



S5E7: Finding a Balance in High School

Julie Bogart with Karen Goldstein

Julie: [Theme music plays] When my oldest child Noah was in junior high, an unfamiliar panic swept over me. I had only ever homeschooled to that point but as I was staring high school full in the face, I suddenly doubted everything I had learned and everything I had done. I wondered: Do I have what it takes to homeschool him all the way through high school? After all, I was terrible at math. My own high school math career was famously poor. I wondered if I could provide him with the foreign language instruction that was required to get into college. And I worried that perhaps my style of home educating wasn't really preparing him for due dates and grades and the pressures associated with college.

So I found myself at this critical juncture called the Re-upping Moment. We had built this beautiful homeschool together that was filled with joy and activity and deep dives into learning but what about all those pesky credits? How would I incorporate those into his life? Today's guests, Karen Goldstein, presents us with this exact dilemma and she is such a delight to talk to. Karen's got a lot of insight into what it takes to create a great life of learning for her teen but she's also being nagged by those same doubts: what about, what about! So that's what we're going to talk about today. I can't wait for you to join me on this season's episode seven of the podcast [theme music plays].

Julie: Welcome to today's episode of the Brave Writer Podcast. With me today is Karen Goldstein, a homeschooling mother to her 15 year old son Elijah. They live in northern California with their poodle named after the amazing poet Rumi. They also have four chickens that are each named after great historical women. Karen has a background teaching elementary and high school English. She was also a writing fellow with the Cal State Long Beach's Writing Workshop program—so awesome. When her son Elijah turned 3, Karen realized she wanted to

home school him. She didn't want to leave him in the school system and thus began their learning adventure together. Karen wrote to Ask Julie looking for advice about how to balance a high school-homeschool life with a love of learning. Karen welcome to the program!

Karen: Thank you for having me!

Julie: I'm so glad you're here. I think your question is one that both intrigued me and I am sure will resonate with a lot of parents, especially parents of high schoolers. So can you put it into your own words: what is it that you would like help with in your home school?

Karen: Well right now I'm really struggling with Elijah entering high school. There are more classes and more subjects and more expectations so trying to balance the rigor of high school level work with what we used to have, which was a much more laid back homeschooling lifestyle and real excitement in learning.

Julie: That totally makes sense. How do you see the current level of high school work inhibiting that? Why doesn't it feel similar to what you experienced before?

Karen: There's just a lot more of it [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs] give me an example of what a lot more looks like. What does a day in the life of Karen and Elijah look like?

Karen: Well, let's see. Today Elijah's in the other room waiting for a response from his Brave Writer instructor so he can get started with that. He'll spend probably an hour and a half doing some Brave Writer work. He has foreign language. He's got a class at the community college for math. We'll run some errands. All of those things are taking really the amount of time of a school day. He's got some history reading. You know these are—it feels more like a day at school rather than maybe what we did a long time ago, which is go collect leaves and flowers and dissect things and take a nature walk and what else would we do—you know, sit down on the couch and read a novel together, you know a few chapters.

So we're still squeezing in something like listening to the audio of the *Lord of the Rings* while he does chores in the morning emptying the dishwasher [laughs] and that kind of thing. But it's—it feels really different. There's just a lot more and things that used to be in the forefront like daily reading time for the two of us together or fieldtrip time or nature walks, those kinds of things really are taking a background. And so, I think part of that is just a normal transition into high

school level work, adulthood kind of level expectations. Prepping for college. But it's also that it's so much more time in the day that I'm trying to figure out how to balance adding those other fun things in or just accepting hey this is where our life is now and this is the direction we're in.

Julie: Does Elijah share this similar feeling about the way his life is or does he feel satisfied is? Has he voiced any concerns or wistful longings to you?

Karen: He asked—I think it was about a year ago, maybe a year and a half ago—about some of the new things we were adding to his schedule. We had always talked about loving learning and loving everything we do and he says “Mom, I don't love this thing”—whatever it was we were working on—“Is this how it's going to be?” And I said “Well some things we're really just going to have to do. And so I remember that conversation taking on a charter school has changed the flavor of our homeschooling a bit because they are expecting certain classes to be covered more subjects to be covered and so we're considering whether or not to stay in for the long term, through high school for that reason.

Julie: These are good questions, yeah. Yeah and I think what you're describing is that uncomfortable shift from when kids are young and exploration seems to be the characteristic of homeschool and then it shifts in high school sometimes to checking off credits or completing coursework or prepping for the future. It has a less immediate feel. It feels like we're getting through or getting done rather than engaging the subject. Do you have that sense?

Karen: Right, sometimes that's true yeah [laugh]. He definitely has goals. He'd like to be a pilot.

Julie: Love that.

Karen: That takes—that takes a level of commitment. He'd rather—if he doesn't need to check off boxes, he'd rather during high school get some college credit for it so he started at the community college with a couple of classes. So he feels like some of it is really working toward his ultimate goal of being a pilot but it is also—some of that—especially with the charter school, checking off a lot of boxes.

Julie: So one of the things that I thought about while I was considering his aspiration—first of all he's lucky to have a clear aspiration, a lot of kids at that age are still very much in the exploratory period, don't know exactly what they want to do with all of this education. The fact

that he's able to have that laser focus helps him work through the classes that maybe are less interesting or less exciting than his usual work or the things he remembers from when he was younger. That said, we want him to continue to experience his own life as being pleasurable, not just being a series of drudgery steps toward this piloting license. Has he begun work on getting his private pilot's license, because I know you can actually fly while you're a teenager? You don't have to wait till adulthood.

Karen: Right so he wanted to get his driver's license first.

Julie: [Laughs] sounds logical.

