



Reaching the Reluctant Writer & Homeschooling Boys

An Interview with Andrew Pudewa
by Ashley Ortega

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Ashley Ortega & Andrew Pudewa, *Reaching the Reluctant Writer & Homeschooling Boys*

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Ashley: Hello. I'm so glad you've joined us for our Home School Super Heroes Telesummit. My name is Ashley Ortega, and I'm thrilled to be able to have Andrew Pudewa join us today. Andrew is the Director Of The Institute For Excellence In Writing, and a home schooling father of 7. Presenting throughout North America, he addresses issues related to teaching, writing, thinking, spelling, and music with clarity, insight, practical experience, and humor.

His seminar is for parents, students, and teachers have helped transform many a reluctant writer and have helped educators with powerful tools to dramatically improve students' skills. Although he's a graduate of the [Tao 0:47] Education Institute in Japan, and holds a certificate of child brain development from the Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia Pennsylvania, his best endorsement is from a young Alaskan boy, who called him the *funny man with the wonderful words*.

He and his beautiful, heroic wife Robin, currently teach their three youngest children at home. And I'm really excited because Andrew is actually my first writing teacher back in junior high, so this should be a fun time for me.

Hi Andrew, how are you?

Andrew: Doing well Ashley. And yourself?

Ashley: I'm doing really well. Just to get started, if you could tell our listeners a little bit about you and your family and your approach to home schooling.

Andrew: Well, I have as you mentioned 7 children. The oldest three went to school here and there for short periods of time, and then by the 4th one down I finally swore of schools entirely. And the 4 youngest, none of them have been to school.

Fiona is currently a 3rd year student at Thomas Aquinas College, a great books school in California. That's her first experience with institutions, and she's doing well. And then we have as you mentioned, the three at home, 16, 13, and 10.

I think if I had to label or describe an approach to home schooling, I guess I would have to say relaxed and classical, or maybe we should reverse the order and put classical and relaxed. Although for some people that can often be an oxymoronic, that the two don't go together. But that's what we're striving for, which is to incorporate as many elements of a classical approach as possible, and yet we after 20 years of this are pretty acutely

aware of the importance of being rested, teaching from a point of rest, and not being stressed.

That would be the best label I could give it, but I don't know. We don't use any set curriculum.

Ashley: That sounds great. That's a fun definition of what you do.

I know you're a hero to our listeners, and one of the areas is writing. Are there some practical tips and tricks that you could share with our listeners to make teaching writing easier?

Andrew: Well, that is my area of professional work, and traveling around the country and doing seminars. I remember meeting you and your sister when you were just little teeny bopper 12 year olds. It was a long time ago, and now you're all married, and your family is all grown up.

But as you remember, our approach to teaching helps kids really in two areas. One in understanding the structure of writing, and number two, giving them some specific things to do, what we might call stylistic techniques. Building a checklist, so that a student can know, if I do this, this, this, and this, then I will be done and will have learned something.

And we also move the problem of I don't know what to write about to much later on in our system so that we begin classes by providing children with specific little Aesop fables and articles with interesting information about people, places, animals, things that would give them a story or information to retell. We start the teaching of writing with the retelling of information rather than, you have to think of something, whatever you want to write about, or tell about an experience you had or a place or an opinion, where it has to come out of your brain first without putting anything in.

We make the whole process a bit easier in that we put stuff in and then have the children pull it out and reorganize it. You probably remember that from the first couple of classes we did.

Ashley: Oh yes. I remember lots of, you see the first text, and then have to outline it and rewrite it in our own words.

Andrew: And even just basic skill of being able to pull key words from each sentence in a short little source text has some tremendous advantages to a child. Number one, it gives them something to write about. Number two, it teaches them a method of moving a fact from that source to their paper without accidentally copying huge chunks from it.

You probably never suffered this, but I suspect that your mother and I, and all the folks our age, when we were in school and had to write reports, it was pretty hard to write a report without accidentally copying phrases, clauses, or whole sentences from the encyclopedia or the library book. And the teachers were always saying, don't copy from the book. Put it in your own words. But I didn't know how to put it in my own words. I said, I don't own any words to use. The encyclopedia already got the good ones.

