do you think you could commit to today?" And she said, "Four." And you're disappointed instantly, but you hide it and you hide it well, and you say, "Fabulous! I'm writing down the big number 4 on the white board." She does all four problems, you double check them, they look good. And now you tell her, "Well, what is the ultimate number for the week you think you could get done?" And then, she decides each day how many of those she wants to get done and on the end of the week, what could be her celebration? I'm not talking about necessarily a reward, like where in advance you say to her, "If you get this all done, I'm going to give you a brand-new game." I'm not talking about a reward like that.

What would be a meaningful way for her? Could it be high-fives, or you're just going to spend a half-hour reading a book you both love together? Something that reinforces satisfaction, accomplishment, celebration. You know, in my family it was things like high-fives, or jumping on the trampoline, or taking a break, or even just pausing to admire the work. Really literally saying, "Wow, look how many sentences you wrote! You thought you could only freewrite for seven minutes and you freewrote for 10. That's impressive." Like that.

Anne: Okay, so, I have a question for you.

Julie: Yes!

Anne: If you—okay, so, let's say I do that—you know, how kids are, they're hit or miss. Some days you give them a math assignment and it's like no big deal. You know, like does it like it's easy-peasy. Another day, I mean, it's just, "No, I can't! This is too hard I can't do this!" So, when you say "Okay, how many can you do?" What if she just says one and then how—

Julie: Perfect, then do one! And allow her the dignity of having an off day. A day when she doesn't feel like doing it.

Because the thing is, as you start to work with her, you can set a target for her. You can say—let's say at the beginning of the month you're looking at her math and you say to her, "Looks like we're coming up on fractions, let's brainstorm a whole bunch of ways fractions get used in our lives." Cooking, sewing, measuring, building, you know, come up with a whole bunch. Say, "Alright, let's come up with a whole bunch of activities we might get to do this month that involve fractions."

So, let's say she says, "I want to bake cakes." Say, "That's awesome, to become more and more skilled in fractions, it seems to me like it might be really important to do this chapter by the end of the month, but I think it'd be really fun if you determined how many problems you did a day and every time you get to 20 or 40, we bake something." Like that.

Anne: Oh, yeah.

Julie: You see? And literally that is the marathon mentality. I didn't increase the number of miles I ran every day. I had rest days. I had days where I only had to run three or five miles, which felt so good after doing a day that had 18. Right? I got to have a day where I got to look forward to only running three miles. So, that's the mentality we're trying to hit here.

You can collaborate, set the vision even what your expectations are, but then I want you to think through personal value and meaning. Setting some, you know, the pin that you drop that says, "Hey, if you've done 30 problems, we're definitely not doing math for a few days. We're going to bake cookies. We're going to actually use these fractions. We're going to sew a quilt for your American Girl Doll. And then when that's done, we'll come back and we'll go back to it again." Like that.

Anne: Right. I really like that because I've been thinking about the days that she does really push through and she's got a great attitude and doesn't give me a hard time at all, even just more recognizing those as well, too. Like, I loved your attitude with math today, and maybe taking the time to point out those times, too. Instead of kind of letting the harder days take highlight, you know.

Julie: Perfect! And to even say, "You were so into it today, I think we just skip it tomorrow." That's incredible. Like, focusing on that energy.

The other thing that you can do, and I love to share, Nadine Dyer from Canada, who shared this on a podcast a while ago, her son one day turned to her and said, "You know, Mom, I'd find math easier if I had my own pot of tea." Sometimes all we need to do is nurture the context.

Recognize it's hard. Rub their shoulders. Tell them they only have to do a few problems. Give them a pot of tea, light a candle, turn on beautiful music in the background. Let them sit near a window instead of in the dark room with the dark table. Let them have their bunny sit in their lap and stroke the bunny's fur while they're doing math. Will it take three times as long? Probably. But now they have a partner, they have something to do to give them those momentary breaks they need to sustain that perseverance you're trying to help them build.

Anne: Right, right. And I think sometimes even—because this morning was a good example, so she was working through a review at the end of a section we were doing, and she was working through quite a few hard problems, I was watching her do it. And then, when I said, "Okay, we have to correct these two," because they were wrong or something, then all of the sudden the tears. "It's too hard!" And it's just interesting, because talking through it with you I'm realizing sometimes we think we can put this—almost this expectation on, "Gosh, you can't even do 10 problems." And we forget how hard maybe her little brain was working on those four problems.

Julie: Absolutely.

Anne: And she's—she's just done. Like, her brain is literally just done. And me saying like, come on, push through, isn't really being effective [laughs].

