

What I am going to talk about today is Fear, or doubts, which stem from fear. The fears we have in our mind concerning unschooling specifically, but all of this can be translated into other areas of our lives.

We learn early on what society, family and friends believe is acceptable parenting. We have learned that school is the only place to get a “real” education. That children are empty vessels that need to be filled. We also learn not to question these things and just accept them as fact. If we had chosen to go along with what we learned to be right we would never have any doubts or fears. What we had chosen to do would be reinforced by society as right. But I chose not to do that.

From early on, when my son cried the first time I laid him down in the basinet I knew that our life as a family would be different. I had this tug in my heart, a tug that many mothers feel and choose to fight off, a tug that for me was life changing. I knew from that moment on that what I had learned from society and my family and friends was not going to work for us. That we would be on a different path and that my son Dallen and later my son Phillip would be guiding us.

This is where those doubts and fears creep in. Fears based in myths. Not based in fact. My choice was to arm myself with facts. The fears included some common ones we have all heard “if you hold the baby all the time they will grow up to be dependent clingy children.” “Let them cry it out.” In doing just some reading in books like *The Continuum Concept* and *Family Bed*, I read numerous accounts of families and cultures where family beds and listening to a babies needs does work, and they grow up to be confident, thinking children. I could find no actual accounts where a healthy family listening to and attending to a child’s needs went wrong, where the baby actually did grow up to be a dependent clingy shell of a child. Armed with the best information I could gather I could make a good decision. My fear and doubt vanished. I could move into a world of trusting that my child knew what was best for him and knew what he needed.

Those doubts vanished but as children grow new doubts and fears creep in. When they reach the “school-age” we start getting those questions about Where are they going to preschool, what grade are they in, how are they doing in school, etc. More doubts as that audio tape plays over and over in your brain....”they will be behind, they will never catch up, they need preschool, how will they ever learn.” All those things that we learned growing up from school, society, family and friends. But you know there is nothing out there that suggests that children that are respected and trusted, children whose families believe that children truly know the best course for them, grow up to be stunted in any way. More fear not based in fact. Because the fact is that unschooled children are social people. They interact with real people in the real world. Not some pre-designed social set up of 30 same age peers. They interact with the mail man, the grocer, the bank teller and their friends of all ages. They are not behind because there is no one to be behind, no one to catch up to. We know from personal accounts that children do not need to be filled up by anyone. They learn all the time and fill themselves up with information about what interest them. I have one son that read at the age of 5 and another who is a nonreader at 7. Am I concerned, not at all. They are each on their own path in life.

We know that there is no grade level to life. That as adults there is no preset grouping of facts that

every adult needs to know. There is no End of Year Exam. Why do we treat children so differently. As adults we all have different interest, occupations and passions. I am not expected to know the same things as Teresa or Anna, and I don't. Children are the same. They have a variety of interests some the same, many different. Each one is unique

Yet, it is so easy for society to put fear into parents. Their arguments seem to make sense. They seem right. But when you look at the end result you realize that this fear is unreasonable. That their theories are filled with holes. When you see real children who have not been "taught" they can add and subtract and balance a check book, and they can read and write. They can think and feel and carry on a conversation. Yet in our society the fear of failing children is leading parents down a spiraling cycle of less and less joy in life. More and more testing, more and more private schools with more and more teachers. More charter schools, more learning centers. More textbooks, more homework, more and more and more....with less and less joy, less and less family, fewer and fewer interests, fewer and fewer passionate children. The answer is right there in front of their eyes. If school doesn't work why not try the opposite. If more homework doesn't work why not try less. If more testing isn't working why test. But in this society reason has been taken over by fear.

When we arm ourselves with information, trustworthy information the fears and doubts go away. When they creep back in, instead of looking at society we need to reread John Holt or Valerie Fitzenreiter. We need to look at our happy children, and connect with other unschoolers. When you can build a community of like minded people you can see again and again why you are doing what you are doing, why you have chosen to live outside the box. When you see your children talking with adults and children of all ages and being respected as individuals the doubts and fears will subside. The doubts will go away and you know when you do it over and over and over again they come back less and less until there is no more doubt out there and you are truly living in the moment, joyfully with your child. You know that learning is everywhere, even if you can't identify it. You stop looking for "teachable moments" and realize that every moment is a learning moment for you and your child.

