



A Homeschooling Story: Mick

I first started considering homeschooling when my oldest child was a newborn. I don't remember exactly how the idea came to me; but at the time, my husband was working in Washington DC, and we were not far from the headquarters of Seton Home Study School. I remember getting a copy of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*, by Dr. Mary Kay Clark (the founder of Seton Home Study School); and after reading it, I thought, "I can do this." I come from a family of teachers: my father taught junior high and high school, my mother taught at the local community college, and my older brother taught at my high school (I actually had him as my history teacher during my junior year). I had double-majored in Mathematics and Education in college; and although I had trained to teach grades 7 through 12, I thought, "How much different could it be to teach kindergarten and the primary grades?"

By the time our oldest child was four, we had moved to Los Angeles County, California. I was already concerned about his education: There was no way I was going to send him to the local public schools, but the annual tuition for kindergarten at our parish school was \$8,000. Our family was on an extremely tight budget, so the parish school was out. Thus, when it was time for our son to start kindergarten, we took the homeschooling plunge.

As Providence would have it, one of my close friends in California had been homeschooled through high school; and her parents were the local representatives for Seton Home Study School. Although I had been planning to use a different Catholic curriculum, my friend's parents convinced me to try Seton. It turned out to be a good fit: I liked their textbooks and workbooks, and I loved the "hand-holding" provided by the daily lesson plans and the access that I had to the teachers and counselors who worked at Seton. I knew that if I had any questions, they had answers; and that if I ran into difficulties, they could help me solve them.

By the time our second child was ready for kindergarten, we were living in an extremely rural area in the Midwest. My husband and I were not impressed with the local public schools; and the Catholic schools, while affordable, were farther away than we wanted to drive twice daily. We knew no one who sent their children to the Catholic schools, so carpooling was not an option. We therefore continued homeschooling our oldest and began homeschooling our second.

When our third child was a toddler, my mother became gravely ill. Our oldest was in sixth grade, the middle child was in third, and the youngest was in kindergarten. Homeschooling allowed us the flexibility to pack up our schoolbooks and travel the seven hours to be with my parents during that difficult time. Over a twelve-month period, the children and I made that trip fourteen times.

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We never knew if we would be staying at my parents' for a weekend or for a fortnight. Most of the time we did school at the house, but on several occasions we did school in a hospital waiting room. Homeschooling was such a blessing; had my children been enrolled in a brick-and-mortar school, we would not have been able to travel as often, and my children would most likely have gotten behind in their schoolwork. Instead, through it all they were able to stay caught up in their studies while I tended to my duties toward my parents.

Seton's curriculum worked well for my children for fifteen years, but at that point I decided to design my own curriculum. After so many years of teaching kindergarten through high school, I had seen how different all of my children were with regard to their learning styles; their particular interests, both academic and non-academic; and their "educational temperaments," if you will. So I designed curricula that were really tailored to the strengths and weaknesses of each child. I still use many of the books that my older children used when enrolled in Seton, but I sometimes choose other books--particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, and literature--which are a better "fit" for a particular child.

If I could give one piece of encouragement to a parent that is considering embarking on the homeschooling journey, it would be this: You can do this. In fact, you already are doing this; you have been your child's teacher since the day he was born. The most important lessons in life he will learn from you. So, rolling academics into the other important education that you are imparting to him is simply an extension of what you've been doing anyway. You don't have to have a degree in Education or any particular credentials to successfully educate your children all the way through high school. I still remember the humorous yet apt advice that a friend gave me at the beginning of my own homeschooling journey: "Don't worry about 'messaging up' your kids; if they graduate from high school able to balance a checkbook and put sentences together in comprehensible fashion, they'll be ahead of 90% of the students in the public schools." And, I would add, they will know their faith; and that is the most important thing of all.