Karen: Which is logical, right. So in a few months he gets to start driver's training. I'm breathing deeply about that [laughs].

Julie: Nice! [Laughs]

Karen: I think I'm more worried about him being in a car than him being in a plane.

Julie: Understood.

Karen: And then we're involved in something called a Young Eagles Program which once a month he gets to fly with the Young Eagles chapter of the EAA, which is a pilot association. My brother in law takes him up once a year, Elijah gets to play on the flight and that's his big birthday present. So we've been all over northern California over the Golden Gate Bridge and down to Monterey and Half Moon Bay and over Napa with Elijah steering—you know, piloting. And so we're working—he's read the flight manual pilot's handbook and a bunch of other books about communicating as a pilot, you know, things like that.

So we're always—I'm always bringing in books. You know he's got pilots that he can talk to. He's got experiences where he's flying but until he's done with his driver's license he's not going to enter into flight school. And he's also worried about taking on flight school and doing all these classes for high school.

Julie: Exactly. That's perfect. You actually pivoted exactly to where I wanted to go next. So one of the things that I think might benefit the two of you while you're envisioning this high school experience: there are two properties of what I talk about in this notion of quote unquote

“enchanting an education.” There are four key ideas: surprise, mystery, risk, and adventure. I typically recommend focusing on these ideas of surprise and mystery, especially with young children. But it is risk and adventure that seem to appeal the most to teenagers.

Karen: [Laughs] I wonder why.

Julie: [Laughs] yeah right? Exactly. And maybe don’t appeal as much to their parents [laughs] who are hand wringing, you know, nails on the edge of the wall, holding on for dear life. But what I want to suggest to you is this: he has a really good aspiration that gives him that sense of risk and adventure and you’ve done such a good job of facilitating his dream while in these bite-sized chunks. He’s not ready to pilot a plane alone but you’ve figured out how to give him the flight experiences that keep nourishing his imagination for the future and because of that focus, he’s even been able to borrow from his happy energy to work on subjects he’s less interested in.

One of the things I want to underscore because it’s such a fabulous example to those listening is that a lot of times, we want our kids to have what I’d call delayed gratification, right? We say “work hard and then we’ll figure out what you want to do with your life.” Or “work hard, that’ll get you to college, which will then get you to your career.” And what you’ve done is you’ve sort of reverse engineered. You’ve given him already a taste of the thing he really wants and that happiness, that imagined future is compelling enough to help him stick to some of the requirements for education that are a less satisfying, less stimulating part of his life. And so it’s important for us to always remember that we can nourish the hard part of life by giving our children a happy experience, not just by telling them some day in the future they’ll be happy.

So I want to commend you Karen because I feel like you already have a good strong sense of how this works. But when we’re looking at the traditional school subjects, the requirements for college, a charter school in California, it is easy to feel like you are robbing your homeschool of that nourishing happy exploratory energy you were used to when you child was young.

So I wrote down three ideas that I wanted you to consider as you are planning this upcoming three more years. First of all, I love that you’re including community college. There is something about academic adventure that we sometimes forget and that is this: school or education taught by a mother, for the entire lifespan of a child, sometimes loses the feeling of adventure for the child because especially with you where you have one child and there’s a mother and child only, it can start to feel like they aren’t being challenged. You know? Who else are they competing against? Who else is evaluating them? They are at the stage where they are wanting to test their wings and find out—[laughs] test their wings, how perfect for your song—and to find out how they stack up right? Will another teacher think they’re a good writer? Will their peer group match their skillset? So good job with community college.

The second thing then I want to ask you about is: which subjects right now are the most irksome? Which are the ones Elijah is the least interested in?

Karen: This semester in particular I've had him do history out of a textbook and he's not enjoying it. He's pulling ideas from it and I still offer videos—we're doing some US history, I'm offering things like the founding brothers and we're having conversations about the constitution and watching videos about that and bringing in other sources, biographies about some of the founding fathers and things and so—I'm still layering on like I usually do but it's more driven by the textbook and that's really not as fun. So for next year I need to do maybe something a little but different but I was trying to fill in those holes, you know. We've done cycles of history over time but really the last time he delved into the American Revolution and the founding of our country was a long time ago. Or at least seen through much younger eyes so I'm not sure how to bring that excitement back with a textbook but also fill in those little gaps. Like he'd never done—we'd never looked at the nullification crisis before and he's actually writing for his Brave Writer Research and Citation class on the nullification crisis.

Julie: Nice.

Karen: And that's something I would have skipped over but because he's reading the textbook he hit it and then found it fascinating that it relates to states' rights and wow how many states' rights it's still an issue after all this time and so there are still things that are alive, it's just not as fun.

Julie: So this is brilliant. Perfect example. So let's talk a minute about history. I remember when Caitrin was coming up to high school and we were trying to find ways to engage her in the story of history—no interest in textbook style history. Johannah, my other daughter, same similar thing. But by Caitrin I had learned a lesson and that was: we didn't use textbooks. We, instead, I looked for that key into the subject area.

So let me put it this way: we have a principle that I share sometimes in Brave Writer called "anything can be taught through anything." So what you want to do is what you just discovered. Your son discovered the nullification crisis, which is going to illuminate all the aspects of US government and early founding of America because he now has a key to unlock that door.

What we typically do is we decide to go chronologically or globally or generally, we say here are the five things we want to teach and we organize around those five things and we move through it as sort of a plodding, predictable pace. What happened with Caitrin is she got interested in the story of women in American history. So we came at American history through that story. And it was amazing how just laser focusing on women's rights in American history illuminated all the rest of history. It showed up not only in just suffrage which wasn't until the 20th century but it showed up in property rights and why women weren't included in the founding and what was education for women and what was the role of the founding fathers'

wives. We purchased a book that was letters written by American women in history and got very caught up in the letters by Abigail Adams and her relationship to John.

