



Homeschooling is not a new concept, nor is it for everyone. However, for many exceptional children and their parents, it is a realistic option that provides a unique opportunity to learn in a whole new way.

The Homeschool *Option*

by Carolyn Graves

NEARLY THREE YEARS AGO, my husband, daughter and I opened the Homeschool Center in a small town in Arkansas. That was when my education about AD/HD began. I saw firsthand how some public schools handled children with the disorder. And at the same time, I realized that my daughter was exhibiting symptoms of AD/HD.

Many families came into the center looking for help. Mothers came with tears streaming down their faces, not knowing which way to turn or what to do. Some parents felt they were “encouraged” to administer medication to their child before he or she would be allowed to return to school. In order to help these families, I had to research AD/HD, and then I had to learn how I could help these children receive a quality education.

We were the only homeschool resource center/facility in the state at that time. Almost everyone in the state who homeschooled their children made a trip to the Center. Each had his or her own story to tell and many of them involved a child with AD/HD. Whether it was their own child or someone else’s, the stories were the same—they needed help. Thus, a new adventure in the education of children was begun.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 1.7 percent of children aged 5–17 were homeschooled

in 1999. Since then, the number has increased by approximately 15–20 percent per year (McDowell & Ray 2000, Lines 2000). The Home School Legal Defense Association estimates that there were 1.7–2.2 million children homeschooled during the 2001–2002 school year. While parents list a variety of reasons for choosing this method of education, the most common are their desire to give their children a better education, religious reasons or a poor learning environment in school. **(Article continues on page 26.)**

A Kid's-Eye View of Homeschooling

A Survivor's Testimony by Stephanie Umbro

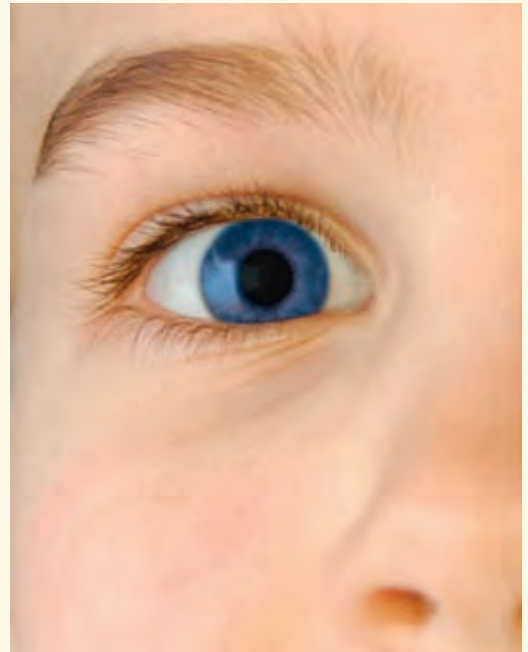
WHAT NORMAL KID likes being with her parents and siblings 24/7? Usually not me, but I lived like that for 10 years.

I attended public school for three years before my parents chose homeschooling. They wanted a Christian-based education for their kids. They didn't give me a reason to question their motives and there were days and nights when I hated homeschooling. But there were also many times when I enjoyed it. It was a love-hate relationship. That changed in 2000, when I was diagnosed with AD/HD. I was psyched to find out I wasn't stupid. Then my mom told me that she had suspected I had AD/HD years before and took me out of public school so I wouldn't be "labeled." I started to question my education. Could I have been diagnosed in public school? Would it have been easier for me to learn? Had my parents caused me more harm than good? However, upon reflection, I've decided that homeschooling was one of the best decisions my parents ever made for me.

I was unpopular at school. I was slow. Kids called me fat, lazy and stupid. I was always the last kid to finish my work or to be picked for teams. I tripped over everything—my shadow, my shoes, my tongue. For me, chairs were made for leaning and tipping; math and oral reading were torturous. I didn't have many friends. I was glad I didn't have to go back.

Homeschool was easier, although my logical mother and I fought often. When sitting became unbearable, I'd drop my bookwork to run up and down our long driveway. My parents didn't care when I did my schoolwork, as long as it was done by Friday. I didn't always make this deadline. Consequences came only if I didn't make an honest effort to get my work done. When concepts turned to mud in my brain, I'd doodle for hours so I could grasp them. I spent four years just learning long division. I got creative in solving formulas—I flunked Algebra, but I was original!

There were many opportunities for me to get involved in different activities. I began singing at local churches at age nine. I took piano lessons. I



started writing short stories at 10, novels at 13, and plays at 14. I was editor of the church newsletter. I ran my own business of baking and selling bread my junior year, for which I had to keep ledgers (go figure!) and deal with town permits, customers and vendors. To top it off, I planned every detail of my high school graduation—from "Pomp and Circumstance" to the tassel and gown.

