



S5E8: Cultivating Connection in a Large Family

Julie Bogart with Jardel Manalo

Julie: [Theme music plays] it's no secret to homeschoolers that one of the reasons we keep our kids home is because we want to form deep, connected relationships with our children. We're interested in them. We want to know them deeply and we also want them to feel known, to feel loved, to feel valued. That goal seems so easy when they're newborns and toddlers and still pudgy-faced. But as our children lengthen and become their own person, sometimes we can wonder: Am I hitting the mark? Are we connected? Did I seek out enough one-on-one time with my middle child or the youngest? Maybe I'm so busy focusing on the education of the older kids I keep parking the younger kid in front of the television. Or maybe I'm so busy enjoying the playfulness of my younger kids, I keep pushing the older kids to independence and I'm losing that sense of trust and relaxed connection that I associated with their younger years. That is the dilemma we come to today with Jardel. She wants to much to give her kids something that she felt she didn't get when she was a kid. Let's join her today and find out about how to grow connection in your homeschool [theme music plays].

Julie: Welcome to today's episode of The Brave Writer Podcast: a brave writer's life in brief. The life we're meeting today is Jardel Manalo, homeschooling mother to her five children who range in ages from 12 all the way down to 2. Jardel also homeschools a wonderful young woman named Samantha, 12 years old, she sometimes her as her niece. Samantha's mother passed away and Jardel offered to take up the responsibility of bringing homeschooling to this precious young lady. Jardel and her husband Michael were both born in Hawaii, how lucky are they, and now they live with their family in Sacramento, California, just walking distance from the beautiful American River. Jardel has a background in liberal studies from Sacramento State University and had planned to be an elementary school teacher. Her plans changed though, as

often happens in life, when she and her husband began a family and decided to homeschool. Good coffee is Jardel's daily fuel and she loves reading, hiking, hand-lettering, and sewing. I got to meet Jardel last year when I was out in Sacramento for a conference and I can assure you she is a delightful person with great hand-lettering skills [laughs]. I aspire to be as good at it as she is. So when Jardel wrote to our Ask Julie podcast and I read the question she had, I knew it was going to resonate with many of you. Particularly if you are homeschooling a large family. Welcome to the podcast Jardel! Can you put into your own words what it is you'd like help with?

Jardel: So basically, like you said, I have five kids and I also homeschool another little—or not little I guess [laughs], she's 12 turning 13 girl. So the sheer number of children in the house sometimes it makes it really challenging—or a lot of times, it makes it really challenging to make it feel like I can connect with all of them, daily, both academically and personally. And so sometimes I feel torn between having some time to talk to each of them but then I need to get to the book work—or I hit one and I don't hit the other—or I get to some kids but I don't get to the others.

Julie: Totally understand that. Especially when you're the kind of parent that really values that connection. It sounds to me like even though you probably have goals and objectives, you have made connecting to your children one of your goals. It's not just getting through the math book or the spelling work book, is that correct?

Jardel: Absolutely.

Julie: That's wonderful. Can you tell me an example of what connection looks like or feels like? How do you know you've connected with a child?

Jardel: Often it's when we have one on one time and I'm able to literally look them in the eyes and talk to them and just hear what they have to talk about. I was helping my 9 year old daughter the other day fold clothes—fold her laundry and she was saying "I always fold my own clothes, how come you're helping me fold?" And I was like "So we could fold clothes and talk." And so she just kind of opened up and started talking about little stuff and so things like that. Or just getting up into my son's bed. He's kind of an introvert and so different times during the day I'll find him off on his own in there and sometimes I feel like I should go see how he's doing and I'll go hop up on his top bunk and talk with him and he'll talk to me sometimes about things that are on his heart or just about the current basketball game that he's really into. So.

Julie: Those are both such beautiful examples of connection. Deliberately chosen by you, finding a way to be with your child as they are going along in their daily life. Not necessarily having to schedule a coffee date or a Frappuccino date with them. What are some examples of a day where connection hasn't happened? What does that look like to you?

Jardel: Where I literally feel like I never got to sit and talk with them or just do something with them or—like I realize at the end of the day when I'm cooking dinner and they're having screen time, I'm like "I don't even know what Titus did all day." I just kind of have that weight of—or when I'm in bed at night just feeling like "I never checked in with so-and-so. They were just off playing—" There were so many kids around so they always have someone to play with. Unless I was wiping a bottom or making lunch or sitting down to lunch for a few minutes but they eat really fast so by the time I sit down and eat, they're done. It's in those quiet moments where I'm not around the kids and I'm doing my own thing, it'll just come to me. Hey I didn't check in with this kid or I didn't check in with that kid.

Julie: When you have that sensation, what do you do with it?

Jardel: You know, sometimes I will be intentional like and I'll think to myself okay, after dinner I'm going to grab a book and go sit with that kid. But honestly sometimes just life happens and dinner happens and then after dinner the kids are crazy and then we're just trying to get to bed and then they're in bed. You know? And I'm not always the best at being intentional and sometimes I'm just exhausted or I think I'll get to them tomorrow. I'll be intentional about tomorrow.

Julie: It's absolutely a real struggle. You mentioned that you sometimes also feel like you want to connect with them academically. What does that look like for you?

Jardel: I think it's just where I feel like we're working on quote unquote school. Something that in my mind that I still struggle with and go back and forth, where we've gotten book work done and I have something to show for it. We did this worksheet or we did this project or we worked on this chunk of a writing project but something tangible. And often I miss, sometimes, I think the invisible academic learning that happens. But in my mind I need something at the end of the year to put in their binder to show that we actually did quote unquote real schoolwork.

