



# THE STUDENT'S VIEW

## Stumbling into Self-Discipline

By Maria van den Bosch

In the summer after my sixth grade year, my parents took our family on a vacation. My mother often said that big decisions she and Dad made were all made while away from home, and that year's important topic of discussion was whether or not to begin homeschooling their children.

All of their reasons (better education, fostering of faith, etc.) didn't mean much to me. I begged to be homeschooled for the simple reason that I was terrified of the seventh grade teacher. Every night, I pleaded with God to let me be homeschooled. He answered my prayers, though not, I am certain, because of the teacher who made my palms sweat.

I was a relatively undisciplined child, not rebellious, but certainly inclined to be lazy and take the easy way out of things whenever possible. I received impressive grades at school without having to try very hard, which suited my work ethic (or lack thereof) just fine.

The first year of homeschooling was (as anyone who has gone from the school system to home knows, be ye teacher or student), like walking into a glass door. Having escaped from the seventh grade teacher, Mr. Crack-the-Whip, I bounced my way into our kitchen on the first day of school, collected my pile of books and went off to learn.

This lasted ten minutes. My first assignment was reading comprehension, a subject I had excelled in the previous year.

I read the chapter and prepared to answer the questions. Instead of the typical questions ('Why was Sally very happy?'), there were questions like 'In your opinion, how could Sally have done a better job?' or 'What could be an alternate ending to this story?' In a panic, I re-read the story searching for my opinion and the hidden ending. My father patiently explained to me that the answer wasn't in the story.

"Well, how am I supposed to do this then?" I wailed. "This is *impossible!*"

I would love to say that I sorted myself out in a week, and turned into Little Miss Self-Discipline, the model homeschooling student.

It took a year. A year of crying, yelling and slamming books around on my part, and stern talks and infinite patience on the part of my parents. By the time summer arrived, I had made friends in our homeschooling circle and adjusted to my new academic standards. I wouldn't have said I loved homeschooling, but I liked it enough to want to continue. My parents, however, weren't so sure. I had been a brat all year (not that they ever called me that), and had made it hard for them to teach not only me, but my brothers as well. I suppose Our Lord gave them a little nudge again, because they decided to keep going.

I graduated from high school and subsequently attended Christendom College, in Front Royal, VA. I now work as a writer, and my brothers and sisters, who

## THE STUDENT'S VIEW

range in age from six months to fifteen years, are still homeschooled.

My parents were never involved in the “unschooling” method, in the sense that they had (and have) a set curriculum, but they also were very hands-off in the sense that their job was to organize field trips and provide a balanced set of courses. It was not their job to sit and hold our hands throughout each school day.

Teaching myself was exhilarating, yet frightening. The first year, (which I now refer to as the horror year), I didn't finish Math until late July. I hadn't followed the schedule they had set as a guideline for me, so I had to face the consequences. (When I asked Dad what would happen if I just didn't bother with this, he said that I would never pass to eighth grade without seventh grade math completed. He didn't care how long that took me.)

Self-discipline was not the highest goal on my parents list when they decided to homeschool my siblings and me. When I look at the advantages of homeschooling, and the profound impact it has had on my life, self-discipline is not the biggest benefit, though it is certainly very high on my list.

My homeschooling experiences have led me to a stronger faith, a more mature outlook and an increased depth of character. I am certain that in leading my parents to make this decision, Our Lord had all of this in mind for me, as well as for my siblings, but He also knew that I would be a writer, and that I would need to be self-disciplined.

In the career I have chosen to follow, there are many frustrations, setbacks and intense mental and emotional output. I

love to write and would not exchange it for any other career, but I also work very hard, as all writers do, and without the push of self-discipline, (the stubborn fierceness that I will finish this math before June, I will finish this chapter today), I would have quit long ago.

My gratitude to my parents for homeschooling us is multi-faceted, however since I write every day, it most often finds outlet in a thankfulness for the self-discipline that I now see as a blessed gift.

And what ever happened to the seventh grade teacher who appeared in my childhood nightmares? The summer before I left for college, I worked on a pick-your-own berry farm. He came one day to pick blueberries, and to my surprise he recognized me. We shook hands and talked for about ten minutes. He wished me all the best in college and hoped to run into me sometime again. As I dropped him off in the berry fields, and drove the wagon back to the barn, I sat up taller. The realization that I was older and therefore less intimidated was immediately followed by the realization that I had never had anything to fear. Shaking hands with this perfectly amiable man, I knew that he could never be as stern a taskmaster as I am.

*Maria van den Bosch works as a writer and tutor. Her writing interests lie primarily in historical fiction and she is currently working on her first novel for children, set in Vancouver during the Second World War. She is also developing a series of literature unit studies for the middle grades. Maria lives and writes in Ontario, Canada. She can be contacted at [mcanuckca@yahoo.com](mailto:mcanuckca@yahoo.com).*