These were ways that we keyed into American history but we used this sort of laser focus on the aspect of history that interested her. Part of the reason I knew this worked is that I was a history major in college and one of the ways I wrote my papers was I always tweaked the assignment to the aspect of history that was most interesting to me and at the time I was in college, what interested me most wasn't weapons, treaties, war decisions. Here I was a history major, those didn't interest me. I was interested in social movements, in justice, in the revolution of what it meant to go from being a group of people who were maybe in a tribal kind of environment to civilizing. I was interested in the trends, the patterns of human beings and how they developed civilization. So whenever I had a paper to write, I was going to look for that angle.

And that's what you are finding with your son. One of the things I was going to suggest even was as a pilot, even understanding—with his aspiration of being a pilot—understanding the trajectory of history through the story, not just of aviation but of transportation, telecommunications. All the ways that we have shrunken the globe through those technologies because literally that's the story he's joining. That's the one. How aviation changed war forever. I mean these are keys back into the story. So if you can liberate yourself from feeling like you have to quote-unquote cover it all and allow your child to start finding that key that turns the lock for him, you may find that it all gets delivered back to you. It just won't be in the package of the textbook.

Karen: Well this is what we used to do [laughs] and this semester we're trying a textbook. So the experiment this semester failed is what it is, except for this piece about the nullification crisis and that what we've always done. We've explored history through aviation and covered a lot of things in the 1900s. He wanted to study this year—I said "What do you want to know?" that's our question every year. And he wanted to know about the Dust Bowl. I gave him some ideas that we hadn't covered and he wanted to know about the Dust Bowl. So we registered for the *Grapes of Wrath* class, we went to the Steinbeck National Center Museum we took a tour through Salinas, we read *Esperanza Rising*, which is another book. We looked at Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta and all of the migrant workers, because that's a very California story, in addition to a national story. And then we studied the Dust Bowl and we studied photographers around the Dust Bowl because we kept running across all these great images by Horace Bristol and Dorothea Lang and so. We did all of these—it was very rich. And that's usually how we do history. And I also am having him read this textbook, which is a fail [laughs].

Julie: Well isn't that great to find out, though? Because there is always this nagging sense that if you do it in this other way you're missing something but ironically in my view, textbooks often feel like the ultimate missing of the information because our eyes glaze over. We can't hold onto it. There is no meaningful interconnection. You know, the science of relations that Charlotte Mason talks about. We're too busy trying to cover information. Now, here's where the

textbook may be useful to you Karen and I know the temptation or—I don't even want to call it that—the desire to have a spine. To have a text. I was a nut about making lists of what most kids covered in each of the grade levels. I did this all the time, it started in first grade. I think there was a series by E.D. Hirsch called *What Every First Grader Should Know, What Every Second Grader Should Know*.

Karen: Oh those.

Julie: Remember those books?

Karen: I do.

Julie: And that was before the internet. Once I got the internet, imagine how much more fun I had looking up lists, they were everywhere [laughs]. But what I would do is: I would digest the list. I would allow myself to be reminded “Oh yeah, Yankee Doodle Dandee, we could sing that song.” “Oh yeah they made Corn Pone in cast iron skillets in the civil war, we could do that.” “Oh it is important to read the nullification clause.” Or whatever sort of grabs you. I would just fill myself with most kids were quote unquote being exposed to. And then, we would just ignore it. Pursue what our children were interested in and then I would return to my lists and see if any of those ideas fit in, or if there was anything that we had just really missed because it seemed important to include it. And we would attack it that way.

So a textbook in high school, what it does for you, is it reminds you of what you will forget. I couldn't teach history, even as a history major, without somebody reminding me of the major bills and wars and statutes that run our country and impact the world. Those are not at my fingertips. But once I see what they are, there are so many other ways to help my kid connect to them. So I think you're really on the right track. I really love what you did for the Dust Bowl. Let me just say this: the depth of experience in the Dust Bowl becomes the lesson. It's not the Dust Bowl itself. There are people listening right now who are having a panic attack saying “I never taught the Dust Bowl!” That is happening, right now, I know it [laughs]. That wasn't the point of teaching the Dust Bowl. What you taught your child is how to thoroughly investigate and know an aspect of history. To think like a historian. To explore like a student of history.

When you wrote to me and you mentioned that your son—I want to read this to you. “My favorite was at the end of a day when we went through a bookshop and saw so many great books by Steinbeck and others.”—This is when you visited the National Steinbeck Center—“Many of these we knew but there were others that we hadn't even known existed. When I came up for air I turned to see Elijah tucked, sitting in a corner of the store on the floor, under a rack of Steinbeck t-shirts hanging on a wall, reading. He had found a new to us novel by Steinbeck and was engrossed. Bombs away! The rest of the bookstore had disappeared and he was caught. Yes, I bought him the book.” That's education! That's the study of history.

So even if the textbook introduced the concept, it is the moment when your child is caught that he is being taught. When Jacob was in high school, he asked to go to public school. Many people know that story. And at the time, thought that homeschool was somehow failing him, which was why he wanted to go to high school. He had all these friends on sports teams and he was a high achieving kind of kid and he wanted to measure himself against his peer group. His senior year of high school, he had to write a paper on Faulkner and I was teaching at Xavier at the time and I gave him my library card and he went into the stacks and pulled down all these books about Faulkner and when he got home he said to me "Mom, I now know why you wanted to homeschool me. I realized while I sat on the floor around all those books that I wanted to take as much time as I needed to read them all and write a really good paper but I only had a week because I had a due date. Is that why you homeschooled me?" I was like "Dude! It was!" [Laughs].