Julie: [Laughs] yes I understand that, too. So on the one level, you are talking about making sure that you have checked in with each child and they know that you are paying attention in a positive loving way, I'm not saying as scrutinizing supervisor-y way but just that you're on their

team. You're actually involved in their thought lives, their imaginations, their play, their beingness. You want them to know that their mother is a part of that personhood that is your child. You're not just herding cattle. These are human beings and you really want to know that they know that you've touched base with them in a meaningful way. And then on the flipside, you also want to make sure that those academics that you prize and value and I know from knowing you and actually reading your description that you sent to us, that you have what you would call a life school. It's not just academics for three hours in the morning and then they play all day.

There is a sort of seamless fluidity between the big juicy conversation at lunch and the movie you watch that is based on the book you read. There's this—and then it's followed up with active imaginary play. There's sort of a seamlessness to all of that in addition to book work or things you can quantify. And so what I hear a little bit, and tell me if this sounds accurate to you, is you want to make sure that you are contributing a substantial enough role or a substantial enough commitment of time and energy that you kids recognize that you've dedicated to them. Does that sound somewhat what you're talking about?

Jardel: Yeah, completely.

Julie: And you want that connection to be more than supervisory, you want it to be connecting at a heart level?

Jardel: Yeah, absolutely.

Julie: Yeah! That totally makes sense. So when I was listening to your description, it sounds to me like the chief way you know connection is happened is through conversation?

Jardel: Mhm.

Julie: Are there any other ways that you can imagine that connection happens with a child?

Jardel: Time. Like if I can look back at my day and know that I spent time with them. I mean yesterday we were trying to wrap up our last writing project and so the kids—my older two boys are making a World War II catalogue from your Partnership Writing book.

Julie: Nice.

Jardel: My son knew so much more information about the atomic bombs that I didn't—it wasn't from something that I had read to them and it was just interesting how he had gone on and on about that. And during that time I was actually—because this interview was going to happen soon I was even thinking wow, this is the connection I'm looking for. He drew a picture of the atomic bomb and he'll write up the description eventually and I guess that would be my academic—meeting his academic need because I'll have that tangible evidence but being able to sit there and let him share with me what he knows about that and just—it was just he and I in the room and that time that we had together to feel like I gave him some of me because I think some of it is that because there are so many of them just logistically, there's only one of me to go around.

So while maybe in my ideal world, I'd love to just sit with each of them for an hour at a time and give them my full devoted attention, it's just not realistic at least at this point in our home. So I feel like a lot of times it's fragmented time. So if I can give them just time—more time that's intentional. Whether we are talking or we're just reading together in the same room. You know it doesn't always have to be talking but that we have like physical time together.

Julie: So this is a great—you're running right down the path to where we're going here. So let's do some math, shall we? So how many kids do you have and homeschool total?

Jardel: Homeschooling six, five of them are my own kids.

Julie: That's right. And I'm guessing that you want to give personal attention to Samantha. You're not just supervising math pages and then sending her off to a corner in a different room.

Jardel: Oh absolutely.

Julie: Right, so you've got six kids. How much time do you think it takes to connect?

Jardel: I've never thought about just—but I mean I guess when we have had heart to heart talks, maybe they're half an hour. Maybe an hour on the long end but I don't even think it goes that long. But where I really feel like I walked away and they felt loved and I felt like I was able to fulfill that in them and I feel just fulfilled in a sense of my calling as a mom and their teacher and their advocate.

Julie: So let's just pick the low end. Let's go with your number of 30. So let's multiply 30 minutes times six, what does that get us to?

Jardel: three hours?

Julie: [Laughs] yep! Okay so three hours. And then now let's just start adding up tasks in your day. So like how long do you think it takes to do meals and clean up every day?

Jardel: Oh gosh. I've never had to do that before. I guess breakfast is maybe an hour, from start to finish, prepping to cooking it and cleaning it. Eating it, cleaning up kind of a thing. It's probably like an hour each meal. And maybe dinner is a little longer because we sit at the table a little longer and cooking it takes a little longer and so.

Julie: So we could say—just we'll do the conservative side, let's just say you had a very fast breakfast on most days so it's about three hours, start to finish, meal prep, eating and cleaning up. So we're at six hours. So what else do you do during a day?

Jardel: House—cleaning up the house or school work.

Julie: Laundry.

Jardel: Laundry.

Julie: Well let's see, you probably don't do laundry every day but I bet you if we took—how much do you think laundry takes in a week?

Jardel: Ugh my goodness.

Julie: Do you think it's fair to say laundry takes three to four hours a week?

Jardel: Yeah I think so.

Julie: So three to four hours a week. If we didn't do it on the weekends we could say that's about 45 minutes a day if we divided it up. So maybe even an hour a day if it took that long. You've got a lot of kids, I bet it's a lot of laundry [laughs].

Jardel: [Laughs] yeah it is! I do all the washing, although this year I do want my older three to start pitching in with the washing but they do sort and fold their own laundry once it comes out.

Julie: Good job! That's excellent. Oh that's excellent. And that's important. And then you've got shopping on top of that. You've got schoolwork on top of that. You've got running errands. Somebody has a dentist appointment. My point is, we can get up into eight or nine hours a day of activity and imagining that we're going to, over the course of that day, put in these three hours where there's a devoted sort of focused attention half hour per child per day is not only unrealistic but you'll always feel like you're coming from behind. Because what happens if you go to have that half hour with one of your kids and they suddenly get a better option, a sibling is suddenly available to build the fort with or the phone rings or the child is really busy in their schoolwork and they don't really want to talk with you, they just want to get it done.

So we have this—the notion that you have around what feels quality is absolutely accurate, the part we want to re-evaluate is the frequency. Is the frequency realistic? I think that was your question at the end and of course, the second we do the math we know it absolutely isn't. But before we can move on, then and say oh well, it's a wash, I guess I don't have to connect to my kids. We want to address what the anxiety is if we don't connect every day. So let's start there.

What would happen—what do you fear is happening—when you don't, every single day, get that quality time that involves a meaningful conversation with each child?

Jardel: I feel like they won't feel loved.

Julie: Interesting.