Julie: Well, you're onto something! You get to ask her how it is for her. In other words, we tend to tell our kids how it should be for them. Instead of finding out how it is for them.

So, if there is a day that she's resisting or your son is resisting, to check in, to say, "Oh, you know, I noticed that when you are feeling good you have no problem doing this. Today you're resisting. What's going on? Are you hungry? Are you bored? Do we need to just play a table top game today? Roll dice and play cards and just have a change of pace? Have I not noticed how hard you've been working, and you just need a break?" Allowing them to show up, to say, "Oh, my stomach hurts, I'm really tired. You know, I was reading that book and now I just don't feel like doing math because all I can think about is the next chapter." You know, sometimes we just don't give our kids the opportunity to be self-aware, and they don't know what to tell you initially, so it takes staying open and even supplying a few suggestions sometimes. Are you hungry? Do you need a glass of water? Should I rub your shoulders? Just say one of those, don't say 20 questions.

Anne: Yeah [laughs].

Julie: But, right? Like, helping them see. And the modeling! So, let's say you're in the middle of the morning, you keep going back to your phone because there was this incredible conversation going on about politics on Facebook and you have the perfect answer for that terrible person, and so you're not really tuned into your kids. You're just thinking about answering this terrible person and your children are starting to lose focus. And then, I don't know if this happens to you, but it totally would happen to me, I get resentful of them for not cooperating because I want them to be done quickly so I can go do the thing *I* really want to do.

You know, we could own that. We could say to our kids, "You know what, I'm really distracted today and now I'm noticing you are, too. I think we need a break, let's take a half-hour to go do whatever we want and I'll be back with better energy." And just own it! And model for our kids, self-care, self-awareness, being honest, not pretending. Those are lessons, too, and they're very important ones.

Anne: Yeah, oh, definitely, definitely. I mean, but I do have to say there are some days when it comes to, say, writing for example with my son and all of the sudden it's, "I'm too tired—I'm too tired to write." So, what do you think on those days when it's like, well, I think you were too tired the last four times we were supposed to write something down?

Julie: So, when a child says that multiple times, he's sending you a very clear message. He is afraid to take the risk.

Anne: Okay.

Julie: He is afraid to take the risk. So, what can you do to lower the bar to experience success? So, instead of writing the whole sentence, can he trace a sentence? Can he narrate a sentence to you, you write it down, and now he copies that sentence one word a day for a week? What can you do to lower the bar to experience success? Because what you're asking him to do is too big.

And I know that sounds counterintuitive, but actually perseverance is built from manageable steps, not from burning yourself out. Pretend that this writing muscle is not well developed and you're asking him to lift a 250 lb. dumbbell. You know? He's letting you know by using the code "I'm too tired." You know, kids say, "I'm bored, I'm tired," to not let you see their insides. They want to please you! So, they think if they say they're tired they don't have to face your disappointment in them.

Anne: Yeah, okay. No, that's really good, really good. Because I think that again, I think we just forget. We look at something and we're like, gosh, it's one sentence. Just copy it. You know? What's so hard? But yeah, if that—like you said, if that writing muscle is still needing to be developed—which it clearly is—then that stuff is just overwhelming him.

It's always just that fine line of is he just trying to get out of it because he doesn't feel like writing right now? He'd rather go out and rollerblade on the deck or play Legos, like I'm always trying to—you know, just that feeling of I don't want to get manipulated myself.

Julie: Well, let's explore that because I'm really glad you brought that up.

So, when we take the position that our child is trying to quote unquote "get out of something," we are taking a morally superior position as though everybody, the child and you, both agree that this is important, and they are deliberately setting out to thwart your will. But what if the truth is you're the only one who's agreed that this is important? Your child is just telling you the truth. "I don't want to do it. It doesn't seem important to me." They are trying to get out of it, but for a very good reason.

They have not yet bought into your vision and it's your vision that you need to find a way to communicate, so that your child buys in, so that it is also their shared vision. That's on us, that is the home educator task, that is the schoolteacher task, and what they do in school is they browbeat kids, or they require kids, or they give grades that make kids have low self-esteem, or they call in the parent, or they give low behavior scores. We chose to homeschool so we wouldn't do that to our children.

So, our job now is to flip it around and take what they say seriously. If they say I'm tired, I don't get it, I don't want to, it doesn't mean that they're not going to do it, but it means our task shifts from coercion to finding new points of agreement. Okay, this feels hard for you. How can I make it more meaningful for you? How can I lower the bar of stress for you? And when you start collaborating and partnering with your kids with that in mind, the value of what you're working on will start to reveal itself. It won't just be about a power struggle. It'll be about the thing; not about your child's character.

