

Bringing Them Home

An Interview with Elizabeth Wiens

Have you wished for a way to share with friends who express an interest in homeschooling? Would you like, in a nonthreatening way, to tell family members who don't understand homeschooling what you do? Are you a new homeschooler who needs encouragement? In *Bringing Them Home* (OakTara, 2010), Elizabeth Wiens pens the story of a fictitious family's journey into homeschooling (see the "Bookshelf and Beyond" review in this issue). Beth Wiens gives us a peek into her family's homeschooling life and her book.

HST: Elizabeth, what motivated you to write *Bringing Them Home*?

Beth: My husband [Gary] and I went through the public system, and we see the vast difference between a secular education and one founded on a biblical worldview. I am passionate about God's desire for Christian parents to train their children, and I wanted to challenge parents to be purposeful in doing that. Since many families love to read stories, I thought a book that presents the philosophies and reasons for homeschooling woven through a story would be enjoyable and beneficial. I was able to deal with many issues homeschoolers face while painting a picture of what homeschooling may look like.

HST: Please tell our readers a little about yourself. In what ways do you think your family is a "typical" homeschool family, and how might you be unique?

Beth: Gary and I have been married for twenty-three years and have four daughters, ages sixteen to twenty-two. My husband completed degrees in Christian education and secular education. After teaching a couple of years, he left the classroom to work full-time with Child Evangelism Fellowship for nearly sixteen years, which gave him the freedom to teach children from God's Word to make an eternal difference. We now serve with GoodSeed Canada. As our children reached school age, we saw quickly that we didn't want them in public school. Gary was interested in homeschooling, but I didn't think I could handle it. We enrolled my eldest daughter in Christian school, where she attended through grade two and my second daughter attended kindergarten. Finally, I tentatively agreed to try it, and we brought them home. We have never regretted that decision, and I came to love the homeschooling lifestyle. Our family is a typical homeschool family in that we have sifted through different curriculum styles until we found what worked for us and remained flexible to adjust to each daughter.

With Gary's full-time ministry, our family has had a unique experience in ministering together. From young ages, our girls became involved in the ministry, as we spent summers giving children's clubs around the province. They grew up with puppets and skits, leading singing, telling Bible stories, and leading their peers to the Lord. Camping and ministering together drew our family closer, and seeing a family work together blessed those we ministered alongside in

churches. We learned to trust God's provision as we raised missionary support. We still have opportunities to do children's ministry with our older girls.

HST: You have four daughters, but the Knight family in your story has three girls and a boy. In what ways did you research to portray accurately the challenges of homeschooling boys?

Beth: For years, I hosted a Mom's Encouragement Night at my home for local homeschooling moms where I heard their struggles about their children. My twin sister has three boys, and though she didn't homeschool, I could see the difference between how her sons and my daughters approached things. Additionally, we have fostered an almost six-year-old boy since he was a baby. Though I have never homeschooled a boy, I incorporated the traits I have witnessed in the boys around me. We are considering adopting our foster boy, and I may start homeschooling over again with a very active boy. If that happens, I'm sure I will be tempted to revise my story!

HST: Your story communicates real struggles and questions that a family asks about homeschooling. What was your biggest concern about homeschooling your children?

Beth: I was concerned about the time commitment and teaching all the subjects. I didn't understand homeschooling or its lifestyle. All the government guidelines, testing, and how to know if I was meeting the right standards intimidated me. Having friends and family challenge me in areas in which I already felt insecure didn't help.

HST: Who do you think will benefit from reading your story?

Beth: I wanted to encourage new homeschool families and give those considering homeschooling a real picture to give them courage to take that step. I also hoped it would help grandparents and extended family members understand homeschooling's purpose, benefits, and the struggles their homeschooling family members may face. I wanted to challenge all Christian parents, including those with children in the public system, to consider prayerfully their children's education and realize there is no neutral education. The education's environment plays a large role in shaping children's worldviews (biblical or unbiblical). Parents are stewards of God's gift, our children, and we must train them to present them back to Him.

HST: When you decided to homeschool, did your extended family support you or were there conflicts or concerns? How did you communicate to your family about your decision to homeschool?

Beth: Gary and I come from Christian families, and all our siblings have sought to build godly homes and honor God in raising their children. However, our family is the only one among our siblings who chose to homeschool, and that has brought challenges. A few family members have been quietly supportive from the beginning, though they don't fully understand and have made

other choices for their families. Most family members have expressed little interest in wanting to hear about our homeschooling. They have supported our daughters' plays, recitals and graduations, but they aren't open to discuss it. A few family members were more vocal to discourage us at first. Later, they seemed to accept our decision, but we still heard an occasional concerned expression or negative comment about homeschoolers.