Jardel: I think growing up my parents were divorced and so I had different things I had to work through growing up and that was one thing that I struggled with was feeling loved because it's not like I didn't know I was loved but I longed for that time. And I know that part of it is my love language, I've learned. But just the time that I didn't get with some of my family members that I wish I had and as I've gotten older I've been able to work on those relationships and with maturity brings a lot of new insight and new wisdom and grace and forgiveness and that type of thing. But I think that my fear is that I don't want my kids to grow up not feeling like I gave them what they needed to feel loved from their mom, you know?

Julie: Absolutely. Absolutely. And in fact, I would even suggest that it's also possible that through this experience of providing that to your kids, you're also re-mothering yourself. You're actually providing to yourself the things you craved and you're doing it through your children. It's actually quite a beautiful psychological structure to be able to heal yourself through giving away the thing you wished you had received.

So the first thing I want to just remind you of and affirm to you is you made the choice to homeschool—I mean most kids spend the day away from their parents. They get a very small amount of time with their families by contrast to how much time school takes up. So you've already conveyed to your children hey I want to be around you just by the homeschooling choice [laughs]. They know! They have no doubts! And I know that you are a loving parent, I can hear it oozing out of every choice you make and the tone and temper of your voice. Your children know that about you, too.

What we want to start doing is helping deal with this sort of mounting anxiety that you're going to miss that one moment of connection. And so the first place I wanted to go with you, Jardel, is to talk about all the ways we connect to our children that are brief and yet deeply meaningful. And I want to make a new list for you to add to the ways that you evaluate yourself, before we start taking away the need to do it every day. Initially, you might need to know that you've connected with your kids every single day just to start to deal with that underlying worry, anxiety, that maybe you're damaging your children.

So I don't want to just start by saying "Ah don't worry about it, you don't have to connect with them every day." Because you won't believe me [laughs]. You're going to go back and try to do it behind my back. So what I thought we would start with is: what are all the nonverbal ways human beings connect to each other? And one of the ways to get a good list going is I want you to think about friendships and your spouse. What are ways you non-verbally connect with people who aren't your children that don't require a long conversation?

Jardel: A hug and a kiss is the first thing that comes to mind.

Julie: Perfect! That's wonderful! A hug and a kiss. Physical touch. A child could be sitting at the computer and you walk by and you just run your two fingers across their back as you go by. That's connection! When you greet a friend, you run into each other at the supermarket. You hug! And you may not stand there and have a long conversation but you've connected because you saw each other and you gave an embrace. So excellent! Hug and a kiss is excellent. What are some other ways?

Jardel: I know that I tend to send quick texts. So just really short "hey I hope you're having a good day!" kind of a thing and so I feel like even for my kids that's one thing in the morning—I don't know if read it somewhere or heard it somewhere but even as they wake up to

intentionally and say good morning and I'm glad you're awake and it's a blessing to have you in our family. So—but it's just real quick because I mean I'm—the morning once they start all waking up, the morning gets going. But it is real quick and short and I think even with friends and things like that, when you run into them in stores you try and just exchange a quick—just a few short words type of thing but not a long—

Julie: That's right. And one of the ways that we currently through social media is we like each other's posts, we actually keep up with their pictures. So with our children who are actually physically with us all the time, you're right, we can sometimes miss the opportunity because of familiarity to do those things. So what would be a way that you could take advantage of this idea—I like what said about just greeting them in the morning, it's so lovely to be greeted, right? To not just be taken for granted. What are some other ways that you could non-verbally make that connection that is brief like a text?

Jardel: Well they have recently set up their own email accounts and they have Google chat and so they'll chat with a couple friends that they can and I've realized that I have a Google account and I figured it all out. And so I had set up a conversation that I could have with them. I haven't really texted them other than when I found them and I was like "Hey it's mom! I can text you on here!" So that actually crossed my mind recently when I was thinking maybe that can be kind of a safe way that if they wanted to reach out and talk to me but not totally talk to me. Or even that I could just—when I think of little things that I want to say to them or just shoot them a little Google chat text.

Julie: Definitely. One of the opportunities that we have now because of technology is to send an emoji. To send a link to an article. To simply show up. It's not—you know, one of the things that we want to pay attention to is that connection isn't only about describing the benefits and blessings of the relationship. Connection is paying attention. That's really what connection is. It's the feeling that somebody knew you well enough to recognize you when they see you in the store, they remember your name, they send you a message because they read an article and it reminded them of you. They heard a song on the radio. Those are the things that help build this camaraderie.

In a family, you can do it in so many ways. You can put a big heart on the mirror with a lipstick for your kid to see when they wake up in the morning. You can stick a Post-It Note on their door. You can send them a message through Google chat. You could make them pancakes for breakfast and put a smiley face on the pancake with chocolate chips. There are ways to say "I see you" that require very little effort but communicate a personal connection. It doesn't have to be neurotic, we don't need to do this every single time we're around our kids or they will start to just take it for granted and it will feel a bit like a hyperactive need to be connected instead of that healthy, enjoyable take them for granted that truly connected people can have.

I always say the healthiest families are the ones where everyone takes for granted that they can be however they want. They take for granted that they're loved. They don't have to prove it. They don't have to schedule time. They know that they're loved because the whole dynamic of the family is loving.

So you don't have to double down and be hyper about it but you can expand your vocabulary. Another way that I know connection has been powerful for me is eye contact. With children it's very easy because usually we're taller. I am no longer taller than my kids [laughs]. But when they were little, you can look over their heads. You talk to them but you're looking beyond the child to what they should be doing, where they should be going, what they should be cleaning up. Instead of actually making the eye contact, which usually changes your tone of voice. You know if you look someone in the eye and say "Hey would you mind picking up those shoes." That's very different from looking over their head and saying "Hey get those shoes picked up." The eye contact softens your interaction instantly. And that's connection! Even if you're giving a directive. It doesn't have to be about saying "Hey I appreciate you, I value you as my daughter and can you pick up the shoes?" [Laughs]. Your tone of voice and eye contact will communicate that you're on the same team.