You know, nobody ever did something because someone else said, "You have a bad character, so now please do this for me." I mean, that's just not how we're motivated. You know, if your husband said to you tomorrow, "The reason you didn't take out the garbage is you're just trying to get out of your hard work." You'd be like, "You know, I had a very good reason to me why I didn't do that yesterday!"

Anne: [Laughs] Oh, no, that is so good. I'm so—it was funny, I was thinking, "You know I just want to take notes, I know when I listen to this, I'm going to be writing that one down."

Julie: [Laughs]

Anne: That's so, *so* good. Gosh, I just—yeah. It's so easy just to think they're just trying to get out of this, but, gosh, when you shift your focus and you see it that way that, yeah, that we have to create value in it for them for it to be meaningful.

Julie: That's right. And we get to say things like, "Oh, yeah, you don't like writing. Okay, I get it. You know, I see it as really important in your life." I love to be honest with my kids, so I would say to my dysgraphic son, "You know, writing is important, but I see that it's really painful for you. So, here's what we're going to do. We're going to take a break, because it's painful for you, and then in six months we're going to revisit writing and see how you feel then."

Now, here's what's really interesting, I did that for three years. Every six months. He did not do much writing. But here's what happened, he played games online so he learned to type. He did an entire set of islands as an island chain, all these maps, which was using a pencil. But it wasn't writing.

And then, here's the most amazing thing that happened, we took up birding together. And in one of the books we read, it said if you are a birder you need to keep your own bird list in a book and it didn't count if it wasn't in your own handwriting, this was a birding book for adults, and when Liam saw that he was like, "Well, then, every bird I see, I am writing." And he took his left-handed scrawl and he wrote every single bird himself.

Now, over three years keeping a list of about 30 birds is not a lot of writing. But he began to see the value of it through birding and he began to see the value of spelling through online chat. It came through his own experience. And finally, one day he came home, and he said "Mom, I'm ready to work on writing because I had to fill out a form at lacrosse and I couldn't fit my letters inside the lines on the form." He was 12.

Anne: Oh, gosh.

Julie: And you know, within two years of writing therapy and working on it, he was fine. And you know, he just graduated from college in a program that was all writing and reading. Literally that's all it was.

So, one of the things we have to do is keep seeking that sort of blend of holding the value of the item before our children and staying open to a variety of ways of accessing it. And helping them, that we're their ally and their partner, not their task master.

Anne: Yeah. Yeah. No, I think that it's just there's so much value in—when you're incorporating something that they're interested in, too. You know, I think sometimes—you know, for example, my daughter, we were working on a paper this year, because we're part of a charter school, and so we have a writing assignment that we have to turn in each month, which sometimes is really rough with my little guy, but with Tegan she's pretty good and we usually can pump something out together. We're still kind of in that partnership writing, which I love because I remember listening to one of your podcasts one time about, you know, you wanted to write that paper on your own and you got a bad grade and then you realized all your friends had their parents' help and how true—when we're teaching our kids how to write we have to help train them, which is being an example.

So, anyways, all that to say she was going to write this paper and—which is an opinion paper and I just said you know what, you choose the subject, you—what do you want to write about? And she just decided, of course, animals. You know, this endangered animal. She did all the research and then I just kind of helped her puzzle piece it together. But if I would have come and said, "Hey, we're writing an opinion paper on this book you just read, sit down, let's write it." I mean, it would have just been like, "Uh, no. I don't want to write about that."

So, I think maybe just even with Joshua—like, I love even just the lists. Like, letting him—you know, he's really into Legos and maybe we could just, you know, I could get a little bit more creative. You know, it's just this out of the box thinking that I'm still growing in.

Julie: Absolutely.

Anne: Just coming from—I didn't come from any kind of homeschool background, so having to kind of think out of the box and not just, okay, hey, let's fill out this outline because we have to turn in something. You know, it's like already this year with him I've squeaked by on some assignments because I've just told the teacher I work with, I said, "Hey, here is the deal. Like, he is just not going to write a five-sentence paragraph, so we are going to get creative." So, we wrote why you should play baseball, but he drew pictures and captioned them instead of writing a full paragraph.

Julie: Nice!

Anne: Because that would just be so overwhelming to him. There's just no way. Like, that's too many words.

Julie: And here's something to even consider, you know, I know if you're in a charter school situation sometimes the pressure is very academic, and it looks more like school. It's one of the challenges of working in that system as a home educator, but your child speaks in paragraphs. It's unavoidable.