Ashley: I agree. I remember that's one thing my mom worked with us a lot on, being able to pull key words. Even if it was just a sentence and not even a full paragraph in our own words. We did that time and time again.

Andrew: So we've got that message. What I've probably learned and come to understand best since meeting you, a decade ago, or more than that, is that really the process of teaching writing is very much like the process, is parallel if not synonymous with the process of teaching thinking. To get something out of your brain and put it on paper is really the act of thinking, though there's the added step of encoding it into a language.

But if you don't have the basic thinking skills, you're kind of dead in the water. So you can imagine how a lot of kids, for example, who don't have the right kind of training, they go in and take that SAT or ACT test where it says, here's a quote, here's an opinion, do you agree or disagree? Think now.

And a lot of kids, I watch them, they freeze up. I can't think. I don't have an opinion. I don't know what to say. And so that blankness can be overwhelming. So in our system, we move the child through a process of what we call the structural units or the different ways to extract ideas and organize them in our syllabus from that dictated content, which is pretty easy. Everyone can be successful right away. Even the most reluctant writer can be successful rewriting an Aesop fable, and they have fun with it too.

And then we move them towards that blank page where essentially you have to say what you think and come out of it. It's not a sudden leap. It's not a violent process, if you will. It's a very gradual and natural development of these cognitive skills.

Ashley: That's neat. I like the way that you move from starting out small and working yourself up to the big part, so when you do sit down in front of the SAT, you're not freaked out. You can really think it through, because you've had step by step instruction.

I have a question for you. One of the things I hear a lot from home schoolers is how do I teach the reluctant writer? And I know you touched on it a little bit. But how do you encourage that reluctant writer to start writing?

Andrew: One thing that immediately makes it more possible is the fact that you've got the content right there. You don't have to think of a story. You don't have to think of what you're writing about. You've got a little keyword outline. Let's say it's on an Aesop fable, something like the Hare and the Tortoise. So you read the first sentence, you put down a few keywords in your outline. Read the next sentence, choose two or three keywords, and you make this little outline.

You put the original away. And then you've got this little outline. It's got words like teasing, tortoise, slow. So you say, can I make a sentence out of that? Oh yeah, I probably could. The hare was teasing the slow tortoise. And boom, you've got the first sentence of the story.

It's almost like giving kids some Lego pieces, and they don't have to create something out of nothing, or form a blob of clay into something that looks good. They've got pieces. They can put it together with the words we give them, the words they extract from the story, and the words they know, and they're off to a great start.

And one of the reasons any reluctant writer is reluctant is because they've had a bad experience in the past. When you think about it Ashley, the only reason any of us don't want to do something is because we've failed to be successful in the past, or we've had something which caused us fear or anxiety about that activity.

I, for example, flat out refuse to ever again for any reason and for no amount of money will I ever do it, get on a snowboard. Why? Because the last time I did it was so miserable, so awful, so frustrating, so tedious, so painful, so embarrassing, so everything bad, I just won't do it again. So a lot of children in academics, they will have had some kind of horrible frustrating painful failing type of experience. If that happens a few times then they just will do anything to not do that. And I think that's where we get a lot of the reluctance in writing. Somehow, somewhere along the line, they got an assignment or an activity or were in a class or turned to a language arts workbook and opened a page, and it said, write something. And what they came out with or failed to come out with was so bad, they said, I'm not good at that.

And as soon as you believe you're not good at something, then you don't want to do it anymore. As soon as you start to believe that maybe you are or could become better at something, then you're willing to do it again.

And that's where our list of stylistic techniques is so powerful and effective. Because what we do is give a very simple little list, maybe starting out with just one or two things to do. So rewrite the fable, and put in an -ly word, an adverb, and then give the kids a nice long list of adverbs to choose from.