Jardel: Yeah absolutely. I think because there's always so much going on all the time, you know. I'm making breakfast lunch or dinner. I'm helping this one kid with this one thing. I'm—the list goes on and on. And so sometimes, like you're saying, when I need to give a directive or if someone is asking me something, a lot of times I'm just talking as I'm moving. Rather than stopping intentionally, shut off the water—you know if I'm washing dishes or something—like stopping, turning, looking. Even walking down the hall to where they're at rather than shouting from the kitchen sink "Hey someone take out the trash."

Julie: Exactly.

Jardel: That totally—I mean I would appreciate that you know? When—

Julie: Yeah! Don't you hate it when you're just yelled at from the other room? Someone is hollering for you. They don't have sort of that desire to make your life peaceful and easy and they're just expecting—that feels like disconnection. Those are excellent examples.

Another thing that is very connect-y for families and intimate relationships are inside jokes. Inside jokes! The ability to wink when you know something is going on and the two of you have an inside understanding. Or you throw out a quote that's meaningful for the child because the two of you read it in the book yesterday and you both know it was funny and now it describes the very situation you're in. Sometimes we forget that connection comes through these sort of

personal points of contact that we've already established and we simply reiterate them. You know? Sense of humor is a massive way families feel connected and have a family identity.

Another one that I would recommend to you—and we're going to talk about quantity in a minute, I just want to give you a whole bunch of ways to think of connection before we start quantifying—another one might be bragging about your child in front of that child. So when you're at the dinner table and maybe you haven't talked to your child the whole day but you noticed that he was reading in a corner or he played well with a sibling or he put away his breakfast dishes and you never asked him to, if you were able to notice that, take it all the way in, have paid attention, at the dinner table you could say something in front of him. "You know honey", to your spouse, "it really stood out to me today when Caleb picked up his dishes and put them in the kitchen sink, it was really so helpful. Thanks Caleb!" Sometimes connection happens indirectly, you know? Sort of third party. Letting the child know that you were aware of them when you didn't know you were aware of them. That's another way we connect.

Jardel: Yeah that's so good. I actually—yesterday my oldest son, I guess I don't know what possessed him but he decided he wanted to clean out our car and obviously we're a big family and our car can get pretty messy, really quick [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs]

Jardel: And I was looking for him because I actually wanted him to finish what he was doing for the writing project we were doing and I thought, oh he's outside he must be playing basketball so I went out and I actually—what I saw was all of our car doors open, our big trashcan open next to it and I saw him inside and I was like "What are you doing?" And he was like "I'm cleaning out the car." And so I was kind of like "Okay." And I came back in. And later on in the evening I did thank him but I didn't do it publicly. But it was funny because this morning I had to go and drop them off somewhere and when my second son, Joshua, opened the door to the car to get in and this is the first time he's getting in there obviously since it was cleaned and he was like "Woah! What happened to our car?" You know he noticed it was clean and that was an opportunity that I had to be able to say "Hey your brother cleaned it all on his own, I didn't even ask him." But in that moment I thought, man I should've maybe done that yesterday. Like I didn't even think about it. Like I totally had forgotten. Like taking notice of that for sure and being able to do that publicly is a great suggestion.

Julie: Absolutely. And let's just pause for a moment and erase part of what you just shared.

Jardel: [Laughs]

Julie: I notice a habit and I think it's an interesting one because I know we all have it. You already disqualified the good you did by saying it should have happened sooner. So maybe let's now move into this quantity and quantifying question of what you're doing. Your children are bottomless pits. There is no way you can possibly meet all their needs for connection as the sole person that offers them the experience of connection. Connection for them is modeled to them by you, it's experienced by you from the time they're in the womb to that early stage of birth, when they're utterly dependent. But as they gain the tools of being independent bodies, you know, they can feed themselves, tie their shoes, use the bathroom, they are now seeking connections not only with you. And if you've established a healthy one with an early baby child, they are going to on some level take that connection for granted.

What they need from you is points of reinforcement. But there is no way you can offer them that same level of 100% devotion that you gave them in the early stages, especially when you add other children. So I want to first just offer you hope! You get to relax and enjoy the connection you've already built. You get to enjoy it. It is not a task, it's not something you should be doing better or more. It already exists. You have done for your children what you wanted done for you. You've already done it, Jardel. And now you get to enjoy your connection.

So one of the ways that you can start reassuring that part of you that feels anxious is to jot it down on a calendar [laughs]. We started by creating this big list of ways to connect with your kids so that when they happen, you can plan from behind, like we talk about in the [Homeschool Alliance](#). Instead of planning to connect, validate yourself for when you have connected. And maybe at the end of the day, you just pause, maybe right before bed you pull out your calendar and you just write the name of the children you remember connecting with. You don't even have to get very descriptive about it unless you need that. You could just write the three names of three kids and you just let that stand. You value the three kids you can remember connecting to and you trust that the connection you already have is holding for those other kids.

Over time, over a week or two weeks, you'll start to notice the good child who never demands anything of you that you've sort of overlooked and that's your reminder to be intentional with that one child the next day. That's it. No big plan. No big "oh no this child will be damaged for life. I'm going to take her to the movies and buy her ice cream and get her her favorite dress", just "she's really been helpful and busy and I've been preoccupied with these younger ones who need me more and so I'm just going to sit with her and help her fold her laundry. I'm going to ask her to stand with me at the sink and help me dry dishes so we can chat. I'm going to bring her with me when I run to Target tonight instead of going alone."

You're just going to make an intentional choice to reach out to the one that didn't show up over a period of a week or two as much as you wanted them to. And you can literally live this way until it becomes comfortable and you are reassured that you're doing a good job.

Jardel: That's so good. I love that. I think being able to see it visually will definitely give me more comfort in knowing that I am connecting with them. I mean even talking to you in this short time I'm like oh I do, I guess.

