

## Unschooling Life Podcast #2 - July 13th, 2014

"Why unschool?"

### Introduction

**Amy:** If unschooled children don't go to school, then how do they learn?

I went on a search to find unschooling parents who I could ask this question, but it turned out to be much harder than I anticipated, because unschooling parents are way too busy having fun and learning with their kids, to take the time to answer my questions.

I did eventually find a good group of people, and asked them: What is unschooling and why do families chose this path?

In this podcast you'll hear what they told me.

I am Amy Childs and welcome to the Unschooling Life.

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**Amy** - First we hear from Jan Hunt, director of the Natural Child Project.

**Jan Hunt** - When someone asks me what unschooling is, the first thing I say is that: it is no different from every loving parent does when their child is young.

When a two year old, or a three year old, gets interested in something, let's say trains, what does the parent do? They get a book about trains, they maybe take them on a train ride, you know, they buy them a toy train.

They know that this child, for whatever reason, has got interested in trains.

And the parent knows, sort of instinctively, to support that, and to further it.

That is a continuous, and it is very natural, and instinctual, and very wise and normal.

And then, all of the sudden, the same child, the same parent... the same child is suddenly quote "school age".

And what that implies is, that there is something different now.

This child is a different person, this child learns in a different way all of the sudden.

That is the assumption, it is never really discussed, but that is the assumption.

That this child who has been learning with great delight, and has had no problem to be inspired or motivated to learn.

In fact, you can't stop a two year old, a three year old from learning. That is all they do all day long.

They explore and they learn exactly what they want to study and learn, whatever is around them.

It is fascinating to them.

All of the sudden, they are school age, and the assumption seems to be:

OK, now they reached an age where their brain changes drastically and they are no longer learning in that same delightful way.

That now, all of the sudden, we have to turn 180 degrees and instead the child figuring out what he wants to learn, someone else: an authority, an expert, a teacher, with a degree. Somebody else knows better what that child is supposed to learn at that moment.

Suddenly the three Rs come in, as though they are separated from life, which they aren't at all. And the child is forced and scared into learning what other people think he should be learning.

And then it goes downhill from there, because after a while the child loses interest, because he is not learning... It's a two part problem: he is not learning what he wants to learn. And he doesn't want to learn what he is being forced to learn.

It's really unfortunate, because the child loses his interest in learning generally.

And then to top this all off, then when the child is totally bored, and what adult wouldn't be?

You know, bored to have to listen to someone on a topic he has no interest in, and not be allowed to move even!

What adult could handle that?

And the child when he can't handle that, we say: oh, now he must have some kind of learning deficit, learning problem, learning deficiency, and we give them pills!

I mean it's really... the whole picture is completely wrong.

An unschooling parent is not a teacher, a parent is like a reference librarian.

You know, a reference librarian in a public library will answer questions, will find the information, will find the books that the person might find helpful.

They listen first for what the person is looking for. What are you looking for? How can I help you? How can I support that?

How can I find material that will help him to learn this in the most fun way.

And that is another huge difference between school and unschool is: unschooling is fun.

My son is 33 years now and we had fun for 33 years.

**Amy:** And now here is Kelly, mother of two, now grown, unschooled sons.

**Kelly:** Joyce Fetteroll one time said there is a side effect, and I like that a lot, that learning is a side effect of living a rich, engaged life.

And my job as the unschooling parent is to expose them to as many things possible.

They can always say: no I don't like it, or I don't like it right now, or I want to try something else.

But my job is to find the learning that is happening in their lives.

So the side effect of living a rich engaged life, the learning is there, my job is just to find it.

**Amy:** Next is Jerry Mintz, founder and director of the Alternative Education Resource Organization.

**Jerry Mintz:** There are basically two paradigms involved with how people think about learning. One is the traditional one, it seems all schools are based on, which is that: kids are naturally lazy, and need to be forced to learn.

The other paradigm is the one most of our schools use, and that is: the kid is a natural learner. And so, if you accept that the last is true (which modern brain research certainly does confirm), then you can't use the typical approach of schools.

And that is, it doesn't make sense to force kids to learn things just because you think they are important, or somebody else thinks they are important for them to learn, because what you are doing is you are tending to extinguish the natural ability to learn.

And the more you do that, the more the other paradigm becomes self-fulfilling .

That is after 7 or 8 years of it, children actually do lose their ability to learn spontaneously, and need to be forced and externally motivated more and more.

So if you understand those things, the choice is really obvious.

And then, if you don't understand it, and of course, a lot of people think they do, but they don't.