So, here's what you do: you either record or transcribe that child's paragraph, and then you let your child either trace your transcription, or copy it like copywork, and you take a month. But that is a paragraph in your child's own writing. It's just you're providing the level of support that matches the level of needs. So, you are separating the steps. It's more steps than maybe what you imagined an 8-year-old should be able to do, which just ignore all that anyway because it's all nonsense, it's just made up by somebody and it has nothing to do with anything.

But if your child tells you a paragraph amount of information about anything, that can be typed up. It can be snipped into lines and rearranged in a new order. New sentences can be added orally, and you can get that all written on paper for him, and he could literally trace it with his pencil, and now he will have his own paragraph in his own handwriting of his own thoughts. And it will be better than any 8-year-old who is asked to do all of that simultaneously from scratch.

Anne: Yes, so true. And it's interesting, because kind of as our year is wrapping up, I've been having him just trace more because, you know, it just—I guess there's been this fear in my head, "Oh, gosh, if he doesn't write it, he's never going to learn how to write." But then you just do that little check like, "Anne, he's going to learn how to write. It's going to be fine." So, I do. I mean, I just write stuff out lightly and he just traces it and just I figure, okay, he's getting his letter formation.

Julie: All of it! That will be tedious at a certain point and he will take over. And you'll know when that day comes.

You may try some freewriting next year when he's 9, where you set the timer for a minute and he just does whatever he wants, and you don't worry about mechanics and spelling. I mean, there are some ideas that could help him break through. I love your idea of lists. We did *endless* lists with my kids.

I had a son who had a whole book of lists. At one point he was listing rollercoasters and I realized: we could make a book of rollercoaster lists. So, he had all his favorite rollercoasters around the country. We did a page for each rollercoaster and then he made a list of facts about each rollercoaster and that became the book. You know, we did it with birding. We did it with Legos. We did it with American Girl accessories.

So, yeah, listing is a phenomenal way to grow a writer. So, you're definitely on the right track. Just lower the bar to experience success. Find ways to create support around the times when

your kids commit and exert energy, and then find ways to tie meaning to those rote skills at least a couple times a month.

Anne: Yeah, so good.

Julie: Awesome. Any questions before we tie up?

Anne: No, I've got a lot of good things to think about and try.

Julie: Fantastic. Well, here's what we're going to do, Anne. I will call you back in the fall, and we'll just check in and see how things are going, and then this episode will air sometime after November.

Anne: Okay, that sounds great.

Julie: Thank you so much for sharing your issue with us. I know it's going to be relevant to so many listeners. We really appreciate it.

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

Julie: Let's give Anne and her family a chance to put some of these principles into practice.

While we're waiting for her to return to the show, I promised you that we would talk about my new book, *The Brave Learner: Finding Everyday Magic in Homeschool, Learning, and Life*. Here's a quote from the book that comes from the chapter called "Magic Doors":

> *Let's push pause on traditional models of education. Learning is happening all of the time. The questions are what's being learned? Do our kids have the space to generate meaning in addition to mastering facts and information? How do I, as an educator, facilitate joy in learning?*

Today's episode of the podcast talks about that exact topic and I offer you many more ideas—more than you could possibly implement in a week or even a school-year—inside my book. If you are curious to know more, you can visit TheBraveLearner.com where there are reviews and

a short description, and a chance for you to pre-order and receive the two free pre-order bonus gifts.

I also want to invite you to follow me on Instagram. I spend a lot of time there sharing good information about homeschooling, self-care, and parenting. If you are looking for a way to connect with other Brave Schoolers—what we call the Brave Writer community—that's a great way to do it if you are an Instagram user. Simply go to Instagram and follow @JulieBraveWriter.

The last resource I want to tell you about is our Facebook group. It is called "Brave Writer Brave Schoolers." You can look that up in Facebook groups and simply join and be a part of a more than 10,000-member community where we talk about these principles, homeschooling, writing, all things Brave Writer.

We invite you to join either on Instagram or Facebook because, hello, totally free, lots of support.

And now, let's get back to Anne and see how things are going where she lives.

Julie: Hey, Anne! Welcome back to the show! How are you doing?

Anne: I'm doing so good, thank you!

Julie: Really glad you're here and I'm excited to talk with you about the last few months. Have you had a chance to be able to implement some of the suggestions I made?

Anne: Yeah, I have! Yes, and it's been great, and I actually was taking notes all throughout the couple months, too, just so I could remember what we tried, but we've definitely tried a lot of your suggestions and some actually ended up coming naturally, which was really fun.

Julie: Oh, wow, I want to hear more about that. Which ones came naturally?

Anne: Okay, so, the list writing. All of the sudden—I don't know, it was probably like a month ago, we're sitting at breakfast and he's the one that was—he still kind of is, but we're getting there—my little struggler with writing.