Karen: Ding ding ding ding!

Julie: You get it now. So by the time my next kids came along and as we were pursuing these various pieces of education, I used these strategies. 1. I made lists of things that I wanted to pay attention to while we were in the study. And then I allowed my own intuition and sort of my brain, my unconscious to work to bring together documentaries. Now I would look on Netflix if I could, we didn't have that then. Books that were written in first-person. I remember Caitrin read *The Feminine Mystique* when she was 12 years old. That's how deeply she was into feminism at the time.

Karen: Excellent.

Julie: Yes! It all came from working on US history through the lens of women's rights. The second thing that I want to recommend to you is if there is a subject that your child just isn't really that interested in. Let's say it's geometry or chemistry or some aspect of literature. Every student is different. Do a crash course. I did US history with Johannah in six weeks [laughs]. We got the SAT 2 book and we sat down on the couch and every day we read it and I lectured to her and we had a big juicy conversation and then we pulled in a few accompanying ideas if they made sense, like an article online or a novel and we just crashed through. And we did it in—it might have been eight weeks. But it was a nightly thing that we did for about an hour and then she took the SAT 2 test and got a good score and that was it. And I counted that as a year's worth of credit because she actually did the work but we did it in a crash course and that worked for her.

The thing to remember is: All the stuff that we're teaching in high school, they're going to get it again in college. Particularly if it's their field. So if they're interested in literature or history, they're going to go far deeper than we can in high school. We're just the introduction service,

helping them discover what they might be interested in and learning the foundation so that they're ready to apply themselves in college. Does that sound interesting? Have you ever thought of doing a short-form sort of crash course?

Karen: No. So every year I ask the question "What do you want to learn?" And then we dive into all those pieces. I make lists, I look up—if it's the civil war I look up the civil war on wiki and I go through and find all those fine points and I grab a few great books and I read them and digest them and find out about them and then come up with documentaries and field trips and make sure women and minorities are covered, there's something about government, cool articles, or novels. That I really relate to.

Julie: Perfect.

Karen: And then we spend a long leisurely year doing that. But the crash course is a new concept for me as an idea. I really like that. I think that could be something that's useful if it's something that I feel like he needs to cover to do that in miniature but still within intensity and a high level of challenge, that sounds great. That's new. That's a new piece to take.

Julie: Awesome. You know, when I was in high school I was not good at math and I found it very difficult to focus on math while I was being an actress in a play, on the drill team, on the tennis team, and all of my other subjects that I loved [laughs]. And so math suffered and it occurred to me between my freshman and sophomore year of high school, that if I isolated math, if I only took it in the summer and did it in eight weeks, four hours a day, and it was the only thing I was doing, maybe I would have more success. So I signed up for geometry and did it in summer school and wound up with a B+, which for me was a huge triumph in math. And the crazy thing is, I look back on that summer and I actually enjoyed it because math wasn't competing with anything else and so the only thing my brain had to work on was math. In fact, what's really funny to me when I look back on that year, one of my friends that year, her name was Toria—Vincent Price's daughter actually [laughs] ironically—we were friends. We were in summer school together and every day we would take the bus home and go play tennis after summer school. And I look back on that summer as really happy. She and I were really good friends, we got to play tennis every day and I studied geometry and actually understood what I was learning. I think we sometimes forget that we are overloaded in all of these seven classes together and if we can give ourselves the opportunity to focus intensely and leave the other things aside for a shorter period, sort of that summer school model, then we give our kids an opportunity to even discover not only they can do it but maybe even like it because it isn't the thing that is draining energy from their happy life. Does that make sense?

Karen: Yeah, it does, it does. And I have a difficult time with this whole seven classes in general.

Julie: Yes, totally. Totally! Well that's the other thing. With homeschool—

Karen: And that's why we've always homeschooled, right?

Julie: Yes! You could certainly put your child on a totally different model, too. You know we've talked about this at other times in *Brave Writer* where we tend to think the seven hour day is the model but what you could consider is that we're going to do history in the fall and then we're going to do science in the spring and that's how we're doing it. We're not going to do history and science together. So we'll double up time in the fall for history and double up time for science in the spring. But these are alternatives that help break up the monotony. I think what we're always fighting in this seven hour day is the feeling that we're chained to the hour per subject model and we're really not.

Karen: Right. Well even Charlotte Mason talks about doing less than that, especially with the little ones. They're short lessons, that's always been appealing to me is shorter.

Julie: And still true in high school because the reason classes are an hour or two hours in classrooms across America is you're dealing with 30 students and you have one teacher and to get around the room during the dissection of the frog or the lab or to make sure everyone has enough time to finish the math test so that even the straggler has adequate time, there's a lot of quote unquote wasted time and my third idea for you was going to be to plan in some "wasted" time.

You know, when you're on this treadmill of getting quote unquote through a lot of through and you're a homeschooler, we tend to be far more conscientious than the school system. There tends to be this feeling where we can never leave anything half-done, unfinished. We can't a day off in the week or take a week off that isn't the scheduled recess and yet the truth is we do have that freedom. And sometimes, just taking that break reinvigorates the regular routine that we're used to.

So giving yourself permission to say we're going to do five day weeks but when we get to winter and things start to get tedious, Friday is always going to be Leave the House Day. We're going to ski or we're going to go to the beach or we're going to take the day to visit art museums. But we're going to do something not in the house. I think especially with an only child this is very, very important because the four walls can start to close in when their whole hormonal system is craving risk and adventure.

