



I Want My Home Back: Keep Your Home Clean While Homeschooling

An Interview with Stephanie Buckwalter
by Ashley Ortega

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Ashley Ortega & Stephanie Buckwalter, *I Want My House Back: Keep Your Home Clean While Homeschooling*

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Ashley: Hello. I'm so glad you joined us today for our Home School Super Heroes Telesummit. My name is Ashley Ortega, and I'm thrilled to be able to have Stephanie Buckwalter join us today.

Stephanie is a wife, mother, homemaker, home schooler, author, teacher and speaker. Even though that sounds like a lot, she spreads those things out so they don't stomp all over each other in her life. She likes to read, write, and spend time with her family.

Stephanie has had several books published for the school library market. One of her stories called *Chocolate Milk and Bologna* has been published in the *Chicken Soup for the Chocolate Lover's Soul*. It is a humorous story about growing up in a big family in a small town.

She has also written articles for newsletters, training manuals, computer system documentation, encyclopedia entries, and more.

Hi Stephanie, how are you?

Stephanie: Hi Ashley. Good to be here.

Ashley: Good. Just to get started, if you could tell our listeners a little bit about you and your family and your approach to home schooling.

Stephanie: As you said, I'm a mother. My husband's name is Kurt, and we've been married for 15 years now. We have 5 children, and we home schooled them from the beginning. They are from pre-K to 9th grade right now. And for those of you who like labels, I have a left brain child, a right brain child, a struggling learner, a learning disabled child, and a gifted child.

So our kids run the gamut. We have a little bit of everything.

When you go to my home schooling site, it's got a little bit of everything on it. I'm focusing on the struggling learners. We have been following a classical style education, although that's not always possible with a struggling learner. Last year, for example, we had a co-op, and my son was studying Latin and Greek, so we're going the true classical route where you learn the classical languages too.

We started experimenting with doing classes out of the home. We started a co-op with 5 other families, so we're expanding our home schooling horizons every year just a little bit.

Ashley: That's really neat. We did a couple co-ops while I was home schooling. It was a really neat experience for us.

I know you're a hero to our listeners in the area of maintaining the home and keeping things clean. I know you have a philosophy or a book about Kamikaze Cleaning. Could you explain what that means to our listeners?

Stephanie: Yes. Kamikaze cleaning was born out of desperation. During the time I was having all those kids, I had 10 pregnancies in 10 years. I would go through the first 3 months, which were the hardest ones. And sometimes I'd be on bed rest, sometimes not, but I very rarely felt good. I kind of like the house go for 10 years plus. And when you do that, it got to the point where I wouldn't let anybody in. It was so horrible, and then I finally felt good after the last child, a couple years into it. I had to do something with my house, and I couldn't face it.

And I'm the kind of person who has to do everything at once. I can't do this, go to a room a day or just clear out a box a day. That doesn't work for me very well. I have to do the whole thing, big picture, get it all done at once. So what I did was I went to the house and I just started throwing everything in boxes that I didn't need in my current lifestyle. After 10 years, I didn't need everything that was out. I started throwing it in boxes and putting it in a staging area.

And then over the next year after that, that was my Kamikaze cleaning phase, and then the year after that, I slowly went through all those boxes to deal with what was in them, but I couldn't deal with everything all at once. So I put it in boxes, got it out of my mind and got my house back a little bit, enough to let people in and entertain. And then I moved on to dealing with the nitty gritty of what I had in my house all those years.

Ashley: That's neat. Building off of that, I bet a lot of our listeners, I haven't had time to accumulate as much stuff because I'm just recently married, but are there any tips and tricks to going through those boxes, sorting things out, and deciding what you should keep and what you shouldn't keep?

Stephanie: Yes. The interesting thing is I'm very right brained. So I like to see the big picture, everything all at once, live my life up in the clouds and deal with the mundane of cleaning the house every once a while. Going back and forth between the two worlds creates tension.

But on the practical side by throwing everything in the boxes, I just got it out of sight, and then when I went back through the boxes, I sorted them according to what I had. And being a visual, big picture person, it was very helpful. Then I could see, I have 7 boxes of office supplies. I didn't really have that many. I don't need that many. What do I really need and what can I give to someone else who needs it more than I do?

There was also this whole emotional part of getting rid of stuff. Because as a right brain person, you imagine stuff into your life when it comes into your home. I could do this and that with it. And it becomes a part of your life and it becomes very hard to get rid of. Some people don't understand that, but I do. I understand that once it's imagined in your life whether you ever use it or not, that's why it never works to say, have you used this in a year? No, but I can imagine using it in 6 years. And then it never leaves the house.