Julie: Absolutely. I mean, are there times when a child is busy doing something and you spontaneously bring that child a snack? Are there times when your child has abandoned their plate and their glass and left it on the table and you've cleaned it up on their behalf without even being bugged, requiring anything?

Part of the connection is if you create for your children a sense of well-being on a daily basis that is actually the biggest gift you can give. And as a child of divorce, that gift is priceless. That they can take their family for granted. That they know that their home is a place that they feel safe to be themselves. Where they know that their needs will be met and cared for and honored? These are all the things that you are giving your children that count as connection.

Now yes, we want to have time where we hear their hearts and their thoughts. So write those down! If you have a half-hour chat with each of your children over the course of a month, you're doing great! Because you're already connecting in a lot of other ways and you are not the only person they want to unfold their hearts to. They're finding other people. They're making friends. They're reaching out online. They're sharing with siblings. I was shocked, for instance, to discover once my kids were adults all the ways they connected with each other right under my own roof that I didn't know were going on. The secrets they told each other. The shared movies they watch that I didn't even know they were watching and we were all in the same room. It was almost like they were leading a childhood I didn't know about with each other.

And so sometimes in our desperation to ensure that our children are having happy lives, we forget that that happy life includes individuating. Finding other people to connect with. And they've learned those skills from you. You're already living and modeling it for them and they're taking that toolkit for them and they're building new connections that are exciting, sometimes scary, sometimes risky, sometimes super comfortable. But they're taking those tools that you're modeling every day, day in and day out. And they're going to build their relationships with other people based on that model.

Jardel: Mhm, yeah, that's so good [laughs]. Absolutely. I think that—man, it's just good stuff. [Laughs] I'm speechless!

Julie: It's okay!

Jardel: I want to give them that, yes.

Julie: And as you were talking about the academics, academics are very similar. You're going to have your big group times where you read aloud and talk or you go on a field trip or everybody is working on the World War II Partnership Writing project and you're all involved and there's a certain level of synergy that creates this family culture and *esprit de corps* that is so wonderful. It's the things your kids will look back on. They may not even know to value it yet. You know they take it so for granted they don't even know how valuable it is. That's how my kids are about poetry tea time. They're like this is the valuable thing we did in our whole family life and they know it now as adults in a way that they took it for granted as children.

And then there will be those moments where a child is struggling and you will carve out time to address and support and monitor that struggle and you'll be the person who helps them over the hump. And then there will be other times where they're really struggling and you're the wrong person. You're going to hire a tutor or put them in a class or get a new program or involve their dad. And that is connection, too. It's you being the right person at the right time meeting the need. Not necessarily having to be the person who does the need. But you are paying attention, you are offering support, you are creating a context for that child to thrive.

That's the heart of connection.

Jardel: Man that's so good. And I think something you said in there where sometimes it's not going to be me but I'll know that they need help from somewhere else and I think that that's maybe part of this dynamic where I feel like "Oh I can't be there and connect with them personally and academically" because I can't be that and there are going to be times where I am going to have to hire a tutor or get extra help and that's okay, you know?

Julie: Absolutely.

Jardel: It can come from somewhere else but that I'm their biggest advocate in making sure that I know that they need that extra help, you know.

Julie: 100%. In fact, if you do that for your children. If you allow them to grow and learn and be taught by others, they are learning how to expand the circle of connection in their own lives. Some of my kids, the connections they built with the actors at their Shakespeare equity acting company for high school, those were profound. They learned things from those instructors, those actors I could never have taught them. And they are indebted to those actors for those gifts. And those are things that even as an actress I have a background in acting, I taught acting at our co-op, they were in my acting classes, but that is not the same as then going on and risking all they've learned from me in front of new people whose admiration and support they are seeking. And for them to leave the home and know that they're secure and have had

good preparation and have somebody who's for them, standing behind when they go out and take that risk, now that's the fruit of connection. And I know you're doing that for your kids.

Jardel: Thank you, that's so encouraging to hear. To just be validated, I guess, and to be encouraged in knowing that I am doing some things. I think sometimes it's so hard because it's just me and them for so much of every—you know, day in and day out. And so I think sometimes I don't see that so that's really encouraging to hear it from someone else.

Julie: Yeah so keeping track will be a blessing for you. You have such beautiful handwriting [laughs]. Decorate a good scatterbook page with your beautiful hand lettering and you might even write down each child's name and a week on a page—make yourself a little chart. Use color coding and you could just use a highlighter color for if you remember connecting to that child. And you know, the truth is even on the days where you can't remember, you probably did. But this way you'll pay attention to those times when you feel like it's just gone too long.

And if you really want those half hour longer times with your kids, I would recommend two things. One is staying alert for when they do happen and writing it down so you don't forget. So if it happens spontaneously, you know you're folding socks and suddenly you're having this heart to heart about your daughter's crush on some boy she met at co-op, write that down somewhere so you don't forget. But if time goes by and it isn't happening more naturally, more spontaneously with a child—and really, for a kid who's like eight, we're talking 10 minutes. It's not going to be 30 minutes of unburdening their souls. It's 10 minutes! But if you haven't had one of those, then you can actually make a date. Let's get up early and make muffins for the whole family. Try not to turn it into a project. You don't want your child to feel like they have to meet your need for connection.

Your job is to meet their need for connection. Do you see the subtle difference? So if you get up with that child and they're in kind of a cranky mood and this was your morning to connect oh well! Cranky mood, didn't happen this time. We don't have to feel bad, wonder if we did it wrong, try to figure out how to fix it. Just be with however it shows up that day. And then try again! You've got a whole childhood to get these done [laughs]. And they definitely don't have to happen all the time. One of the things I know in looking back is that if you create opportunities and you are doing that just by homeschooling, to pay attention and reach out in those moments, they will happen. And you don't need daily ones. You know? You just need a handful of really powerful ones over a lifetime.