That's what we recommend in our system, is that you give children nice long lists of words, so they can scan the list. Then they write, the hare was teasing the slow tortoise, and they scan the list, and go meanly. Cruelly, viciously. That would work. Let's use that one. The hare was viciously teasing the slow tortoise, and suddenly you're excited, because you've improved the original story in some small way, or at least you feel like you have, and so there's some excitement and energy and willingness to keep going and to try again.

And when you've got the thing, it's something you can be proud of. I think that's the best way to turn around an attitude. Do something that will ensure success or perceived success.

Ashley: That's great. I remember my mom used to always tell this story. When she first took us to your workshop, both my sister and I were kicking and screaming the whole way. And it was an hour away, but by the time we had finished the day, we both wrote non-stop the entire way home. She uses that as a great example that what you're teaching really does work. And the way you start out slow, with specific requirements, stylistic techniques, and then moving and adding more, really does work for children.

Andrew: So that's how your mom became such a big fan of our stuff. Because she had the reluctant writer problem, and I probably didn't even know that when you walked in. I probably thought, here's a couple of kids, they don't know what this is going to be like. And then I just teach it the way it is. And the magic is in the system, not magic, power. The power is in the system, not the personality. My class may be funny cause I tell jokes, but there are hundreds and hundreds of people all over the country teaching with this system and getting similar transformative results.

Ashley: That's neat. How do you suggest doing this for multiple kids? Do you give them all the same source text, or do you give them different levels of source text, or is it just that the stylistic techniques are different? How do you incorporate multiple age levels into this?

Andrew: That's a good question. I like personally to teach groups with children of three to four years' span. I don't have any problem at all teaching a group of kids 7 to 10 years old, maybe even the really reluctant 11 year old thrown in. And of course one of the things I teach in the seminar to

parents and teachers is to start with a source text, a bit of information written out, that is at or preferably below the level of the reader.

And so I am often using, even with older kids or adults, a rather simple source text. Aesop fables are great, because nobody ever complains about Aesop fables. You can use them with 2nd graders, or with 10th graders. Nobody complains that they are too easy or too simple. You can use the same source text with a very wide range. Kids 3 to 4 years apart.

Beyond that, you can start to divide, but I think most families, if they're going to do it at home, could easily divide their kids into probably two chunks, the older 2 or 3, and the younger 2 or 3, depending on how many they've got. And then what you can do is customize the stylistic techniques checklist for children in different subgroups. Even individually, you can do that. So you can say, you top kid, you've learned your four stylistic techniques. You have to do your -ly, who/which, adjective, and here, you next kid down, you just work with the -ly and the strong verb, and here you little kid, just work with the -ly word. And what you do then is you watch and as it becomes easy, meaning they can do it without much help and it doesn't sound too goofy, you can gradually expand the checklist for each of the children at their own speed.

And we all know, and I'm sure you may discover this if you have kids someday Ashley that older doesn't necessarily mean they're ahead in terms of writing or reading aptitude. It is very common in a family, especially a large one, to have a child who is a year or 2 or 3 younger reading circles around an older sibling or having a much easier time with writing. So you wouldn't even connect this with grade level or age. You would just expand the complexity as mastery is attained, and don't worry about the speed. It's like you're all on a pathway, and it doesn't matter how fast you get to the end. You're all making progress, and it's going well.

Our approach works very well in mixed age groups. It works very well in co-op settings where you have kids of a wide age range, and even in schools. If you had a whole room full of children who were all in 6th grade, even if they were born on the exact same day, you'd have probably a 2-3 "grade" range in terms of reading and or writing aptitude.

That's part of the reason I think we've had such good success, adaptability in this way. And I encourage people whenever they're looking for curriculum, look for things you can do with 2 or 3 of the children that are closest together in age all at once. The last thing you want to do in a home school with 5 children, have 5 different "grade" levels going, and 5 different workbooks of every subject to have to monitor and check and answer. You'd be running around like crazy.

I think your mom discovered this too, didn't she? That teaching everyone together is a lot more efficient and a lot more fun, and probably even more real learning occurs when there's this synergy.

Ashley: We had many discussions that came out of us all learning together that we wouldn't have had if we were each doing our own thing in our bedroom. We had those times too. But a lot of it was taught together.