Karen: Yeah. And we do—we do love our poodle and our chickens and we do try to get them out and walk them every day and that kind of thing to change the scenery. It is something to be—it's very intensive and also really lovely to be a mom of an only. And we do need to see other things and other people besides the four walls in our house.

Julie: That's right. Well I think Karen you have just a fabulous homeschool. It's more than apparent to me that your child is getting the education he deserves. One of the things to remember, whenever you do start to feel that pressure of "oh no, I have to fulfill all these commitments" is to just pause and take notes in your scatter book or in your notebook of all the amazing conversations and insights your child is offering you over the course of a week. Because then you will be reassured. "Oh he knows how to learn, he is learning. And anything we miss he's going to discover on his own in college or beyond." You know, there's no deadline. 18 is not the finish line as you have proven in your own adult life. So you've given him a foundation, it's very apparent to me.

Karen: Thank you. So with this idea of jotting down great things.

Julie: Yes.

Karen: Did you ever keep records of what your kids did?

Julie: I totally did. Yes absolutely. The way that I did it—I've shared this in the [Homeschool Alliance](#), which is my coaching community. I kept a notebook but I called it a scatter book because I'm kind of a scattered personality [laughs]. I'm not good at systems. I can't say here are the four categories I'm going to need. That is not how I work. I tend to get it all down and then later reorganize it in my own thinking or mind. So what I would do is I made lists of books. I made lists of criteria. I made lists of movies, things we had seen and done. But then I also jotted down direct quotes. Like if my kids said something brilliant or surprised me or shocked me. I also would take a day and I would write a narrative sketch of that entire day. Like what we did, what they said, what we enjoyed together, what new insights they offered. Even what things they didn't like! What things didn't work, what failed. And I called these narratives sketches and at one point I kept them in a private blog—that blog is still online but it is literally secret [laughs]. No one has ever seen it except for me but it was back when blogging was really brand new and popular and I loved pairing pictures and doing formatting. It was almost like having a visual scrapbook of my children's homeschool. And those tools helped me feel like we were making progress better than any checklist because I could go back and I reread them

even today and I am stunned by how much we did. Stuff I've completely forgotten. Like I thought we had never read Plutarch's lives, apparently we did [laughs].

Karen: [Laughs] so glad it made an impression!

Julie: Well how about that right? We read it. I wrote about it. I completely forgot it. So there's a good example of feeling like well Charlotte Mason said to do it, we did it, and it didn't even stick. So some of this is all about becoming comfortable with what the nature of learning is. We aren't learning to amass information. We're learning how to learn. We're learning how to become self-educated, motivated, citizens. That's what we're doing. And homeschooling provides that foundation and it's clear listening to you that you have provided it. So let's just review really quick. I would say this then let's consider the idea of researching through a textbook rather than depending on it. Getting that list going, so number one, getting that list going of things that you want to stay aware of. Things you could introduce that you've forgotten about in a particular school subject and building from that. Using the textbook the way you used Wikipedia, basically.

Number two, consider a crash course. Doing something that is less pleasurable in a shorter time frame where you devote full energy to that. You literally push the pause button on other subjects and you just say over we're going to do a crash course in this, get it done, feel like we've accomplished something. Maybe not to the level of other school subjects but enough to feel good about giving credit for a college application. And then number three would simply be keeping track of your child's development through this scatter book idea. Through taking notes, being involved in their story. Making sure that you are paying attention to those developments.

Karen: I use a blank notebook. It's a regular sketchbook.

Julie: Perfect.

Karen: And I do keep those ideas at the beginning of the year. I keep what Elijah's interested in so that I always have that in the forefront and can come back to what he wants and what I think would be a rich filling out. Like I said, he was interested in the Civil War but I didn't want him to just only do the Civil War, of course I wanted to cover some of the other things in the 1800s. What was going on with slavery, what was going on with women, what was going on the national stage, what was going on in California specifically. And so I'd fill all of those things in with ideas and documentary, book ideas that kind of thing. And then I'd come back and I used to do it through letters. You know when people would ask what's going on, I used to do a holiday letter but only to the close friends and then I'd edit it down so that other people could tolerate it [laughs] because otherwise it would be too long. But that's how I started. When he

was little it would be a letter to myself or to other people or to him about what we had been doing and then eventually in the last couple of years it's more like a bullet list of some of the things that he's done. But what I love is this idea of direct quotes, which I only did when he was first very learning to talk. You know, I would keep the quotes of the little things he would say and that was melt your heart kind of stuff but I just love it as his young adult voice coming through to add quotes to my sketchbooks. And I love this sketch of the day—I think in one of the Waldorf programs we did like a parent taught program, they had parents be observers of their children and just sit back and jot down what their child was actually doing and it was so informative.

Julie: It's incredible how different that is than grading coursework. You get this 360 degree view of your child. This three-dimensional person shows up. And it's reassuring! So even if you have a child struggling in a subject area, you will get insights into that struggle when you just observe and take notes, as opposed to only thinking about outcomes. And that's a major shift for homeschoolers. We have to move away from that scope and sequence graded mentality. And high school—oh my gosh, it just brings that craving back into focus. We're like okay I was able to avoid school-ish notions through 8th grade but now I'm real school. 9th-12th grade, it can't be the same as before. But why not? Why can't we quote our young adults who are saying amazing things?

Karen: Yeah and what a gift—I would have loved to have had some of those from when I was idealistic and excited and discovering who I was.

Julie: So true.

Karen: To have some of those things to come back to when I get bogged down with things like—whatever's going on in life. And I use a journal to do that for myself now but I would have loved to have vision of myself as a young adult and a teenager. I think that would have been really lovely to be able to go back to. You know, as I was trying to figure myself out. And so to be able to do that and have that for him sounds really great.