Julie: Yes.

Anne: And we were talking about his birthday party that he's planning for October and he says, "Well, I'm going to make a list of my friends, so can you write it?" And I said, "Well, I'm standing right here making breakfast, why don't you write it?" So, I gave him a piece of breakfast and a pencil and he just starts writing all—and you know, of course, "How do you spell…" And that's fine! I'll help him spell. But he wrote probably 15 names down and he was so proud because he's like, "I have my birthday list, now I won't forget who I'm inviting."

Julie: Aww!

Anne: And the whole time I'm thinking, "Yes!"

Julie: [Laughs]

Anne: He's writing and he doesn't even know it's really good for him!

Julie: It is so good for him, and I love that he even has that connection that by writing it down he won't forget it. Obviously, this is one of the primary reasons we use writing and it's not something we highlight very often for our children.

Anne: Right. And it made me think about how you kept saying how do you make it more meaningful for them? And I thought, oh, my gosh, exactly, he had that connection. I don't want to forget who I want to invite, so I'm going to write the list and then—and so then I was just like, "Yes!" Of course, after, "Bud, I'm so proud of you. That was a lot of writing." You know? Like, you did a good job [laughs].

Julie: Fabulous. Oh, I love that. Oh, good.

Anne: Yeah, so, that was great. But yes! Just let me know what you else you want me to share because we had lots of fun. It felt like some good breakthroughs.

Julie: Yeah, I'm so excited to hear about math. Where you want to make it fun and then it looks like your version of fun isn't his version of fun.

Anne: Yes, right.

Julie: So, did you make use of his interest in baseball? Or how did that work for you?

Anne: You know, I forgot to do that. It's funny, because I was looking over the notes, I forgot about that. But with my daughters—we'll flip it over to her—so, my 11-year-old. She's the one—it's funny, because he gives me more of the attitude with writing and she kind of gives me it more with math. So, something that she started to do is she really wants a horse, and so she has started doing research and making lists and prices of how much things cost, and then she kind of created this budget that she thought with her savings account. So, she's been using math in that sense, which I thought is so neat and practical.

And I'm trying to remember—I'm thinking if it was before we talked or after, but we did have them both open a bank account, and so they have a little bank book and every time they get allowance for helping around the house. So, every time we make a deposit, either I take them to the bank or I tell them, hey, I made this bank book. They have to go to their bank book and they do their deposit, or if they spend something then they have to subtract it out. So, just real-life math, that's been great for them to see how to balance an account and how to see their spending.

Julie: Fabulous.

Anne: So, I really liked that. The other thing is I ended up switching math curriculums [laughs].

Julie: You know, sometimes that is really important. So, are they finding the new one more easily addressed? Are they willing to do the work in that program?

Anne: Yes. I think that it definitely took a lot of pressure and stress off my daughter and she—there are days where it's challenging, but I think it's just a better fit for her.

And I was super panicky to switch math curriculums, because of course there's that fear of, "They're going to have holes and we're going to miss something." But finally I just kicked the bucket. I just did it. And now I'm so glad. And I ended up switching my son, too, because for me it's just easier to be on the same thing. But he loves it because there are manipulatives—there are blocks. And he's such a Lego-oriented kid that he sits and he's messing with the blocks even when I'm teaching him. But it's giving him something to do while we're teaching.

So, I'm really glad I did it even though that was always a scary one for me. Switching math curriculums always felt like that's the big "No" but if I can share with anyone, just saying it's okay. It's okay to try something else, because when it really comes down to it, I just figured math is math. We're going to learn it one way or another and there are so many different attitudes to get there, so I just was kind of like—

Julie: Oh, 100%. In fact, one of my favorite conversations was with a good friend of mine here in Cincinnati. She and I have kids the same ages and we homeschooled all together, you know, for over a decade. And she says she remembers agonizing over 1st grade math curriculum. Like, which is the best program. And in hindsight she thought looking back, does it really matter which program I used to teach 3 + 4? You know, like when it gets right down to it, these are just all methods to address all the various ways that we use math in elementary school and junior high and even high school.

And so, switching is just giving yourself an opportunity to reinvest math with maybe some interest or a different strategy for retention, because even if something is working well, sometimes just taking a different point of view causes a whole new set of brain links to be developed.

And so, in this case, when we had talked before about personal meaning and giving ownership, handing your child manipulatives that they find personally engaging *is* how they generate meaning. It's not meaning like in the abstract universe, future career sense. It's meaning for today. How does this manipulative look in my hand? How does it fit with other manipulatives? What can I do with it while my mom's droning on? These are all the ways that they start to correlate meaning with the more abstract practices of math, so that's brilliant! Yay for you!