Switching tracks. One thing is I know you've had had boys and home schooled them. Do you have any tips and tricks with home schooling boys, the way they interact.

Andrew: Personally, I only have one boy out of 7 children. So I thought I was an expert, but discovered I was only an expert in girls and that boys were a bit different.

On the other hand, I've had the opportunity to teach a lot of other people's boys in my past life as a violin and music type of classes I've done in my home town and traveling around the country doing shorter term workshops. I also had the great privilege of learning some of the very interesting facts about the neurological and physiological differences between boys and girls, how they hear differently, see differently, handle stress and pain very differently.

This is not a personality thing. This is the neuro-physiological differences. I put some of that together in a talk that I've given at many conferences, and it's also available on audio or on DVD from us, *Teaching Boys And Other Kids Who Would Rather Be Making Forts All Day*, which is a title that grabs a lot of moms as you can imagine.

Not to go into great detail, because I'm sure we don't have time, there's a man named Dr. Leonard Sax. He wrote a book called *Why Gender Matters*. His website is www.whygendermatters.com. He was a pediatrician, working in New Jersey, about 15, 18 years ago. He started to notice a rapidly increasing number of moms bringing in boys saying we believe this child as an attention deficit issue. Would you please prescribe an appropriate medication?

And of course, Dr. Sax would often evaluate the child and say, he looks like a perfectly normal boy to me, and decline to prescribe the medication. And the same mom with the same boy a few weeks later and another note from the school saying we really, really think this child would benefit from some medication. Would you please reconsider? And Sax began to wonder if teachers and administrators, if people in schools, knew what

doctors very often learn about boys, and that is that most boys don't hear as well as most girls.

Now, I think most moms figure this out pretty quickly. Sometimes even before they have boys, but they marry one and realize that they don't hear what they should, especially when they're talking to them. But the research is very clear that from birth on, a majority of boys do not hear as soft sounds as a majority of girls. There's all sorts of research. Dr. Sax's book, *Why Gender Matters*. His presentations are packed with this. It's not disputable. It's clear that in many different ways, all different ages, this is true. And of course, it kind of flies in the face of the modern psychology that so many teachers have been trained in which is that boys and girls are the same and equal in every way and it's only individual differences that would do this. There's no gender-based generality that can be made.

But the research, the evidence, is not in favor. So what Dr. Sax did, he took some of this research to share with the teachers and administrators of the schools in his area. And he quickly discovered two things. Number one, nobody had ever seen anything like this. And number two, nobody wanted to see it. It was counter to what they believed, and they felt threatened.

But Dr. Sax realized if you got a little guy in a class, and he's not hearing well what's going on, you can bet he's going to have an attention issue. I'd stand up and walk away. You can't do that when you're in a public prison, I mean classroom.

So he really did quite a bit of research, and I have found it fascinating. It helps me understand my own children better, both the boys and the girls. When you realize that yes, actually that is pretty clear that the boys and the girls hear differently and see differently and handle stress and pain differently. If you want to get the full scoop, you should read Dr. Sax's book. I highly recommend it for every parent. And his second book, called *Boys Adrift*, equally if not more valuable the 5 factors derailing the success of young men in America today.

In terms of very quickly, what can you glean from that and apply in home school? Number one, talk louder to your boys. I figured that out a long time ago, as most moms do. If I teach a little group of children, I'll put the boys on one side, the girls on another, and I'll just stand next to the boys and talk as loud as I want, and they can hear me easily, and the girls don't feel threatened. Deal with it.

Boys will make noises. It's so, you've probably noticed this with your little brother, boys will sometimes just start tapping stuff and making little

noises. And you just get irritated. Would you stop that? And of course, the kid's like, stop what? What am I doing? You're making noise. Oh, I didn't notice. Because they don't hear it. They're not sensitive to that in the same way a lot of girls are.