I went through a whole process of developing a system to get rid of stuff that involves finding places to give it away. On the practical end, just sorting it into types of things, you can see how much of something you have. When it comes down to it, you're limited by space. That's your only limitation. You're never limited by imagination. You can imagine everything in your life being used at some point in your life. But that's not the point. When you get to the point that you have so much stuff, and it's hard to deal with emotionally to have all that stuff in your house. It is healthy to eventually go through it. And like I said, I had 10 years of accumulation.

So seeing how much you have, figuring out how much space you have to store that type of item, that pretty much determines what you can keep and what you can't.

Ashley: I really like the idea of being able to give it away to someone that needs it. I think that's really cool. What about someone more similar to my situation that things are somewhat organized, or we don't have a lot of stuff yet. Are there ways to either avoid collecting stuff, or organizing it as we get it?

Stephanie: That's my third book that I mention on my website that I haven't written yet. So I get to do a little preview of my book here. If you're a right brain person, my series is specific to right brained house keepers. And there are three stages I see right brained house keepers in. One of them is where I was at my lowest point. I needed to Kamikaze clean to get the stuff out of the way, throw it in boxes. It was already being stored, it was just being stored visually. So I just stored it in boxes.

The second stage is where I'm hovering right now, which is, life is busy. I can't stay on top of everything all the time, so I do an occasional Kamikaze clean, and when I have time I go through the boxes. And then there's the third stage, which is where you are. You're just getting started. You haven't had time to accumulate a lot of things. And there's still hope. You'll never get that back until life blindsides you then you might. But there are ways out of it now.

And that is to develop a system. I just recently wrote a blog post on how when we bring something home, if you're the type that drops it in spot and doesn't deal with it right away, that's a big clue that you're a right brained person. And the biggest thing you can do to help yourself is to have a plan for what comes into your house ahead of time.

For example, the things that come in that can cause the biggest problems are mail, books—in my case, because I love books. It could be whatever your craft supplies are, something you collect. Clothes come in and out. Newspapers if you subscribe to those. I don't know if anyone actually subscribes that much anymore. But things you know, household goods, supplies, food. All those things come into your house on a regular basis, and you know that. So if you plan for where they're going to be.

For example, for me, it's very easy to keep my kitchen organized, because I have a place for all the food that comes in. The refrigerator, the freezer, the pantry. Dishes go in cabinets. And so it's easy for me to maintain that. That's the one area of my house that doesn't fall apart ever, even in those 10 years.

But for me, the downsides are books and mail. Because we home school, so we have all the home schooling stuff coming in. That can get pile up. This looked interesting, but you don't have time to check it out, so it gets shoved aside. If I had a plan for the stuff I'm using now, and the stuff I'm sorting through another year, because kids have outgrown it but I've got another one coming up, this is the stuff I'd like to look at this year to see if we can work it in. The key is having that plan.

And if your house is already that way, or starting to get that way, then if you were on my newsletter list, you just got a 4 page report called "Getting Your ACT Together." If you hear this message, and you'd like that, just go to my website and email me on the contact form, and I'll send you a copy of that 4 page report. A is for analyze, C is for categorize, and T is for take action. If your house is tending towards messiness, see what it is that's collecting. Analyze where it's collecting. Categorize what's collecting. Is it mail? What is it? Where does it need to go? And then put that system into action.

That's the short version of it, but I use the acronym ACT.

Ashley:

That's neat. It's something, I know for me, if I can visualize it, I feel like I'm more right brain, but I still have a little bit of left brain in me. If I can see, then I'll remember it better. It's a good way to remember the steps that we have to go through for cleaning.

I know you mentioned a little bit about home schooling. I know this can be a big thing for home school moms, especially when they do have so many books and school supplies and it's not put in a classroom. Some people have school classrooms in their home, and some don't. For those that don't, is there a way you keep it organized. If it's in the middle of your living room, or a kid's bedroom, how do you organize all that school stuff?

Stephanie: I think the people that don't have a room are more organized than people that do. We do ours in the dining room, so we have a dual function room, and then next to it we have a formal living room, but it has bookshelves and a couple of cubicles, one for me and one for the kids for school. That one I find harder. But the key I think is using see-through containers so you can see what's in them. And then logically sort them.