Julie: Awesome. That's fantastic. Well I think this has been just a wonderful conversation and I know it's going to help a lot of parents who are facing these similar dilemmas so I thank you Karen for offering your story and your son. Would you be comfortable with us calling you back some time in the fall and just checking in and seeing how these ideas are playing out for you?

Karen: Absolutely that would be great and hold me accountable and I would love it.

Julie: Wonderful. Thank you!

Karen: Thank you!

Julie: [Theme music plays] while we step away from Karen for a moment, I want to take a chance to read for you another quote from my brand new book, [*The Brave Learner: finding everyday magic in homeschool, learning, and life*](#). Today's quote is coming from a chapter where we talk about the value of risk in learning experiences and just like we've been discussing with Karen, teens are the most inclined to being excited about risk and adventure. Sometimes we think about risk like aviation, right? Getting a pilot's license or driving a car. But what about risky thinking? Here's what I have to say about that topic in *The Brave Learner*:

Dare to think differently. In addition to bold, daring activities, make space for risky thinking. New insight bubbles up. Choose to sit with ideas in conflict. For children, the way my family does it is the right way. By high school, teens notice alternatives. For instance, consider how many ways there are to eat. The way my family eats, the way my kosher keeping neighbors eat, the way people eat in China, the way my cousin with Crohn's Disease eats. These variations of what we all do form a base of difference within similarity. Risk means being willing to entertain those differences without collapsing in fear or anxiety. We can't get there if the only method of education is one that values our right answers, arrived at by thinkers we approve.

In *The Brave Learner*, I give you ideas for how to grow your own capacity for risk. Being willing, for instance, for your children to challenge your assumptions. And isn't that the hardest kind of conversation [laughs]? The one where your child holds a position—holds forth on a position that you don't hold? Absolutely, I have been there. But just know this: you are helping your child grow their cognitive powers. Every time they think outside the family culture, or outside the boxes that you want them to check. They won't hold all of these positions in their absolute form all the way into their forties and fifties, I promise you. But by allowing them that space and creating room for a difference of opinion, you are teaching them how to be critical thinkers so kudos to you if you're taking that risk with your family.

[Theme music plays] If this kind of discussion, what we've been talking about in this podcast season, if the suggestions I make or the discussion points we're holding seem relevant to you, then I think you're going to love my book. But here's what I'm actually the most excited about: once you have the book, I want to read it with you. I want to talk to you about it. I want to walk you through the various practices and activities in the book! Here's how we're going to do it: I will be hosting a monthly book club webinar available live and on replay. And the very first session, the very first meeting of our Brave Learner Book Club is for anyone who pre-orders the book, totally free. If you live in a foreign part of the world from me, I'm in Cincinnati, let's say you're in Bangkok, yes, it will be an inconvenient hour for you so what we will do is make that replay available to you at any time. Here's the goal though: I want us to convene. I want to hear from you. I want to know what's working, what's not, how we can tweak and twist these

activities to be truly meaningful in your families. And I want us to revolutionize the conversation about learning at home. I want us to feel comfortable considering all the options and creating a truly meaningful experience for you and your family. So if you're interested in that, if you want to be a part of this educational revolution, go to thebravelearner.com and click on any of the buy buttons. You can buy the book in Audible, Kindle, or paperback. Any purchase counts. You can buy it for a friend and then come back and enter your receipt number on the link provided there. You add that plus your email address or your friend's email address and we will send you two free gifts [THIS OFFER HAS EXPIRED], one of which is a PDF download called hard cases, Q+A with Julie where I address some of the pesky questions I've gotten over the last 20 years and then the other is an invitation to that webinar. Both of these will come to you on February 5th when the book is published. So I'm very much looking forward to participating with you on this journey and I thank you for your enthusiasm up to this point and let's get back to Karen because I can't wait to find out what happens with this aviation-loving son of hers. [Theme music plays]

Julie: Welcome Karen! We're so glad to have you back on the podcast for this follow up conversation.

Karen: Thanks for having me Julie.

Julie: It's just great to talk with you. And I just want to refresh everyone's mind that you're talking about how to create a balanced high school life. Do you want to expound on that just for a moment, a little bit more?

Karen: Well I was having a difficult time trying to juggle the charter school requirements, the minimal high school requirements, the community college classes that my son's taking, and what used to be a pretty relaxed [laughs] lovely homeschooling experience. And it feels like the ante has really gone up. There's a lot more to do, there are a lot more things to juggle in order to meet requirements outside of our home and homeschooling and so trying to bring some sanity really and balance to that is my goal.

Julie: Completely makes sense. I understand that experience. I know that high school poses for many people what I like to call the re-upping moment where you signed on at kindergarten with a lot of confidence but then suddenly high school feels daunting all over again and you have chosen to re-up so let's just discuss a little bit about the homework I gave you. Some of the things that we suggested were: being able to make lists of the most important things you want him to learn, how to integrate those with interests, hobbies and passions. Ways to look at

doing a crash course if it's a subject that you don't really see him showing as much interest in. Did any of those help you plan? How are they working for you so far?

Karen: So it was really helpful to go back to one of the things you said in—you have a scatter book I think and I use a sketch book. To add some of his voice into that as I plan was really helpful, that was one of the suggestions I made. Not just to think about what I'm doing and what we wants but really add his voice. So as an observer look at where he is in this moment and what he's needing and bring his voice into that conversation, actually write it down. You know, I hear it all the time, I transcribe things but to really use his quotes was helpful to come back to a foundation of what he's needing as I planned. I think we're doing a pretty good job of bringing in hobbies and interests so that was nice to just check and say "Yes, I'm doing something and it's working" [laughs].