I'm often asked if I felt deprived. Yes, I was deprived of a childhood filled with additional pain, pressure, rejection and despair. Don't misunderstand, I twitched, daydreamed and struggled through 10 years of school. I fought for every right answer and grade. My high school years were so hard I almost had an emotional breakdown. But I had time to develop skills I've needed to succeed as an adult with AD/HD. I was free to be me. I'm proud to call myself a homeschool survivor—no other word fits. If I had the chance to do it all over again, I wouldn't change my educational experiences. I wouldn't be "me" without them. ■

Stephanie Umbro worked for five years as a nurses' assistant and medication technician. In June 2002, she graduated with an associate's degree in paralegal studies and is currently employed by Maine's largest law firm.



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Helping Your Child Succeed

One day, a young mother walked into the Center with her four sons. The youngest of the boys was five-year-old Michael. They had just come from the doctor's office where Michael had been diagnosed with AD/HD. He also had an auditory processing problem. The doctor told the mother it would be better for both of them if she homeschooled Michael. He would probably never be able to read or process much, but he would have a better chance if he was homeschooled, otherwise he would be lost in the public school system.

We started looking at books that might help Michael and began retraining the young mother's view of what books to choose. She had to learn to select books that would work best for him, not the ones she would choose for herself. Then we had to find the best way to teach Michael so that he would actually learn. With a lot of love, prayer and discipline, each day brought small victories for both mother and son.

Michael is now seven. He reads as well as any first grader. He is writing, doing math and able to complete all of his studies. Michael loves reading and is always looking for new books. He takes pride in finishing each workbook and always looks forward to the next one.

Working on a one-on-one basis with children with AD/HD can make a difference in the lives of those children. So many parents come into the Center feeling discouraged. They have been told that their children will never be able to learn normally and they believe that the situation is hopeless. However, when they return to the Center, the changes are incredible! The children are more disciplined and easier to manage both at home and in public. They are learning how to read, do math, and write everything from a single sentence to an entire story. Nationally, state-mandated tests taken by scores of homeschoolers indicate that while some perform below average, a majority test above that mark (Educational Resources Information Center).

In order for a child to grow, we must care enough to help him succeed. This includes choosing the right books, methodology and place for your child to study. Working with each child is different. Not all children learn the same whether or not they have AD/HD. Almost all brothers and sisters are different and have unique learning styles. While some do better with reading directions for themselves (visual learners), others need to have the directions read to them (auditory learners), and still others have to be shown (tactile

learners). Whatever method it takes, working with that child alone is beneficial.

Parents also have to make a concerted effort to help their child. For instance, parents should only choose books that will work for the child, and disregard their own personal preferences. Once a mom came in and walked right past some very good art books that she had requested because they had a black spiral binding and she did not like that aspect of the book. I pointed the book out, but she did not buy it. She chose another one, but still ended up coming back to purchase the original book. She was wise enough to admit her mistake, put her child first, and get the book she needed to teach art to her child.

A dad came in and asked for help with his ninth grader. His son was failing in the public school system. He could not do his math or English, and could barely read on a third grade level. Everyone involved was frustrated and discouraged. After I found out how well he used the computer and how much he enjoyed it, I suggested having him do his schoolwork that way. It worked wonderfully! Within a year, he was up to par and soaking up knowledge like a sponge. His reading level rose three grade levels, his test scores improved and his confidence soared.

Children with AD/HD are not slow learners, nor do they all have learning disabilities—they just learn differently. They need a little more creativity in designing their curriculum and more time to adjust to their surroundings. They also need more focus, love and understanding—the kind only a parent can offer.

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Homeschooling Resources

There are a host of sites on the Internet that can provide information on homeschooling a child with special needs. Here are just a few sites to visit when considering this option.

www.geocities.com/athens/8259/special.html

This site is dedicated to listing websites that can provide support and information to parents who home-school their children with special needs. This site includes links to both local and national organizations.

www.inspirit.com.au/unschooling/resources/hsspecialneeds.html

Includes links to educational planning, creative approaches to lesson development, catalogs for ordering books on AD/HD and other learning disabilities. It also provides links to information on the Americans with Disabilities Act, which parents should read and understand as it may apply to their child's rights.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

(800) 514-0301
www.ada.gov

CHADD National Resource Center

(800) 233-4050
www.help4adhd.org

Local Department of Education

Check your local city or state for listing.

National ADD Association

(847) 432-ADDA
www.add.org

National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network (NATHHAN)

(208) 267-6246
www.nathhan.com

Carolyn Graves has been a homeschool mom for the past 10 years. She has spoken for the past two years at homeschool book fairs in Arkansas and Louisiana on "*How to Choose Curriculum*" and the "*Logic of Doing Lesson Plans*." She writes articles for the local newspaper and counsels with new homeschool parents daily, offering direction and encouragement. Graves also manages the Homeschool Center in Greenbrier, Ark.

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McDowell, S. A. & Ray, B. D. (2000). The home education movement in context, practice, and theory: Editors introduction. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75 (1&2), 1–7.