It was difficult to explain our convictions to our extended family when most of our nieces and nephews attended public school and our position on schooling opposed theirs. The further we progressed in our journey, the more we sought biblical direction in other areas. As a result, the difference in our family's standards has widened. I address these issues in *As For Me and My House* (coming soon), the sequel to *Bringing Them Home*, which deals with homeschooling through the teen years, youth culture, biblical roles, and courtship. I struggled with how to present a strong message in a way that would challenge and not alienate my audience. Homeschoolers experience responses varying from supportive to antagonistic from family and friends. Our experience fit somewhere in the middle.

HST: What advice and encouragement would you give to those considering homeschooling but who are afraid to step outside the box? How would you encourage the mom who is wondering whether she can teach her children?

Beth: I would encourage them to let go of their fears and trust God with their family. Jesus said we are to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to Him. Our children belong to God and not the state. We should never follow human principles and worldly methods if we are seeking godly results. There are many excellent resources to help Christian parents teach from a biblical perspective, and the rewards for investing in their children's spiritual mentorship are eternal.

I would challenge Christian parents to quit worrying about meeting human standards and to seek God's standards. God never asks them to do something for which He does not give them the strength to accomplish. Parents know their child's strengths and weaknesses and better than anyone what is best. No matter what parents' weaknesses are, if they love their child, they are capable of helping them learn with more concentrated attention than would ever be available in a classroom.

HST: What thoughts would you share with our readers new to homeschooling?

Beth: I would encourage new homeschoolers to read many books about homeschooling for wisdom from those who have gone before them. Reading a variety of authors will help them think through any misconceptions and introduce them to different styles and approaches to homeschooling, enabling them to draw from methods that suit their family.

There is more to homeschooling than simply doing “school” at home, and no two families look exactly alike. Parents don’t have to fit their family into someone else’s mold. They have freedom and flexibility to fit their program to their family. If what they are doing isn’t working, they can try another approach. Especially, they should seek support from other homeschooling families whom they admire for encouragement along the way.

HST: You have two graduated daughters. What advice do you offer homeschool alumni as they transition to their culture and to parents uncertain or fearful about sending their children into the world?

Beth: We have tried to teach our daughters to view their culture from Scripture. By learning to think biblically, they have developed strong convictions and learned how to confront their culture with truth. It is not easy to walk counter to one’s culture, but we have been doing that as a family for years. When the Bible is your authority in all things and your children know how to apply Scriptural principles, they are better prepared with answers to cultural issues. We started long before graduation, so it comes more naturally to them. Is it always easy? No! But they can successfully interact with their culture and be the salt and light God intended. Homeschool alumni trained to think biblically should be able to make that transition and stand firm. If they haven’t been trained, they need to open their Bibles and learn to measure everything against it.

Homeschooling, by nature, tends to produce independent thinkers who are more likely to become leaders and entrepreneurs rather than followers. Homeschooling gives them the courage to confront their culture.

Many chose to homeschool because they didn’t want the world to train their children. We realized the value of protecting them from ungodly influences while they were young. With a strong foundation, they will be ready to go out and make disciples, and we can trust them to God.

HST: What dangers do you see currently confronting the homeschool movement?

Beth: Although the modern homeschool movement started primarily as a Christian movement with families fighting for the right to homeschool for biblical reasons, to some extent the movement is losing its original focus. Many do not see biblical training as foundational to their studies. As a result, I am disheartened to see too many teens coming from Christian homeschool families who do not think biblically or see the Bible as their authority.

As well, some families are turning back to the public system or turn to online schooling once their children reach high school to meet government standards and gain credits. Thus, they diminish the Christian resources they may have been using and send the message to their children, intentional or not, that the biblical model is no longer sufficient and man’s wisdom prevails. This shift not only affects the homeschool movement’s tone, but many of these families

do not hold convictions strongly enough to fight for the right to homeschool should these freedoms be challenged again.

HST: What one or two things do you think are essential to a successful homeschool experience for any family?

Beth: I see prayer and a biblical foundation as key to a successful homeschool experience. If parents are committed to leading their children to a personal faith in Christ, helping them develop a love for God's Word and training them in godly character, everything else will be easier. Following God's principles and ministering together strengthens the family. Developing close family relationships and servant hearts makes homeschooling a blessing.

Marilyn Rockett, Editor in Chief and regular columnist for *Homeschooling Today* magazine, was the interviewer for this article.

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