Jardel: That's so true. I think sometimes I feel like because of our large family maybe some of the things I did with my older ones and could be intentional about, I can't always do that with my younger ones. So then I feel like they're missing out because they didn't get to do X, Y, or Z with me like I did with the older ones. And trying to make sure that creating new traditions or

new memories with my younger ones is okay, too, and it doesn't have to be all the same from the oldest to the youngest.

Julie: You know I'm really glad you brought that up because I think it's something that parents of large families grapple with. I discovered that I had two homeschools. I had the homeschool of my oldest children and the homeschool of my youngest children. They were not the same homeschools. First of all, the younger kids sort of get swept up into the new levels that each of your older kids are constantly facing. You know the oldest child is the biggest adventure because you've literally never taught every single age that child hits. But by the time you get to your sixth or fifth child, you've already taught reading five times. You're like done! I don't want to teach reading again.

But flipside, those younger children get exposed to things that your older ones never got exposed to at a much earlier age in a much more family-centered context. There's a lot more celebratory party-ish-ness about a big family homeschool experience. So make peace with the fact that you will have two homeschools. Your younger kids will not do the things your older kids did. But they will also have a very different teen life because as the older kids start peeling off, you can give a kind of devoted attention to those teenagers that your older ones will not have from you. They got it more on the early end and less on the older end.

My oldest daughter Johannah said to me once about Caitrin, her younger sister who is seven years younger, she said "So you kind of got to do the *Gilmore Girls* thing with Caitrin." And I started laughing because it actually turned out to be true and I had never realized that. You know? But Johannah had a kind of creative energy from me that by the time Caitrin came along, I didn't use as much. Because I was at the start of my homeschooling experience and I was busy collaborating with a lot of families and we had these five kids that we were always bringing together.

So it's okay for the homeschooling to look different. They're connecting with you at different stages in different ways. But you'll find new, special traditions all across the spectrum.

Jardel: Oh that's so encouraging [laughs].

Julie: [Laughs] good. Well is there anything about what I've shared that you want to push back on? Something that you're like "Well I don't know about that Julie."

Jardel: You know I think everything you said—I mean it just makes sense and it resonates with me and I love your idea of writing it down. I think I just recently have started to really get into scatter booking. I've always journaled a lot but not writing down a lot of the things you've talked about in your podcast and planning from behind and noticing little things about my kids and writing those things down. And so I think that that tool is going to be such a game-changer

really for me. And feeling like okay, I am meeting checking in with them or I am connecting with them regularly even in ways where I miss it sometimes because I don't—or I forget because I don't write it down and so being able to write it down and look back is going to be super helpful and so I think even at the end of the school year put together their binders. They choose different pieces of work that they want to put in there and they go back all the time to look at it and when I go back and look at it with them, I'm like oh yeah, we did do stuff.

Julie: Awesome.

Jardel: And so I think in that same context it'll be the same with connection—on the connection level. Being able to look back and see that we do make connection and that's good. So when I'm not making connection that I have it there in front of me and I can be intentional with the kids that I need to be.

Julie: Well that sounds perfect. I'm very excited then to hear how this goes. We will check back with you in the fall if that's okay with you and just find out, did you feel a sort of sense of relief as you were able to quantify and also value alternate forms of connection besides the one-on-one time. And you know, it can happen in the middle of the muddle. That's why I brought up even just running fingers across the back of somebody on a video game or squeezing somebody's shoulders or dropping a peck on the cheek. That lets your kids know that they are seen. And that's what connection's all about. I see you.

Jardel: Yeah that's so good.

Julie: Good! Well thanks for joining me! Thanks for sharing your issue with our audience, I know they're going to all appreciate it.

Jardel: Aw thank you so much for having me, Julie.

Julie: [Theme music plays] let's send Jardel back home with her planner [laughs] and let her start recording some of those great connection moments. I'll be eager to see how it all plays out for her when we talk again. In the meantime, it is time for our weekly quote from [*The Brave Learner: Finding everyday magic in homeschool, learning, and life*](#). My brand new book that will publish on February 5th, 2019. And appropriately, this quote comes from the chapter called "The Pixie Dust of Reasonable Expectations" and the subheading is "Connection, connection, connection."

Jane Faulkner, another fabulous coach in the Brave Writer [Homeschool Alliance](#) community reminds parents “Connection, connection, connection is to homeschool what location, location, location is to real estate.” Connection the most important feature of a harmonious homeschool family. Our relationship to our children can’t be built on performance. Enjoying each other lays the foundation for learning. It’s the essential ingredient, in fact.

And that’s what this book talks all about. I am helping you understand the myriad ways connection occurs. It isn’t only through deep conversation or knowing your child’s secrets. So if you are the kind of parent interested in establishing firm foundation for the loving and learning context of your home, I think you’ll like my book. You can go pre-order it at thebravelearner.com, enter your receipt number and your email address in the provided link and you will receive our two free gifts [THIS OFFER HAS EXPIRED], which you can read about on the website. One of them is an invitation to our first webinar book club for the book. So I hope you’ll be there, can’t wait to meet you. I think we’re going to have a lot of fun.

The second thing I just wanted to share is something that makes me really proud. Some of you will remember that interviewed Barbara Oakley on the podcast back in August of 2018. She’s the author of a book called *Learning How to Learn* and it is directed to middle school kids, helping them take responsibility for growing their capacity to sustain their interest in the hard work of some of the school subjects of learning how to learn. And she read my book and wrote a review that really blew me away. So anyway I’m proud of it, I just wanted to share it with you because it was so meaningful to me. Here’s what she wrote:

A masterpiece. This is the deepest, most meaningful book on parenting I have ever read. If you want to raise your child to be a happy learner whether via homeschooling or conventional schooling, read this book.

Thank you Barbara, that means the world to me coming from you. And now, let’s get back to Jardel and find out how she is growing that connection with her children [theme music plays].

Julie: Jardel! Welcome back to the podcast.

Jardel: Hi!