You will start to see that the math that they need every day is right there in their lives every day. You will see that when they want to e mail someone or write a letter to a friend, the written word becomes important. You will see that if left alone and not forced to read what you think is important they will read what they feel is important and you will not have to "make" them read. You will see that history is not a subject in and of itself it is important in what they are doing every day. Unschooling in our family looks different from other families as every family is unique. Life cannot be divided up into nice neat little subjects.

My husband always tells this same story when people ask him about unschooling. He explains how when we first moved into our house we had a pool put in. Then a couple of years later we wanted a deck. We had a couple of options. We could pay someone to built it for us or we could do it ourselves. Loving home improvement like he does we decided to build it ourselves. We were both intrigued with this idea and started absorbing all the information we could in preparation. Reading books about building decks, watching videos, talking with contractors, reading over the local building codes. We went to Home Depot to look at building materials treated lumber, untreated lumber,

recycled materials used for decking, different screws, lag bolts, nails. And we compared prices with the local hardware store. We had some tools and bought a few more. We drove around the neighborhood looking at our neighbors decks and talking with them about what they liked and didn't like about their decks, how they have held up and the maintenance required.

There was so much to learn but because we were so interested and wanted to do this ourselves it was easy, we did not have to be coerced into learning, the deck was important to us. There was so much math and science and reading and writing, but it was life, not divided up into subjects and not something that we had been taught in school. It all came together in building a deck. And you know what...that deck has led to more. We started landscaping around the deck, that brought in more research into water requirements, space requirements, soil requirements for different species of plants. That is what unschooling is like. It is how adults learn. They see something that interests them and they go after it. No one makes you try a new recipe, start quilting, plant a garden or raise chickens. It is something that you are interested in.

Children learn in the same way, if it is important to them they will learn what they need to know.

When you look at real results instead of what fear tells you will happen, you realize that this fear is great for those trying to sell books, or curriculum. But the fear is just that. Fear.

While on my computer one day I happened to look up at the headlines running across the front page of AOL. And it jumped out at me. A picture of this precious little girl with a huge smile on her face and the caption read "Old enough to know how to...and then it listed Care for a pet, Bathe solo, do chores... and when you click on the tab it takes you directly to an ad for Parenting Magazine that says "An Age By Age Guide." There is no author given but you can again "learn more" by clicking on the banner to "buy the magazine". Fear. They are preying on the fear that some parents will have when they read that banner. Oh my child must be behind because Johnny can't take care of our pet. I must be a bad parent. Maybe if I buy this magazine "they" will tell me how to do it right. How to be a "good" parent. How your child can catch up.

If we put that fear where it belongs we soon see that everyone is an individual. There is nothing to "catch up" to. There are no real guidelines for the individual, truly free people are unique. They cannot be compared to anyone else. Children need freedom to be who they are, not put into any category with it's set of labels. We parents need to seek out real information with real examples. As unschoolers we see what the rest of society misses. That real children will do exactly what real babies do. They will help you, their parents, learn what you need to know to help them. And as they grow they will learn what they need to learn to do what they are doing right now. At this moment in time. Living the most joyful life they can.

We are not adversaries we are allies in life. WE have such a special role, a front seat to watch this unfolding of who they are and who they are meant to be. We are chauffeurs, confidants, advisors, and co-learners in life. We are there to answer questions and help our children find the information they need and want. Information to help them explore their interests. And information to help them make

good informed decisions about their life so they will know how to meet fear and doubt themselves. If we interfere in that process it becomes about us not about our children. My greatest fear now is that if I interfere with who they are and who they are becoming by imposing some preset block of “knowledge”, I may be permanently changing them, altering their learning process and I will never know who it is they were to truly become. I must allow my boys to connect the dots of life in a way that makes sense and is interesting to them.

My boys are social, interactive, creative, energetic boys. With a love of learning that has not been sucked out of them. They feel free to explore genetic engineering, robotics, or Yu Gi Oh . There is no age limit on learning. It is all out there if we put the fear aside and just jump, armed with good information and real facts.

My son Phillip was talking with his cousin this past summer, his cousin goes to public school. They were both in the back seat of the car and the cousin asked Phillip what grade he was in. He first said that grades are for meat and eggs not children, then he explained that he did not go to school. His cousins response to this was “how do you learn anything, you have to go to school to learn.” I just sat and listened. Phillip, without missing a beat said, “I think people learn best when they can just explore”. He is so right. People, not children, learn best when they can just explore.