I talk to so many groups and I'll say that, and all the moms will say, that is exactly the case. The girl is like, mom, tell him to quit. I can't concentrate. It's irritating. Boys don't even know they're doing it. So you build bridges. You say to the girl, you're going to have to learn in a distraction-filled environment. It's part of growing up, so here's an opportunity to deal with it. You might decide you want to marry one of those someday. And you go to the boy, you're going to have to learn to control your body. So when you're making a noise and it's irritating people, I'm going to give you a little signal, I'll put up a finger in the air. When you see that I have a finger in the air, you look around and see which part of your body's moving and stop it.

Vision is another thing. Boys are much more tuned into direction and speed and motion. And girls for the most part are much more tuned into color and texture. And it has to do with the way the optic nerve is connected to the rods and cones in the retina. Again, it's not behavioral. It's not psychological. It's not personality. It's the way the body is wired.

Now, there are of course a few exceptions. If you're going to make a general statement and say, most girls don't hear as soft of sounds as most girls, you're going to have to acknowledge that there will be some exceptions and that some boys will hear softer sounds than some girls, and some boys will see color and texture better than they see motion and speed, because there is a spectrum in individual differences. But the statistical generalizations are valid. And so when we're trying to understand girls and boys in general better, we can pay attention.

This is why boys will respond to motion. I think this is why boys more easily become addicted to video games than girls, because the motion and speed stimulates them. It gives them this engagement that the girls don't seem to have the same craving for, not in the same numbers.

So when you're teaching boys, move around more. Wave your arms, pound on the table, shout at them. They love it. Stress. Men and women, boys and girls, males and females handle stress very differently. This was so revealing to me. There's this whole concept that humans and mammals in general will have a fight or flight response. But actually it's only true with male animals. Female mammals and humans of course too have an almost opposite reaction under stress. They won't fight or flight. They'll try to disappear, huddle together, fade away. Boys are much more likely to have tantrums where they go jumping around and pounding things,

screaming. Girls are more likely to curl up on the couch, pull a blanket over their head and cry quietly, retreat.

So when we're home schooling, and we're thinking, there's some stress involved with home education. I think we would all agree with that. Sometimes we say, son, sit down, and do this hard math. When actually we might be better off to say, son, stand up here at the counter and do this math. If boys are going to handle stress better by moving around, standing at the counter and working might be easier. I've met adult men who've set up their whole office so they can sit on a high chair or stand up the whole time, working on a computer. You'll meet a lot of men who say, sitting all day in school was physically painful for me.

And you'll meet home school moms, once you get past that first year, where you have to do school at home and give up on the little desks and the raising the hand and the flag on the wall and starting at 8:30. Some people can keep going with that for a while, but I think most people get to a point where the reason we're home educating is so that we're not doing school at home. We actually want to do a different type of education here. And then they start to realize, it's okay if the boy jumps on the trampoline while he's trying to recite his multiplication tables, or stand at the kitchen counter to do his math, or go up in the tree house and get his essay done. Whatever the task is. We have so much more flexibility and can meet the neurological and personal needs of children so much better.

Usually, that becomes more apparent when we give the boys a little more freedom. They function a little better. That's it in a nutshell. The talk is real good, *Teaching Boys And The Kids Who Would Rather Be Making Forts All Day*, and also Dr. Sax's book which I don't sell. I don't know, maybe your mom does. *Why Gender Matters*. Tremendously valuable compendium of information. And then again, the newer book, *Boys Adrift*. And I think Sax's newest book is out now, it's called *Girls on the Edge*. He's looking at not only the neurological factors affecting children but also now the environmental and social factors that are so disruptive to many families.

Ashley: Wow. That's a lot of good information, especially, I'm not a parent yet. Hopefully one day. But parents and other listeners, just to understand their children better. And I'm looking at teaching, so it's a lot of good information for me as a teacher on how to handle a classroom and see that the boys, it's okay for them to want to move around. That's part of how they learn.

Andrew: Dr. Sax works primarily with public educators. He has an organization called the Association for Single Sex Public Education. The statistics are overwhelming. Every time you segregate the boys and girls and you take

your two first grade classrooms and divide them into a grade one boys and a grade one girls, or even if you have a school that's not big enough to do that and you have a grade 1-3 boys and do a combo class of just boys. And a grade of 1-3 combo class of just girls. Every school that's done it has had improvement in test scores and lowering of behavior problems.