Julie: What are some of those hobbies and interests that he is enjoying simultaneous to this more academic project?

Karen: So he really wants to be a pilot and so a lot of what we do academically will be focusing on his need to have a degree to land a job. So he's happy to do the schooling because he wants to be a pilot and doesn't mean he's got it all figured out—which you know, at 15, of course—but integrating the hobbies like doing a Young Eagles Program, they meet once a month, they're in most major cities where kids get to go and have a first flight experience. Pilots volunteer their plane and their time and their fuel to be able to give kids the experience of flight. And you can go as many times as you want. So he's been volunteering there and also getting flights there and learning a lot about scholarships that are available and camps that are available and programs for kids who want to be pilots and so it's been a real positive to be able to do that and participate in that program. So adding that in has been great. Through that program he found out about something that's a sporty's learn to fly course online. So he was able to do some ground school training online over the summer.

Julie: Love that, oh that's so good.

Karen: Yeah which is great and then when he finished that course, he was able to get a free full flight lesson from a flight instructor at a local airport so he just did that last week. So we're definitely layering those things in so that his desire to be a pilot and that goal really moves him forward academically as well.

Julie: You know what I'm hearing and what I think is so brilliant? He is learning some of those disciplines that we think the academics are going to teach through this aviation journey. So following through on an entire course online. Showing up on time. Being coached or taught by an expert. These are all the things that we expect our kids to learn either in a public high school or bachelors in college. And we assume that it needs to be a history class or a math class and yet the very skills that he needs to learn whatever he needs to learn in life, he's getting a first crack at it with something he cares about. And so I love how you have shown him the 360 degree view of what it means to be a pilot. He not only gets to have these bite-sized experiences that keep that alive in his imagination but he's even having to employ some student-like skills to pursue his passion and then you can borrow those right into the academics that will enable him to go to college. So I love what you're doing. Do you see it that way, too? Is that what you're noticing?

Karen: It's really been a—I see it as a gift. Not everybody's kid sees know what they want to do but most kids have some sort of interest. They're not always married together. The interest and a future career but all those skills are really there so that's, to me, what homeschooling is all about is those skills that they gain. Teaching in the sweet spot kind of moments are following your passions so that you can be a real human, you know, a full human being, not just the automaton that's checking the clock or checking off something from a list of things that you're supposed to be getting done for a class.

Julie: So tell me a little bit then about your plans for the academics and how that shifted after our conversation.

Karen: So our family has shifted a little bit and it may be that some time in the next year I may need to be working at least part time so what I tried to do was up the academics a little bit this semester [laughs] so that we could check off some of those boxes and then have a little bit less to do maybe while I'm working. So the crash course idea was really important [laughs].

Julie: Awesome!

Karen: That could not have come at a better time. It's really hard, though, to take a full curriculum and squeeze it into something shorter, smaller time-wise. But it's been important to break things down. I've had to take a couple of different things and break them down this semester into smaller chunks of time to really hit it as deeply as possible in the shorter amount of time but to then check off the box. Because sometimes that still has to happen and so the crash course planning has been I think harder than regular planning because there isn't the—you know I often make a general sketch of something, I choose books and resources then I

choose something to make a routine, a rhythm for the day or the week and then we just go. But this has really had to be so much more specific so that I'm sure to get everything in to six or eight weeks.

Julie: Yes! Right. It's almost like you're teaching on the quarter system for college, right, exactly. It moves as such a must faster pace.

Karen: So that has been harder than I had anticipated but at times it felt like I just want to be done but I can't be done because if I'm going to do this in six or eight weeks I have to keep going [laughs].

Julie: Well I totally get that and of course, always feel free to experiment. Maybe you need to do three weeks on, a week off, three weeks on, you know? It can still be in a short time frame but if it feels overwhelming simultaneously or consecutively, I guess is the way we want to put it, give yourself permission to take a break. One of the things that is a lens to help you with this is: If you frontload the year with these bigger challenges when you have your fresh fall energy. Then you get to—yes exactly! Then you get to sort of sluff off. So if you do the six weeks and you're sort of like counting it down and it feels intense, definitely give yourself a nice break when that's over and know that you can shift into a different kind of energy following it because you can't just do back to back to back to back crash courses. That will be exhausting for everybody.

Karen: Right, right. So I like the option of having a few weeks of this and then a few weeks of that, which may end up happening but I also know that I am frontloading but you know, it's [laughs] crunch time for other reasons so frontloading makes sense and it needs to happen to this semester is when it's going to happen and it's that's going to be six to eight week chunks a couple different times or if that's going to be a couple of four week chunks and then shift to something else then that will be the way it happens but it—it needs to happen or it may not happen at all so.

Julie: Right! Right. Well that's what I used to realize. I mean it took me several years to discover that our best projects happened in the fall and so once I figured that out in the first couple of years, then I always made sure that fall was loaded with the things that I was the most excited to do that would going to require the biggest amount of energy from me and the kids. And there were always projects like that! I mean we didn't even have Instagram or Facebook back then and I still had more projects that I wanted to try than time to experience, right? So I tried to—

Karen: Or Pinterest [laughs]!

Julie: Right! I mean all of those. Exactly. And then you consult with people at park days and then you go to your charter school teacher and she has a list of things. So picking two, three, four of those and really doing them at the beginning of the year allows you to move into a different energy by the winter. I wanted to ask you about your son. How's he feeling? What is his feeling about school this year and how is he responding to the idea of a crash course or some of these ideas that you're testing?

