

## Ex-Homeschooler: Writer Extraordinaire

*By Hannah Bossner*

When people ventured to ask how I was enjoying school, I always gave the same answer. “School is great. I wake up late, do my work quickly, then enjoy the rest of the day to myself.” I was never stressed, because I was a “teacher’s pet.” This teacher never gave homework to my two classmates and me, and luckily for us, she shared the same passion for speeding through schoolwork as we did. Some parents might find my school experience shocking, but to me, it was perfectly normal. In my opinion, I was just an average kid whose mom happened to teach her and her little brothers in their basement. I admit that my elementary days were easy, but that wouldn’t last for long.

My parents always made sure that we were not weird “homeschoolers”; we just happened to be homeschooled. The average homeschoolers, unfortunately, share a certain characteristic-- being too secluded from society. To prevent their kids from this terrible stigma, my parents took us to “extra-curricular” activities such as church and basketball practice so that we would be well rounded and fully sociable. Although such events helped me make friends, my parents began to notice that my problem wasn’t social, but was a growing academic laziness due to lack of structured days. To fix this conundrum, they decided to enroll me in my church’s tiny private academy. The word “academy” held a double meaning in my thoughts at the time. Academy meant torturously long school days, homework, and stress, yet it also meant independence, friends, and sports. My mixed emotional adrenalin propelled me to my first day of academy in eighth grade.

The morning of my first day was absolutely dreadful. I somehow managed to wake up late, even though this was the one of the biggest days in my life thus far. Jumping out of bed, I ran down the hallway to my bathroom and turned on the water faucet. My skin felt like fire as I doused it with cold water, realizing that I caught some kind of cold over the weekend. “Terrific,” I thought as I continued to battle my temperature. While plugging in my favorite sparkly hot-pink hair straightener, I contemplated if subjecting myself to more heat would be a wise decision. I decided against the straightener and threw it back in its drawer. Instead of beautifully pin straight hair, I had no choice but to settle for a frumpy ponytail to keep my hair off of my burning skin. Perhaps that rough morning is why I don’t like ponytails on myself even now.

Before leaving for school I decided to take one last look of myself in the mirror. The 12-year-old staring back at me was the epitome of an awkward junior higher. She was tall for her age, and her atrocious school uniform (that was bought purposely larger, to “grow into”) hung off of her body. Dark eyeliner rimmed her eyes, because after all, why shouldn’t she wear makeup now that she was 12? Her pulled back hair further accentuated the wonderful combination of a blemished and fevered complexion. I wasn’t so positive that that girl was going to be a success.

The first day of classes was a blur of confusion and chaos. My excited wonder of lockers and lunchrooms had worn off by the time the bell signaling the end of lunch rang. I quickly shoved my pink insulated lunch bag into my locker, trying to hide it from the cool kids who carried brown paper bags.

Slowly walking down the hall, fellow eighth-grader Amanda caught my arm. She cautioned, “I just wanted to warn you, Lipka keeps a month’s worth of used old crusty lunch containers piled up in the corner of his room. Steer clear for your own safety.” Thankful for this life-saving information, I ran to class hoping to find a seat far away from that pile. I would soon realize that my desk was the least of my problems.

Mr. Lipka, the English teacher who I had heard so many stories about, began teaching our grammar lesson towards the middle of the book, for whatever reason. I didn’t know exactly where we

were in the lesson so I glanced around the room at my classmates instead. There were only six of us altogether, and a diverse six we were. Daniel the Asian braniac and average-joe Aaron were the only guys, so they sat next to each other on the far side of the room. Kim and Melissa, twins who spoke their own unique language that only they understood, pushed their desks together and tuned out the rest of us. Then there was Amanda who, at the moment, was spritzing the room with Sweet Pea perfume to rid the awful stench. I, ex-homeschooler, wasn't exactly sure how I fit into this complicated puzzle called the eighth-grade class.

Mr. Lipka assigned our first book report, and the initial shock almost gave me a heart attack. As if trying to fit in wasn't already hard enough, now I had homework to worry about! I decided to pick the book recommended to me, entitled *Once Upon a Summer*. It was terribly cheezy, but the plot and moral tone were simple enough that I was able to pull out a few points and a general thesis for my paper. For days I heard my classmates discussing their topics, ranging from sci-fi to classics to romance. I worried that my book was too simple and that my report would be a failure. I tentatively handed in my paper on the due date, desperately hoping that it would be comparable to my classmates'.

Weeks later, Mr. Lipka approached my desk and asked me to read the paper he was handing back aloud. For a split second, I contemplated if that implied a good or bad grade. I then starred down at my paper, and was relieved to see a big "A" on the top. With a smile on my face I spun around to see what my classmates' reactions were to their papers. To my surprise, I saw frustration, confusion, jealousy, and only a little happiness. I quickly declined the opportunity for my paper to become a good example. Unfortunately, Mr. Lipka insisted on reading it aloud himself, which definitely didn't help my friend situation at the moment, but I didn't really care. My paper was not that special really, just well organized, but in my own mind, I gained a new confidence. That one simple assignment led me to believe that I was not the ex-homeschooler anymore, but a student capable of being a successful piece of that complicated eighth-grade puzzle.

Looking back fondly at that day in English class, I see how that assignment shaped my writing today. I'm sure that if I read that book report now, I'd laugh at my choice of words, messy penmanship, and simple examples. I would also notice, though, a clear intro, points one through three, and a conclusion (probably terrible, but a conclusion nonetheless). I now fully understand the importance of being organized, and how simple but clear points will aid the reader in understanding a writer's thoughts. Through that book report, I was able to not only communicate my feelings about the story itself, but also bridge the transition between homeschool and average school. That is the story of how I came to write the papers I turn in today, and how they all are influenced by my simple eighth-grade book report.

\*If you'd like to see my story in video form, here's my Animoto link:

<http://animoto.com/play/tZz3nCfA2R145I3IfGLGww>