Julie: Hi! Thanks so much for joining me for the follow up. I’m so eager to hear about how the suggestions I made played out in your family.

Jardel: Yeah I’m super excited to share [laughs].

Julie: Well let's talk a little bit first about some of those non-verbal ways to connect that we discussed. Were you able to implement any of those?

Jardel: Oh yes, totally. I was absolutely was and the funny thing is I realized I did it more than I realized I did it, does that make sense?

Julie: Yes! Oh so interesting. So it's maybe a natural way for you to connect but you didn't even value or notice it before. Interesting!

Jardel: Yeah totally.

Julie: Do you have an example?

Jardel: I realized that in the morning I always give my kids a hug and say good morning and I give them a hug and a kiss as they wake up. I realized that I naturally will just jump on Google chat to send them little texts or—you talked about last time when you're walking by and you touch them on the back or those types of things, I just—I mean sometimes it was me being intentional because I was thinking oh I want to connect with them nonverbally. But a lot of times or most times I started realizing I was doing it naturally but because I was being intentional about noticing it, it was kind of like a little ping in my mind that would be like oh you just did it! Oh you just did it! You know?

Julie: So good! It's like you could give yourself credit for something that was natural to you. A lot of times the things that come to us naturally we devalue because we don't even notice. Right? It's just operating at this sort of background energy. But when we elevate it to the level of being worthy of valuing, you know, validating it. Putting it on a checklist, suddenly we can be proud of the fact that we are actually doing the kind of parenting that we say we want to do.

Jardel: Yeah. I was so surprised, which was kind of odd. I was like "Why am I surprised about this?" But I was surprised that just by being intentional about the noticing part, like not even just intentional about doing but noticing, it just made me realize that I was doing more than I was realizing I was doing, you know? So that was so helpful. It was kind of like—you know when you're looking for a new car and then you see it everywhere, right? So it was that type of thing where because I was like looking for where I was connecting, I just started noticing it and almost surprising myself that I really am connecting with them more than I realize I am.

Julie: That's fantastic. I love hearing that! Did you try making a date with any of your kids? Just to have more one-on-one time?

Jardel: I have and even for my husband and my kids and so being intentional—one thing I noticed that we were intentional about—that again, it was just the simple act of noticing was when sometimes we'll go places in two cars—like to church for example, just for timing. We're intentional about who gets to ride with my husband in his work car and have one-on-one time there. Or a couple of the kids. Or oh you got to ride with him last time so it's your sister's turn. And just that little bit of one-on-one time, like it matters a lot to them.

Julie: It's amazing.

Jardel: You know and things like that. But even just quote unquote bigger dates that I have planned to take them out one-on-one, even for my little five year old that just wanted to go to Target to look at the dollar section because she got a little bit of spending money for her birthday. And that just meant the world to her. All week she was like when are we going to Target? When are we going to Target?

Julie: I love that. Oh that's perfect Jardel! Those are such good practical examples of even a low energy expense. It's not like you have to plan a tea party at the American Girl center to have one-on-one time, right? You can just find ways along the way that allow that child to sort of show up as an individual. That's great.

Jardel: Even just in the kitchen I noticed just the other week my 7 year old was trying to learn this new recipe of making pancakes with just eggs and banana and he needed a little help and he kept going to one of his older brothers and then I ended up kind of finishing out with him and it was just he and I and then at the end of it he was like "thanks mom for helping me making those pancakes!" And it was just one of those pings again in my mind where I'm like oh my gosh we just sat here for the last 20 minutes making pancakes together.

Julie: So beautiful.

Jardel: Yeah, mhm.

Julie: So how are you feeling then sort of on the deeper level of emotion here? I remember when we spoke last time, some of this was generated—some of this anxiety that you weren't connecting enough was generated from what you experienced as a child and I suggested that maybe through mothering your kids you would also sort of reciprocally re-mother yourself. How are you with that?

Jardel: [Laughs] this has been so helpful. I don't know why I didn't plan from behind before. I mean I kind of knew about it but I don't know. But just starting to plan from behind has been huge. I mean on the academic level it's been huge but then on the emotional level, has been just great. It really has. It's helped me to notice that—I think when I was only planning ahead—which is great because you need that and you want to be intentional so write those things down, right?—but I think that by doing the planning from behind it just gave me that element of noticing where my successes were and to celebrate that and to not just see unchecked boxes, you know? Because that's all I was seeing with only having preplanned. And so in my planning from behind, it's just helped me see where I am connecting with them. Where I am meeting academic needs and personal needs. It's just been a game-changer for me totally.

Julie: Wow. Isn't that amazing?

Jardel: It is. I was surprised by just how much it affected me. I mean I knew it was a simple thing so I kind of was like oh it's just a simple tweak. But it's been just great. It has been so neat to see. And I even—so in my planning from behind, I take my academic planning from behind notes. And then I write little hearts. You know how on Instagram you do the little hearts? And so I do little hearts for the emotional check ins with the kids.

Julie: Nice!

Jardel: And so then—and so much of it I realized are just little things. And—but over the—because I've done it for 10 weeks because I started when we first started school and I noticed that it's so many little things. But I kind of realized I think all of those little things just really add up to kind of that one big thing that I'm so longing for, which is the connection that leaves them feeling loved, you know?

Julie: Totally.

Jardel: And I think because I wasn't noticing all the little things—it's almost like I'm on the hunt for the big thing, right? And that I was missing it. But now I feel like I'm seeing it and on the days or the weeks where maybe I—naturally will kind of go back to feeling like "Oh I'm failing!" I have this beautiful gift of notes that I can go back to and be like oh no, we are doing, I am doing, I am connecting, they are feeling loved. It's just so powerful. Like it really is. And it's so worth the last bit of energy I have at the end of the night to write it down because it pays dividends later. And so—I've only been doing it for 10 weeks and so.

Julie: Wow.

Jardel: Yeah it's been great!