Karen: It's week three so he's still adjusting to the new schedule. He ended up with a canceled class and so he's done at 9:00. And then we're trying to accommodate his desire to sleep [laughs] and give him a little rest in the morning. But sometimes his body clock is waking him up so I think his biggest issue right now is adjusting to being back to a full schedule and also the newness of having a class in the evening, that that doesn't give the usual—what used to be down time in the evening. And so now we're—we're kind of flip-flopping lots of things. So I think that's his biggest issue. He loves that we're doing as much as we're doing with hobbies. The crash course idea he's like "Is that allowed?" [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs] isn't that amazing? And then you say "yes, it so is."

Karen: Yes! [Laughs]

Julie: [Laughs] I love that! I love that.

Karen: And we're exploring some different things. Some of the work samples that we got from the charter school, he looked at and said "I am just not doing these. These are not great quality" [laughs].

Julie: Isn't that amazing?

Karen: And I said "Well this is the reason why a crash course works. We don't—we like to do deep dives, we like to be really thorough. When we're passionate about something we explore it, and explore it, and explore it to no end. But there's a limited amount of time so this is how we're going to do it." And so he said okay.

Julie: That's right. And you never know! Sometimes they get interested half-way through a brief encounter because you're giving it that devoted attention that normally gets spread out and dissipates. So by—you're almost giving it a full chance when you do it in a more intense way if that makes sense. And you never know! They may circle back in college or later in life. There are plenty of kids who don't like history. Plenty of adults who didn't like history and then they hit 35 and all they care about his history. A couple decades under your belt and suddenly it's very interesting to understand what happened before. So we're also planting seeds that can maybe spring to life through another venue later so that's perfect. Well wonderful!

Karen: And he would like the time. I think one of the things that I found is that I could have been a perpetual college student because there was so—you know, it's like the whole Pinterest Instagram thing. There's just—you mean there's something else [laughs]?

Julie: Right!

Karen: Oh that whole discipline looks interesting. So there just wasn't enough time for that and I think that's part of the life experience is figuring out what to weed out as well. And so that feels like an important piece to be introducing at this point because we've spent so much of our time being able to do those deep dives—and he really thrives doing them—but it's not possible to do that for everything.

Julie: Yes.

Karen: And it's not possible to do that—you know, he sees me making choices about curriculum and he sees me making choices about social engagements and things. We can only do so many things so he's starting to take that on as well and I think that pairing down is a skill that not everybody has and is still important to cultivate.

Julie: Yes! Because part of what you're teaching him is how to be the voice of his own home education, of his own education. And I love that that's where you started with this follow up call and I wanted to draw it back full circle. What we're doing isn't just down in the weeds of what the coursework is. We are also helping our kids discover how to be in charge of their own learning odyssey, which will last the rest of their lives. It isn't limited just to the years when they're getting degrees. And so by showing them a variety of ways to learn things, what kind of student they are, what kind of schedule they need, what kind of balance between hobbies and

requirement or obligation to a job or to some other task, we are giving them all of these experiences so they can develop their own educational voice. They can actually be self-aware human beings who know what works for them. And so I am impressed with what you're doing! I feel like you've really just taken this ball and run with it.

Karen: It's been great.

Julie: Karen thank you so much for being on today's podcast and helping other families of high schoolers think differently about how to combine their interests and academics.

Karen: Thank you so much for your help Julie, this has been fantastic.

Julie: Wonderful. Take good care!

Karen: Thank you!

Julie: Thanks to Karen for laying out such a common concern in homeschool. I think Karen and her son give us a model of what it means to be scrap credits and also deep dive into our passions, into what we love to create an amazing high school experience. So thank you for that! I'm hopeful that that was helpful to everybody listening. If you aren't following me on Instagram yet, I hope you will. My account is [@juliebravewriter](#) and every week we discuss these episodes in the comments based on whatever the topic was.

So just a couple weeks ago we talked about how to add fun to learning, which was a hugely popular episode. We had so many people sending us Instagram stories and posts, sharing about why that episode was so meaningful. Julie, who has an account called [@julieisprobablyalreadytaken](#) had the following comment, and I wanted to pass along her great suggestion: "This was such a great episode. I wanted to recommend a tool for capturing her son's writing in a paragraph. Google Docs has a pretty great speech to text tool. Her little guy might love the process of talking to the computer and watching his words pop up on the screen."

So isn't that fun? And so if you have a child who is struggling with writing and isn't quite ready to transcribe their own thoughts but doesn't really want you to jot them down either, this is a great option for you and I appreciate that suggestion. We've also seen just a slew of you leaving reviews on iTunes. I cannot tell you how meaningful that is to our team. Every time you post one, it gets shared in our Slack channel and our podcasting team high fives each other. It's gratifying to know that this work we're doing, sending this out into the world just as an act of

generosity and to encourage homeschooling parents, is being valued and received by you. So thank you for that. If you want to leave a review, please just go to iTunes or Stitcher and follow the directions and we are deeply appreciative when you do.

Thanks for listening today. I'd like to give credit to The Podcast Masters for doing an awesome job of audio editing and preparing the show notes. We do have transcriptions of all of the episodes coming and may even be posted by the time you're listening to this episode. So feel free to go back to blog.bravewriter.com, click on the [podcast category](#), and you'll be able to find those transcripts if you would like to have a written copy of any of these conversations. They are graciously prepared by my wonderful daughter Caitrin Bogart, so let's give her a shout out. Also a shout out to Jeannette, Beth, and Amy for making sure that these podcasts are ready to go every single week.

And now I return you to your lovely family. Enjoy season of loving and learning. I'm Julie Bogart from [Brave Writer](#). [Theme music plays]

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

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