Some of them may sort their school materials by subject, by grade, by student. It depends on how you run your home school, really. I think the best thing to do when organizing any room is to think of two things. What's the most convenient place to store it and how often will I need it? So if you need it often, it needs to be really convenient. And if you need it sometimes, you can store it another room.

Convenience is the biggest thing, no matter where you home school. Whether you have a room to yourself or you do it in a common area in the home, have everything convenient. Store it where you can reach it easily. Otherwise it won't get used that year, and at the end of the year, you'll think, I had all this stuff here and I never used it.

Ashley: That's really neat. I know it's probably similar, but I know you also put up a blog post recently about keeping children's rooms organized and clean. What kind of tips do you have for that?

Stephanie: The kids' room is interesting. We have three kids' rooms in our house. The boys share a room, and then we have a little girl. And the thing about a kid's room is it's really a microcosm of household management. You can really teach your kids a lot about life and work ethic and self control and discipline just by working on helping them maintain their bedrooms. Especially if they share a bedroom, that gives you some more opportunity to learn some of the things that they can learn from their room. Just training for life skills. You're going to have to maintain a house eventually in some fashion, whether you're married or single.

Especially if you're single, then you'll have to keep a house. You develop a work ethic by deciding your attitude towards cleaning your room, the things you keep in your room—are they precious to you or things you can trash? It develops character. There's service. You can serve the other

person by helping them clean their part of the room. Diligence. Do you keep to the schedule? Do you do your job well? If you share a room, there's division of labor. There's prioritizing if your parents make you do work before play. There's so much that kids can learn just from cleaning their room.

And your part is to help them develop the schedule. Set the guidelines. This is what a clean room looks like, and if you have struggling learners or kids with process problems, then you may take a picture of what a clean room looks like. Or if you have kids that like to argue a lot on the other end of the spectrum, that are really smart and really think they know everything, take a picture of the room when it's clean, and say, this is what a clean room looks like. That way they can't argue, back and forth. I have some of each in the house. We have the arguer. And with the photograph, there's nothing to argue with. It doesn't look like this. It's not clean.

Then you train them. And you really have to help, especially the younger ones. There is an element of training. We sometimes think cleaning is easy, but if you struggle with it, you know that it's not. You have to train them in all those things. You also have to be a role model, so if you tend to be messy, which I do, then it helps me to keep my bedroom clean. And it forces me to, so that I can be a role model for them. And also it gives camaraderie. Okay everybody, it's Saturday morning, time to clean your room. They have to go clean theirs and I'll go clean mine. And that will help keep us all accountable.

And it also builds like in the military, when you're in a war together, and you build this camaraderie. Believe it or not, the same thing happens in house keeping with your kids, if they're mimicking what you're doing in your own living space, you can make a big impact on their lives, and they're more willing and likely to do the work.

Ashley: That's neat. I like the idea of accountability, because it holds you as a parent accountable as well as your children at the same time. That's a really neat idea.

As far as organization in a kids' room, is a lot of back to what you were saying in a school room, see through boxes, a lot of shelves? How do you help them keep it somewhat organized with all their toys, games, and different things.

Stephanie: It's changed over time. The organization scheme can change over time. For example, my oldest one is going into high school. Now he doesn't do any of his school work up in his room, but if he did, I would need to consider putting a desk area in there.

Once you have a desk area in a child's room, there's the whole thing of teaching them a basic, rudimentary filing system. You can teach them how to deal with paper, which becomes very important when you're an adult, and how to manage a desk area. Keeping up with supplies and things like that.

The main thing is determining what the room is used for. Is it used for play, for schoolwork, for recreation in the sense of is there a TV with video games? Is it where they entertain their friends, or do they tend to play down in a public area somewhere else in the house. I say down, because we have a basement, on the East Coast, almost everybody has a basement, a first level, and a second level. You hear me talk about down and up, the bedrooms are all upstairs, and in the basement, it's finished, but we've never developed it. We've always saved it for kid play.

And that's the other thing that I was going to mention about organizing. We decided that we have a public area and a private area for the boys to play in. The public area being the basement and the private area being their bedrooms. So when they have kids over that they don't like messing with their stuff, we keep that stuff up in their bedrooms, and when those kids come over, they just can't play upstairs in the bedrooms. But anybody can play in the basement, and it's stuff that we don't mind if something happens to it. Like except for the video games and stuff.