Anne: [Laughs]

Julie: High-five across the miles!

Anne: Aw, thank you! Yeah, so, that was a good step, I'm glad I did it. And it's been a good fit for us.

And the other thing, too, with my daughter. She—the program we're using has teaching videos and she loves being more independent with it. So, I'll watch the video ahead of time, and then I'll let her watch it, and then she gives it a go, and then if she gets stuck, then she comes and, you know, I of course check. So, we're still connected. But I think there was something about backing off, like that pressure of me being right there—you know, always there, there, there. She can just go. When she's there she watches the video. She does the assignment.

Even last week she did the assignment. She got every single one wrong and my old self probably would have been like come, sit, let's fix it all. But I looked at all the work she had just done and I was like, you know what? We'll fix it tomorrow. No big deal. Because you worked hard. I saw how hard you worked. You did math! Just because you didn't get the right answer, you still worked hard. So, don't worry about it. We'll get it tomorrow.

So, that was—thank you, Julie! I was thinking in my head, "What would Julie do? She'd say just she worked hard, done for the day. We'll pick it up tomorrow." [Laughs]

Julie: I love that! No, it's so beautiful, because I have this joke I make all the time at conferences that no child who's been homeschooled has ever missed a math problem because their mother won't let them [laughs], right?

Anne: [Laughs] Right.

Julie: The second you get it wrong, the mother swoops in. "Let's rework the problem and find out what you did wrong." Whereas, you know, in 3rd grade at most schools, you just get minus two or minus six. So, part of the willingness that you are displaying to allow a child to struggle and get as much as they get until the next attempt; that is what growth looks like. It's not about the end result being right. It's about the process that creates those brain links that lays the foundation for the future.

And it wasn't like you were just going to leave it where she continued to do these problems incorrectly for the rest of her life. You were respecting the effort. You saw the amount of math engagement.

And you know what's also interesting? If we take this more patient approach, like 24 hours or a week or whatever, we don't go in with such breathless anxiety also. We're giving ourselves a chance to digest, "Well, just which part of this did she get? Which part of this did she not get?" So, that we can come in and just show them the easy way to solve it. But if we go into it with this anxiety and we see the wrong answers, we might not even be able to see the parts that she did correctly or did well.

Anne: Right, no, that's so good. Because of course, my initial reaction was like, "Oh, my gosh, how did she get every single one wrong?" But again, it was just, "Take a deep breath, it's fine. We'll work on it tomorrow." And I also knew that there was no way she was going to be able to engage back in, you know, after 15-20 minutes of really intense math. Her brain's done.

Julie: Totally.

Anne: You know, so there was just no way, even if I showed her the right way, it probably would have just gone in one ear out the other. I just knew she was done for the day.

Julie: Absolutely. You know, I say that a lot about writing. You know, she might even a few days later go back and look at her own math, and it might even be that it would be possible that she would discover that she made mistakes. Because sometimes, just like in writing, you know, you're spelling, you're thinking about the content, you're using your handwriting, all of these things are happening simultaneously. But when you can get a little distance and go back and just read, now you're able to see a misspelling or the missing punctuation mark, because not so many demands are being placed on your brain.

I know for me when I was doing math, one of the challenges when I was young was just lining things up straight. You know, especially when we would get into multiplying multiple digits and you had move over a digit column to add together and if you just miss one of those, if you just misalign the numbers slightly because you don't have good pencil control, you're going to end up with the wrong answer even though you're doing everything right. And I wish in hindsight I could have valued all of that effort I was always making. Because for me the verdict was always about the final answer and if I got the answer wrong, I thought I did everything wrong. I would collapse in the face of that verdict. So, I love what you're doing. That's all just to say good job [laughs].

Anne: Yeah, it was great and, I'm not going to lie, you know, jelly beans are great incentives, too [laughs].

Julie: Yes, absolutely! Why not?

Anne: On those challenging days, there is just—we have this jelly bean jar now and it's just, "Hey, if you can do two more, you can get a jelly bean." And my son loves to just suck on one. He'll suck on one jelly bean for his entire math assignment. Just if he has something to suck on,

something that's kind of keeping him going. So, I have learned that this looks like a challenging page, how about a jelly bean? [Laughs]

Julie: I love that! Yes! I call that sweetening the deal. Yep, perfect. Well, there was one more thing we talked about. I'm wondering if you did any goal-setting? Where your kids picked a goal, committed to it, had some kind of process to get there? How did that go?

Anne: You know, I didn't do the goal-setting. You know, I was just looking at that, too, and I'm like, gosh, I should—ah! I forgot the goal-setting, but it's good because it's still more homework that I can continue to do.