And Sax is saying, you're not giving them a separate education. You're giving them a more appropriate learning environment and therefore everyone can learn better. People maybe work with church youth groups or Sunday Schools or even in the home school co-op situation, there's a lot of good reasons why teachers might want to study this up and say, we've got enough kids, let's do this. Let's do the boys separate and the girls separate. And then learn and study. And that's what Dr. Sax does. He helps teach teachers and parents and any interested people how to teach boys and girls more appropriately.

It has to do more with just the environment. Sometimes it's the way you present concepts that lock in better to a boy's way of thinking and seeing the world and responding. So that's what he does. He's got another organization called the Association for Single Sex Public Education. I don't know the website right offhand, but it can be very easily found.

Ashley: That's neat. That sounds really interesting. I really like the idea of doing home school co-ops separately, if that's the way our children are going to learn. I feel like we should give them that opportunity. That's a really neat idea.

One question I'm asking all of our speakers is what are you passionate about? What really lights your fire, so to speak?

Andrew: I like to constantly ask this question of myself and challenge people to ask this question. What are we really doing here? Whatever the circumstance is. What are we really doing in our family today? What are we really doing choosing to home school and keep our kids at home? What are we really doing in establishing this classical education co-op? Or what are really doing as a whole movement of home schoolers?

Because when we ask that question, it starts to help clarify our real purposes and goals and then prioritize things much more effectively I think. There is a great, great pressure to be like the world. A great weight, especially on the new home school mom to be sure that she is "covering all the bases," "keeping up," "not destroying her kids." This constant underlying subconscious, semi-conscious, sometimes even external and obvious pressure to do schooling like the institutions. So my passion really is to help parents discover not only is that not necessary, it possibly isn't even a good idea.

I think you know, and I'm sure your mom knows, and I think we're both fans of a couple books that really help point people in this direction of thinking. What are we really doing here, and do we really want to do it like the institution down the street? John Taylor Gatto's book, *An Underground History of American Education*. Have you read that one Ashley?

Ashley: I haven't. My mom keeps telling me I need to.

Andrew: When you get some time. It's a big book, but it gives you a real phenomenal picture of how we got into this educational mess we have in this country. We spend more money than anyone in the world, and at the moment, we're getting worse results than almost every other developed country and things aren't getting much better in most places. In fact, they seem to be getting worse, the drop out rates, literacy rates, kids saying they hate school. Everything seems to be getting worse, and it's kind of paradoxical. Because we've been talking about it and throwing money at it and basing political decisions on it now with increasing intensity for several decades.

So why is this so? That's a huge question. And Gatto in his book goes into great detail as to how the system was set up. Who set up the educational system we have in this country. Why did they do it the way that they did it, and what were the objectives? And what are the results of this system? It's a very important thing for every parent and for teachers. I've met teachers who have read this book, and said, he's right on the mark. But of course, they're trapped into the system that is in a way not designed to produce the kind of education we so desperately need in today's world.

He points out, essentially it was created by German psychologists to imitate a Prussian, system. And a lot of things we have, grade levels and graded classrooms and letter grades and little desks and raising your hand and speak when you get permission, all this. These traditions and customs really were pulled from the Prussians, who were the first modern nation to say if we could pull the kids out of the home, put them in a school and train them, we could have a more efficient workforce, a more efficient economy, a more efficient military.

And so we pulled the German psychologists, the progeny of Wilhelm Wundt, who became the teachers of John Dewey were thinking in this way. And it was supported philosophically by the new Darwinists, the Utopianists, the idea that man is evolving, man is getting better, if we could control education, we could improve society. And so this desire to

create a better world by controlling and creating better children was adopted by the new modern Utopian agnostics, if you will.