Because of their own training. It is in their guts!

It is in how, you feel like they have to force learning or someone is going to miss something and so on.

And that is something that you have to learn how to fight against in yourself.

And then you will be able to be comfortable with your choice of children having natural learning.

**Amy:** This is 22 year old Idzie whose blog is called "I am unschooled and yes, I can write".

**Idzie:** That is a type of self directed homeschooling where the learners themselves, the children or teens, are really the ones making the important decision about their own education and what they want to be leaning about.

With parents acting like the facilitators and mentors, and helping them to find resources instead of being teachers.

**Amy:** What did you like about unschooling as a kid?

**Idzie:** Oh, there were multiple things.

It was really great to be able to focus as much or as little as I wanted on things.

Because there were a lot of times, and I am sure you are familiar with that, where, OK, a google search is enough!

Oh, now I know what I basically want to know about this and that, and that is it!

To have the freedom to do that, to do the really quick multiple questions, answer a day when you don't want to dig in much.

To be able to focus in something you are really interested in for weeks, months at a time.

I really like that there wasn't a set curriculum where: these are the things you are supposed to learn about, and these are the things that aren't as important.

I could really focus as much or as little as I wanted to on things.

**Amy:** Carsie Blanton is a singer, songwriter, who has performed with **The Weepies, The Wood Brothers, Paul Simon**, you can even find her on Wikipedia.

**Carsie Blanton:** I am really glad that I was unschooled.

It gave me a sense of how to make plans, and set goals, and then achieve them, without any outside influence.

Or without very much outside influence.

And I think that, as a touring musician, I rely on that skill pretty heavily.

So, right now, I am in a 6 weeks tour all around the country and I've had some help with booking the tour, but a lot of it is just, you know:

I put the band together, I book some of the shows, I am driving the van, and I find the places to stay. It's a lot of reliance on my own internal motivation and my own personal resources.

And I feel like I had that skill because I didn't go to school.

So I had to figure out how to get things done without a lot of help of upper management. Chuckles.

I also think that I am pretty comfortable spending long stretches of time by myself.

And that is partially because I didn't go to school, and I grew up in a rural part of the world.

And so I think I rely on that skill also as a songwriter, because it takes a lot of sitting idly before I get a good idea. So I think if I was less comfortable wandering around by myself I probably wouldn't write songs really. Chuckles.

I got started fairly young, I made my first record when I was 19.

And I think the reason I was able to do that is, because at that point I already had 5 or 8 years of fairly full time practicing and rehearsal and performing under my belt, because I got to start really young.

So I started playing and writing and performing when I was 13.

I did all those things quite a bit, at a pretty young age, because I didn't have anything else that I was required to do.

And that was what I was most interested in.

So, I think in that way, I kinda got ahead of the curve, a little bit.

**Amy:** Michelle Loucas is one of the co-founders of the Philadelphia Free School

**Michelle Loucas:** At the Philly Free School we believe that human beings are born curious, and that given the supportive environment, nearly all human beings will blossom with that curiosity.

And that the learning that results from self directed education is more profound, more powerful and more rewarding than what we see in conventional schools.

We think that it is illogical to continue to try to mandate what young people should learn in an era when our access to information, entire global economy, the workforce and everything about our lives is changing so dramatically.

It just makes no sense whatsoever that we are still operating in a school system that was created when we became an industrialised nation, and we needed workers for heavy industry.

I don't believe that any school board is in a better position to determine a curriculum or course of study for a young person than that young person him or herself.

And I think that after 45 years of Sudbury Education, starting with the Sudbury Valley school in 1968, and extending to over 30 schools around the world now, we have a lot of data, and we have a lot of graduates we can look at, and they are doing amazing things.

Not only are they competent, effective professionals, but they are also happy, they are engaged in their communities, they are well adjusted citizens.

I think all of those measures are really important and are often overlooked with conventional measures of education affluence.

**Amy:** Here is Sandra Dodd with a simple definition of unschooling.

**Sandra Dodd:** Creating an environment where natural learning can flourish.

**Amy:** What's natural learning?

**Sandra Dodd:** Learning from experience, learning from asking questions, following interests, being.

**Amy:** So thanks to everyone who shared some of their ideas of what unschooling is, and how people unschool, and why.

To finish off, I asked my daughter Nikiah to share her definition of unschooling.

**Nikiah Childs:** Unschooling is eliminating the distraction of school from being alive, from the art of being alive, from the act of being alive, from the joy of being alive.

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- Music Plays -

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