Julie: Absolutely.

Anne: I think just because we were having such good success, I just didn't even think about popping the goal-setting in, because the other things were just working so well that I was just going with the flow.

Julie: Yeah, not necessary yet. I mean, one of the things to recognize, and I really love that you just said that going with the flow, is that we don't want to be guilty of wasting too many things—especially too many new things—on our kids at once.

So, anyone listening to this podcast and anyone who's been listening to each session during this season, just know that you can keep these ideas in your hip pocket [laughs], you know? When you come to that moment where you need something new, you'll have a whole slew of ideas to try and you can sort of sprinkle them throughout the year.

Anne: Right, yeah, because I don't want to reveal all of the tools too quickly [laughs].

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

Anne: Yeah, so, I'm going with what's working right now, but that's definitely—I have all of our notes and that's definitely on the back-burner.

Julie: So, is there anything else that you were excited to share that I didn't ask you about yet?

Anne: Well, do you want to go over to writing? Can we share a couple more things about writing?

Julie: Yes, please! Definitely.

Anne: Okay, so, one of the things—so, with my little guy who's still—the writing is—it just feels like it's so painful. I always just feel—sometimes I feel bad because I'm like, am I—is it really that painful? But anyways, one thing that really freed up a lot of the frustration and the pain, and we had talked about this, too, is that the copywork was really difficult for him, so what I started doing is I just had him trace. So, everything, like either it was dictating something to me, then I'd have him trace as much as he could—I love that, we've been doing a lot of that. How much do you think you can do?

And I think I had sent you an email or a picture and said, "Oh, my goodness! Julie! He copied the whole thing!" You know, he traced the whole thing! I thought he was only going—literally I was like, "Oh, he's only going to trace one or two sentences." Nope, he just sat down, he traced the whole thing. It was probably like, six or seven sentences. So, the freedom in just being okay with him tracing it and it not being, "Oh, he has to copy it." Because he really is still getting the handwriting technique. He's having to still form the letters, it's just—I just do it really lightly and he traces.

And I think that has taken the pressure off the copywork. Because he would look at the copywork and just melt because it was just too frustrating. I don't know what it was, I think I told you he gets the letters confused when he tries to find them again, you know, he's going up and down. So, the tracing has been beautiful. He loves to trace. I've kind of just made up my own little handwriting curriculum this year where he traces a sentence, and then if he feels like he can do it that day, he can copy underneath it. Or we come back the next day and he tries copying underneath it.

Julie: Perfect. In fact, that's what I was just going to suggest. That the next step after tracing is literally copying beneath, because if you just go from copying from another page, it may be too big of a step. So, you are dialed in, sister! You're doing great! This is perfect.

Anne: We're getting there, we're getting there [laughs]. So, that's been really helpful. The other thing I did was we had talked last time about how, with the charter school that we're a part of, there are writing requirements that we have to turn in every month and—so, I met with

my teacher and I just—I just said you know what, we've been homeschooling six years, it's time, I'm advocating for my kid. So, I just said, you know what, I love that we have these writing projects, but I'm going to be honest with you they are just stressing me out, and I just don't want to put this kind of pressure on him to have to complete these assignments that we're just not ready for.

So, I said, "How can we do this?" You know, we're still kind of in a jot it down stage, can he be dictating to me and then we work on it later? So, what she said we could do is he can record a story, so I just put my phone on the memo and he recorded this amazing story last month, then you can just type it out for him, word for word, and then later on just kind of work through the editing process with him just so he learns the writing process.

Julie: Of course.

Anne: And I was just like, oh, thank you, thank you. I finally just stood up and was like, you know, this is just how it's going to have to be because he's not there yet. If I tell him, hey, you're going to have to copy everything you just dictated, or here write me a story, I mean, he just shuts down because his brain can't get—the thoughts can't get out to his hands yet. His hands can't keep up, that's what I meant to say. His hands can't keep up yet.

Julie: Right! Exactly. And I love that she was aware that that's a valid system for writing. Not every charter school teacher that I've talked with knows that, and yet that's actually what we advocate in Brave Writer that you jot down your child's lucid thoughts, their spontaneous self-expression, the stories they want to tell you. You can record and then transcribe, or you can literally handwrite while they're talking, or type while they're talking. And then, of course, what would stop you from doing revision at that point and using all the powerful tools that are in Microsoft Word to make that happen? There's no reason for kids to have to handwrite the same thing three times in a row anymore. That day is over—thank goodness.