And it was financed, and this is what's so fascinating, the big industrialists. Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Mellon. If you go today to the University of Chicago, the School of Education, Columbia Teacher's College, whose name is on the wall there in bronze? Where did all the money come from to fund this new education? Well, it came from those industrialists who wanted very specifically, and they didn't hide it. They made no deceit here. It was publicly announced, if you will, that we want an educational system that will produce reliable voters, factory workers, and consumers who will do, vote, and buy exactly the way they're told to because this is the way we will create a powerful industry, economy, and nation.

And of course, it worked. We did this. What one other author, Oliver DeMille, who wrote *A Thomas Jefferson Education*, he terms it a Soviet conveyor belt, because it became non-optional after the beginning of compulsory education in the 1860s and '70s. It was illegal to not put your children in school, and then the schools gained a tremendous amount of influence on the intellect and behavior of everyone in society. This creating of efficient people who were good cogs in a system produced an industrial powerhouse.

That worked really very effectively for 60-70 years. But as we moved into the information age, out of the industrial, we started to have a need then for people who could think. Who weren't just going to sit around, do what they were told. We needed people who had the type of problem-solving skills and the type of initiative that had gradually been trained out of the country. This is where we stand today. Bill Gates is even saying, the educational system at its very core is not meeting the needs of a modern society, and if we don't change, we're not going to keep up with the world.

That's from a materialistic perspective, and I would agree with him on that, although I would agree that his motives are not necessarily the right ones. What I think we as parents, particularly as Christian parents if we're looking at it from a survival of Western culture, if we're looking at the coming crises looming on the edge, we desperately need leadership in this country in every area. We need good leadership in industry and in business. We clearly have a dearth of real leadership in politics. And I think that people on both sides of the aisle would agree that politics has become so very pragmatic that it's rare you find someone who's willing to make a decision or cast a vote based on principles. It's always a case of what's going to help me keep my power or get re-elected.

We clearly have lack of leadership in churches, families. I think what we're really looking at here in terms of can we raise up a small but significant contingent of people who have had a different type of education, not the conveyor belt program, learn everything in the same way according to the same schedule so that you know exactly what to think, but can we raise up kids who become adults that are learning how to think. And so that's why I'm very excited about Gatto's book, also about DeMille's book, which I know your mom also is enthusiastic about, *The Thomas Jefferson Education Model*.

And that segues into my teaching of writing, because as I said early on, you can't learn to write without also learning to think. And so we teachers of writing, whether we're doing it in the home or the co-op or the classroom, we're the subversive group. We're the ones who are saying, you can't give answer ABCD. You have to produce a thought here. You have to learn how to ask hard questions, and hear some answers, and articulate those answers. Because that's the process by which we may be able to survive this coming crisis.

And on behalf of my generation Ashley, I will apologize to you and your generation. We have not left you a better world than we found. We have not left you a better, more stable, more hopeful America than we had when we were your age. The truth is, I think you know, and I think almost everyone my age knows, that there could be some very major crises right around the corner. Some economic things that could just shatter people's concepts of reality. You could see major geo-political reorganizations in your time. There could be a third world war. There's any number of things brewing that make this not such an easy time to be young, or to be old unless you can re-up and die quickly before the power cream hits the fan.

But you, your generation, and your children are going to have to weather some real crisis. And I think my passion is to say, if that's true, how do we help everyone? Whatever their situation. Educate, character, and knowledge, and skills that are going to give them the wisdom and the virtue and the ability to get through some coming difficult times. That was a long answer to your short question.

Ashley: That's one of my passions in a way. I really enjoy helping people, whether that's through education. That's part of why I'm pursuing teaching. And I know I haven't quite decided which direction I'm going to take it completely. I'm in the process. Just being able to have an impact on somebody and hopefully produce that thinking and that righteousness that we're called to have.

This sounds really exciting to hear someone else say it as well. That's really neat to hear.

If you could start home schooling all over again, what is one thing you would do differently knowing what you know now?

Andrew: That's a very good question. And it is one of the great blessings of having a larger family. Especially spread out. My oldest is 30, and my youngest is 10, and so you do get that second wave of wisdom. Some of the things I thought were really important when my oldest kids were young turned out not to be all that significant. And some of the things I didn't think about enough when they were young, I now think a lot about. I'll give you a couple examples. The first one would be academics. I am not convinced that academics, particularly as pertains to "grade level" and matching ability to age, is important at all.