Julie: Well 10 weeks is a long time! I mean that's a full quarter of school on the quarter system. So what I hear from you that there is momentum that you're creating for yourself that is positive because you've sustained it for 10 weeks. You know a lot of times we start with good intentions but the thing that we're recording or the thing we're doing isn't giving us life. And then we end up not continuing and then we feel guilty that we're not continuing.

So the typical scheduler style is planning ahead, looking to the future and when we don't live up to that then our incentive and motivation to keep planning ahead starts to falter. And the next thing you know you're like looking for the plan that has no plan so you don't have to plan for your failure and your disappointment, right? And so—but what I'm hearing you say is this planning from behind, this recording what already happened, this heightened awareness for pay days and surprises of happy and moments of connection are so valuable to you that you actually have the incentive, even when you're tired, to continue to record those moments. And to me, that's what a sustainable homeschool looks like. That's beautiful, Jardel. Oh my gosh!

Jardel: I wanted to add one thing. One thing I remember you talked about when we first talked was about how I can't meet all their connection needs, you know? That they're going to need to start making those elsewhere but that I'm going to kind of be their biggest advocate in noticing where do they need those connections.

Julie: Yes.

Jardel: Because I can't give them everything to feel loved but my ultimate goal is that they would feel loved, right? So it's not just making connections of mom to kid but kid to kid, kid to friend, kid to church, kid to God, you know all those other connections to help establish this

foundation I want them to have in feeling loved. And so one example I've had recently that I've just been like "Ah pay day!" was that I was noticing that my oldest, who's 12 and a half and his love language is quality time, he was desiring deeper connections outside the home. And I think before having talked to you I was thinking "Oh I need to give him more, I need to give him more." And I realized I think he needs something that's not me. You know?

So I had asked him in the beginning of the school year if there's one thing that I can help you learn this year—or something you want to learn and I can help you get that, what would it be? And without any promises but I would try my best to do that. And he was saying he wanted to learn woodworking. And so it just so happens that I have a neighbor friend that I'm close with that homeschools in our neighborhood and her husband is a woodworker, that's his job. And he has a shop out of his garage, like he works out of his garage so I reached out to her and I said "Hey, Caleb wants to learn woodworking. Could we work something out with your husband?" And I wasn't really sure because he's kind of a quiet guy but he totally wanted to. Her husband was like "Yeah, I'll have him over!"

So the last about month or so, he goes over about once or twice a week for two to three hours, he bikes over there on his own. He spends one on one time with this guy. They do woodworking. He's learned how to make a knife on his own. Not to mention on the personality level, this guy is like right up my son's alley where he just kind of—the way he has his shop set up, Caleb was just all googly eyes over it.

Julie: Nice.

Jardel: And it's been great. He loves his time there and he comes home just beaming and he just is so filled. And I was realizing that because of note-taking and noticing that he needed that connection and I was able to advocate for that and help him get that connection, he feels so loved. But it wasn't me giving that to him per se personally but helping him find that connection. So that's been a total pay day and amazing.

Julie: Wow. What a—

Jardel: I'm so grateful.

Julie: What a perfect story. I love that you helped him find what he wanted but then it bloomed into this other influential adult in his life, offering him both love and connection but also a vision of awesome adulthood. Right? Like this guy is still a woodworker as an adult. He gets to play with the big machinery, the really risky dangerous tools. He gets to make things that go in people's houses not just little bookshelves in a woodshop class in 7th grade. So you've

actually expanded your son's world and because you've done that, he will love you forever for it. Literally so awesome. I'm completely proud of you. Jardel this is amazing!

Jardel: I am just so grateful. Man this planning from behind it really—I could not speak more—everybody should be doing it! Every homeschooler, even just people that aren't homeschooling. Parents that—we always feel like we're failing you know and I think it's because we just see all the unmarked boxes. And I'm like if we just put it on paper that you did do something, you'll start to see that all those little things really add up, you know?

Julie: Truly. And where you turn your attention—just like you said, shopping for a new car, suddenly you see the car everywhere. So simply shifting your attention to the thing that you think is lacking and you start allowing yourself to quantify because the truth is sometimes when I would plan from behind, I would look over a month and realize gosh we really haven't done anything related to science. Well then that gives you the chance to say okay, we're going to! As opposed to looking at a blank calendar, identifying all the subjects, trying to slot them in. People aren't interested on the day that you pick science. You know? That's the kind of thing that happens.

So I love what you're saying. It's so validating to hear you share the way it worked for you, not only in a school setting but in a relational context. I think sometimes we forget how important that component is because truly when you feel close to your kids, doesn't the rest of the academic life feel easier?

Jardel: Yes. So much so. It makes a huge difference, yeah.

Julie: That's fabulous. Jardel thank you so much for sharing your story, your vulnerability, your family, the ways that these ideas have helped you. I know they're going to mean a lot to our families.

Jardel: Yeah I hope so. Thank you for having me. I'm so grateful for the opportunity.

Julie: [Theme music plays] it never ceases to amaze me how powerful planning from behind is. If you're new to that experience and you're looking for support and community as you grow, check out the [Homeschool Alliance](#). It's my coaching community designed to help homeschoolers like you find their feet. There is a seven and 14 day free trial so you can come in, look around, watch a couple webinars, see if the community conversation is helpful to you before you commit. One of the reasons that I urge you to look into it is that there is something

about community support that helps you sustain the practices you're trying to add to your life. So please join us. Jean Faulkner, who I quoted in the middle of this episode, is one of the coaches and she's incredible. So please consider it and I look forward to helping you discover the joys of planning from behind.

Thank you Jardel for joining us today and sharing your vulnerable experience with all of us. Thanks to The Podcast Masters, Hayden for sound editing, Ben for putting together the podcast notes. And Caitrin Bogart for the transcriptions. I'd also like to thank Jeannette, Amy, and Beth for making sure this podcast was ready to go for you this week.

In the meantime, continue the project of loving and learning with your wonderful family. 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?

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