A toy gets broken, it's no one precious, special toy. We've learned to do that to organize. Keep precious stuff in the bedrooms, and only close, trusted friends can go in there. Anybody else can go in the basement. So if your kids play in their rooms and they're younger, and they play with things like Legos or doll houses, you need to have more floor space, and then you need to have a convenient, close at hand storage space for them to put it away. And it helps if they can see where it goes. I used to have a bunch of tubs that were the solid colors, but then I had to label them. Or if they couldn't read, I had to put pictures on them. That can work.

Now those tubs are stronger than the see-through ones, so there's your trade off. Do you want the strong tubs that aren't going to crack, or the heavier ones that you can put a picture on the outside? And it helps when they're younger to go in and help them put things away. And even when they're older, you'll be surprised what kind of conversational topics come up when you're just helping your kids, side by side. Whether it's doing dishes or cleaning your room, you can get some good conversations going. Again, it's that camaraderie being built between you and your kids.

Organization I don't use the closets just for clothes. The other thing I've done is not use dressers. I've gone both ways. Sometimes I've used the

closets not really for clothes, except for nicer clothes. Everything else gets folded and put into drawers. But we've also had times when we haven't used dressers. We put everything in the closet. I buy those little wire shelves that build into squares. You can build them to fit so it's not permanent. It's temporary. And I fold their clothes and put them on those. I put underwear and things in drawers so guests don't see those.

That gives you more floor space in the room. It all depends on what it's used for. So each area can be organized according to what's most practical at the time. And it will change over the years. That's why I used the shelves that collapse that I can take apart after I don't want them. Or they get a dresser when they're older and they need more privacy in their clothing area.

Ashley: That's neat. That's some great things to think about. I don't have kids yet, but even just living in an apartment, I've got a lot less space than I did when I lived in my parent's house. So just taking some of those ideas and thinking, we have a bedroom with a dresser, but it takes up a lot of room. Would it be more convenient to put all those in a closet? So I think you can use this for any room in the house, just to organize yourself.

Stephanie: That's one thing I've learned. I've also done that. I've put dressers in closets several times throughout my life. Even when I was living in apartments too. My kids and their rooms, I'll put a dresser in a closet. I have no problem doing that. As long as I can access the drawers, and it clears out so much space in your room. Cause you're not using the closet effectively in most cases. In most houses, people don't use their closets effectively. Thinking outside the box is perfectly fine.

Ashley: Good. A question I'm asking all of our listeners is what are you passionate about? What really lights your fire?

Stephanie: There are really three areas. I've been like that all my life. I take a 90-day prayer challenge, they say two things, and I pick 10. So I'll give you 3, you get a bonus. They're the three things I have websites on. One of the websites is in the works. But I have www.BusyHomeMaker.com, because that's what my life is right now. I live at home. I home school. I'm at home a lot, and my house fell apart during a lot of my life. And I'm just rebuilding that.

So I'm passionate as I'm rebuilding about the progress I'm making. I want to share it with others. And that's where this whole Kamikaze cleaning thing came from, and I want my house back. So that was my heart's cry. I want my house back. I don't have it any more, cause it was trashed.

And then home schooling, I love to teach. And I didn't know that until I started home schooling. I used to tutor, and I was training in the corporate world, documentation and training type stuff. But I didn't realize how much I really like to teach. And I like to teach in the home school environment cause I like to learn. And I can learn right along with my kids. So that's been real exciting.

Then my other site which I don't have up yet will be for Christian life. That's my other passion, just seeing, I know there's the reaching out to people who are not saved and who are unbelievers, but building up the body of Christ. Helping those who are stuck in life. And actually that's what it says at www.StephanieBuckwalter.com. And it says helping you get unstuck in life. So I guess if you boil it all down to the one, even though it's three areas in my life, it all comes down to the one thing, and that's helping people get unstuck in their life, whether it's home making, home schooling or their Christian walk.

Ashley: That's neat. I really like that title. Helping others get unstuck in their life. That's a neat way to put it all together. I love to teach, and I love helping people develop their Christian life. I like the way you phrased that there. I feel like that's a lot of what you do as a teacher, or even pastors or elders. They're helping others figure out what life is all about as we try to do it at the same time.

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

Stephanie: I didn't know I had a struggling learner when I started out. That covers my answer a little bit. I would have spent more time looking at the different ways to home school before I committed. In home schooling, you don't ever have to commit to one way. Home schoolers are notorious for changing curriculum and everything else. But I would have spent more time listing the people who did home school in the traditional way.