Anne: Right. I know. And the other thing—and that's the thing I just love so much about Brave Writer is how the original thought gets to come out before being so blocked by the technical stuff. I think the technical can be so inhibiting of these beautiful, imaginative stories that these kids have tapped into their writer's voices, you know. They just want to get that out, but I think if you say, "Okay, write it." And they're not there yet then it's like, "No, I can't, it's too much. I can't write that out."

Julie: And then that starts you down the whole path of writing block and writing resistance, and what we want instead is for them to be so blown away by their own mental insight and vocabulary that we record for them that they won't even want to wait to get to the point where they can transcribe it. You know, they'll be so enamored with their own ideas showing up in print somewhere that that will catapult them into wanting to master the mechanics.

And that's what we've seen over and over in Brave Writer, that when we separate original voice from the mechanics at the early stages, and we value that original voice and get some of it into writing, kids will have more motivation to work on the mechanics because now they know they're going to be recording things that they value. Saying things that they wish other people to read. And that's the whole point of writing!

Anne: Right, and that just makes so much more sense. And, you know, and we brought it out at dinner, too, and read it to Daddy.

Julie: Oh, good!

Anne: And he was so proud of it, and again I've been trying to reiterate to him that isn't it so neat that now we have this story written down? You know, this amazing story you had in your head, we have it written down now, so we can go back and read it.

Julie: So fabulous. Anne, you're doing everything right! You sound great!

Anne: It's good! I just still—oh, when I watch his little hand and that struggle it's still so hard, but I think something, too, that I've gotten out of all of this—and even hearing stories of your kids through the past years that I've followed you that, you know, everyone learns to write.

Julie: Yes!

Anne: You know, it's not like, oh, when he's 20 he's still going to be struggling. So, just because he's struggling now and, yes, my daughter, when she was in 3rd grade she was—I was looking at some of her stuff and I went, "Oh, no, she was writing so much more." But you know what, he'll get there. It's just trusting in the process, right?

Julie: Yes.

Anne: Like, he will—he'll get there. And just being patient—sometimes it's hard! You know I have my days where I'm like, gosh, you can't even just write a sentence! You know? Like, what's wrong? But just, okay, do as much as you can today.

Julie: You've got it. And, in fact, expand on this listing idea and tracing idea. Those combinations are going to pay off over time.

I maybe shared already, Noah kept lists of rollercoasters, and at first it was just a list of all of the rollercoasters. Then it became each rollercoaster got its own page. And then we made the list of all of the characteristics that went with each rollercoaster. And then—and this is over the course of a year, by the way, not two weeks, not one month—and then eventually he was able to write a little narrative of when he visited Cedar Point with his dad and went on one of those rollercoasters. So, over a two-year period, that's what came out of him. But it was all listing at the beginning, do you see what I mean?

Anne: Yes.

Julie: So, you can be building up to these experiences, and I'm so grateful that you said "trusting the process." It takes a lot of trust and that's what you can bring to the table. So, as hard as it is for your child to handwrite, it's equally hard for a parent to trust the process. So, exercise that muscle the same way, right? Little tiny bite-sized pieces and you're doing it. You're doing a great job.

Anne: Yes. Aw, thanks. I love that idea, though, I'm going to keep that one—expanding on the lists. That's great.

Julie: Yes! Super fun.

Anne: Because he was also writing down fish names, because he wants to get a fish.

Julie: Perfect.

Anne: So, that would be really fun. Maybe we could write little things about each fish or each name, so that's great.

Julie: Absolutely. Yeah, and if you get him a notebook and you even let him do it by tab dividers. Some kids just find that endlessly interesting. Oh, I have to label all these tabs. What list will go behind each one? So, that's another little trick. Especially if they're colorful, or he can use markers or something like that. And then, keep it on the coffee table where everyone can read it. So, homeschool tome, no folder in the back of a cabinet that nobody ever sees [laughs]. That's the death-knell of writing is when you hide it [laughs].

Anne: Yes, yeah.

Julie: Well, Anne, I'm going to let you go, but thank you so much for joining us and sharing your story. I know it's going to help so many families.

Anne: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you, Julie, I really appreciate all of the help that you've given me. [Theme music plays]

Julie: I'm so glad you joined us today and I hope some of these ideas are ones you can test with your own kids this coming week. Thanks for joining us. We want to thank our production company, The Podcast Masters, for producing this wonderful podcast for you. Jeannette, Beth, and Amy for their hard work on the Brave Writer team. And to each of our guests who opened their homes and hearts to us every single week. I wish you well on your journey to pair meaning with learning, and see joy erupt in your children's lives. Have a great week loving and learning. I'm Julie Bogart, from Brave Writer. [Theme music plays]