I think as long as good learning and thinking and discussion and basic skills are building, a child's character is far more important than whether they are "behind" or "ahead" in science or math or reading. If I could say one thing to young home schooling parents or future home schooling parents such as yourself, don't worry about academics. Teach basic skills, teach at the point of need, nurture your kids, but don't get caught up in this, he's 9 years old, and so he should be in 4th grade, but we're still in the 3rd grade math book. We're failing miserably.

That's one of the reasons people will put their children back in school. They'll fill like they're not keeping up. Of course, the kid goes back to school. He's not keeping up there anyway, so they ultimately pull him back home, and they all become a better family because of it. But I am convinced really that the academic achievement particularly in the younger years during home schooling is probably one of the last important things. Whereas the culture you create at home by far is the most important. What are you doing to build the habits? What are you doing to build the virtues, the character?

And most parents would agree with that and say, it would be better to be totally illiterate and love God with all your heart and have that integrity, honesty, purity, and charity, and yet very often, that great dragon of scholastica and academics raises its head and threatens to derail the building of culture at home.

The other thing I wish I would have done differently, I would have paid a lot more attention to peer relationships. I think that I grew up in a time where my parents had no clue who I was with at any time. I didn't know any of the people at home. They didn't know any of the people in the neighborhood. And it was a very dangerous time, and only by the grace of

God did I survive my childhood. But I've seen now as a parent how significant, for better or for worse, peer relationships can have on children as they're growing up. I didn't pay enough attention to that when the oldest kids were younger, and now I pay a lot of attention and think very carefully about the social circumstances and the types of friends that my younger children have. That's I think a very important thing, and I think a lot of parents maybe don't realize the significance or the importance of that later on.

Those would be my two bits of advice. Don't worry too much about academics, and keeping up, and think carefully about the people your children spend time with. Next to you and the books you read, that's going to be one of the most significant factors.

Ashley: That's really great advice. Thank you. Before we wrap up for today, I want to ask if there's a way that our listeners can get back in touch with you, your website or things like that.

Andrew: Yeah. Our website is www.excellenceinwriting.com. And we have a lot of information on that website. There's a downloads section that has articles I've written on various subjects in the teaching of writing and developing language skills and education in general. There's also some audio downloads of other talks that I've given, which can be, a couple of them are free. A couple of them cost \$3 as an audio download.

You can download our whole catalog if you're interested in seeing our whole line of products. You can also read testimonials and you can find out about support groups, for those of your listeners who are already using our writing program, we have several different Yahoo! groups, one for home school parents, co-op teachers, school teachers. A Thomas Jefferson Education Yahoo! group and that information is available on our website on the Help Support tab. And then if people want to write to me, there's a form to write in to our website and that will be forwarded to me if someone else in our organization can't answer it.

And there's an 800 number, and you're welcome to call any time.

Ashley: Perfect. Thank you very much. Thank you so much for your time today. I've really enjoyed it.

Andrew: It's a pleasure, Ashley, and I'm happy to see that you're following the path of becoming a thinking adult and a thinking mom and getting into education and that you're facilitating this whole thing. I think it'll be a great thing for many people, and God bless you.

Ashley: Alright. God bless you too.

Resources

Andrew Pudewa:

www.ExcellenceInWriting.com

Christian Parenting Association

Informal & Conversational Interviews with 16 Top Homeschooling Experts – Not a Formal Presentation, but questions you'd like to ask our experts!

www.HomeschoolSuperHeroes.com

FREEBIES: Monday Meals, Tuesday Tips, Wednesday Words, Thursday Tools and much more:

www.CurriculumConnection.net/blog

How to Get It All Done-FREE Report

www.CurriculumConnection.net

FREE Mini Course on Teaching Writing

www.HowToTeachWriting.com

12 Month Christian Parenting Course

www.ChristianParentingAssociation.org