Of course, I told you earlier I was doing the classical model of home schooling, but with a struggling learner, I'm interested in looking into the Un-Schooling way. With him, it just makes so much more sense. I would be more open to non-traditional ways to school. I think every home schooler has to struggle through that at some point, whether it's at the beginning or the end. You have to define for yourself what is school. I guess I didn't do that. I would now. I would go back and say, what is school? What is an education? And what does that really mean?

Ashley: Those are some good questions to ask ourselves. With it being back to school season, is there any advice you would give to our listeners on

getting started right now? In the planning process or as they're beginning school within the next couple of weeks, what they should focus on in the beginning?

Stephanie: Planning your school work ahead. If you're an Un-Schooler, you can't do that, because you go with child-directed material. But you can be planning things you'd like to do, and if it blossoms into a subject that they pursue, that's great. But for the more traditional schoolers, that's one thing I didn't do enough of in the early days, planning ahead during the summer. Planning out the next few months of school.

Part of the reason was because my second son was my struggling learner. And no matter what I planned, it never worked out. Now I have a better idea of the pacing for him. And I can plan that better. Just do as much planning and scheduling of work as you can ahead of time. The one thing I learned from all of my home schooling—thankfully early on—whatever you teach them, they learn. In the sense that the very first standardized test my oldest son took, he did great on everything except spelling. He scored as pre-kindergarten in spelling, and when I looked at that, I went, we forgot to study spelling our first year. That made me feel good about the rest of the things, because it made me realize that whatever I taught him, whether there were gaps or not, he did learn.

And I think that's one thing home schoolers can take comfort in. Plan ahead, because the more planning you do, the more school you can get in, and they will learn it. They will pick it up. Kids are natural learners.

Ashley: I like that idea. Cause I think a lot of home schoolers can get worried or stressed about, am I teaching them the right things? Is this the right way to go? If we just remember what God has shown us to teach them, they're going to learn and understand it. If you miss something, like spelling, then go back the next year, you can fix it then—that sounds bad. But you can learn it then, and be able to just rest in the fact they will learn from you as well.

Stephanie: I have a question for you on that line. You were home schooled. Do you feel like when you finally graduated there was something you somehow missed in your education?

Ashley: Nope. Not at all.

Stephanie: Did your mother and father cover everything that public schools did?

Ashley: There's nothing I could visually guess that I didn't learn in home schooling. There might have been this or that, but there was no big gap. If anything, I felt I was ready now to go to college and be there. I did

college a little differently, because I did it online, but I was able to keep up with the other students just as well as they were with their public education. Honestly, I felt like the biggest thing I got from home schooling was learning how to be self-disciplined, and learning how to work and learn on my own.

That's one thing that even if there was something I missed, I could go back and learn it, because I had the skills now to learn things on my own.

Stephanie: That's great.

Ashley: That was something mom did a really good job at.

Stephanie: That was what I was thinking, even if you do miss something, or you don't match the public schools exactly, you can go back and catch it. You're still not cheated. I grew up in a small town of 3,000 people. My graduating class was 77 people. Even though I went to public school, I was not given the same education as someone who went to a big city high school, especially a rich district.

But I still went to the University of Texas, and I still made it through college. Not to turn off home school. I made it through college. That was my personal struggle. Had nothing to do with how I was schooled.

But the point with home school is whatever you teach them, they are learning. And it may not be the same thing that someone in a private or public school is learning, but they're still learning. So take heart from that. Plan it how you will. And teach it.

Ashley: Before we wrap up our time today, I want to ask you how our listeners can get back in touch with you, with either the cleaning or the home schooling?

Stephanie: I have a main site that links to all the other ones. That's www.StephanieBuckwalter.com. The housekeeping website is www.BusyHomeMaker.com. And if you sign up for my mailing list, you get the Kamikaze book for free. I have a whole house support program there. And that's free. Every month we work on a new room. We work through the whole house year round month by month to get it in order. And my other website is www.BusyHomeSchooler.com. Originally I started that with a general information website. But I'm really starting to focus on the struggling learner and the right brain learner, because that's where my passion is with home schoolers.

Plus I understand them because I'm right brained. Those are my websites.

Ashley: Perfect. Thank you so much for your time today. I've really enjoyed it. I got some great tips from it.

Stephanie: Thank you. I've enjoyed it. I hope people have a great school year.

Ashley: Thank you very much.

Resources

Stephanie Buckwalter:

www.StephanieBuckwalter.com

www.BusyHomemaker.com

www.BusyHomeschooler.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!

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