

Homeschooling with Books Really Works with Veteran Jennifer Stowe

Episode 268

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

One of the privileges of homeschooling these days is that we can talk with families who homeschool their children and have lived to tell the tale. Today, we'll hear from a veteran homeschool mom who gives some encouragement we all need. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively and enjoyably. Carol Joyside has been helping families homeschool for several decades now through her literature based approach to education. In this episode, Carol is joined by Jennifer Stowe, whose homeschool life was also inspired by Doctor. Raymond Moore and Charlotte Mason. She shares the joys of her family learning together and reassures us to trust the process of great books, time outside, and freedom to explore our interests.

Rachel Winchester [00:00:47]:

Listen in.

Carole Joy Seid [00:00:49]:

Well, welcome, friends. I have the privilege today of sitting across the screen from my new friend, Jennifer Stowe. Jennifer and her husband live in the clear state of Tennessee, and they have homeschooled six children for twenty seven years. And I am so honored and delighted to meet you in person, Jennifer. God bless you. And how are you?

Jennifer Stowe [00:01:14]:

Thank you for having me, Carol. I'm fine.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:17]:

Good. Well, tell me how you came into homeschooling, and was this something that you just always thought you do, or did you have kind of an moment? What what were the circumstances?

Jennifer Stowe [00:01:29]:

Yes. Well, I was a young mother. I had a two year old and a new baby and we were stationed in Alaska. My husband was military. And he came home from work one day having listened to an episode of I think it was focused on the family and heard all about doctor Moore and his, homeschooling methods and advocating homeschooling. And he said, I really think we ought to do this. I wasn't at all inclined to do it. I was a registered nurse and fully expected I'd be going back to work.

Jennifer Stowe [00:02:02]:

And, but then as the Lord would have direct our steps, he put us in Washington DC next. And I just couldn't imagine putting my little four year old on a bus around the Beltway for forty five minutes twice a day. And Oh my. So my husband again revisited the idea of homeschooling and said, well, how about if we just did it for the two years that were stationed here in DC? And I thought, well, how hard could kindergarten be? So we went ahead and started homeschooling. And our two year duty station turned into five. And by that time, I had, a seven year old and a nine year old, and I thought and and another child. And I just thought, well, we're in it for life. Well, I actually I thought, school.

Jennifer Stowe [00:02:47]:

And as I've come to realize, that's sort of the the the battle cry of a lot of homeschooling families. But I have to say, twenty seven years later, we've stuck with it, and it's really it's been a become a way of life, and it's just become a blessing

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:02]:

for the family. I'm so glad. So what were some of the you know, as you started out, did you use doctor Moore's approach, doctor Raymond Moore, I should explain to our listeners?

Jennifer Stowe [00:03:14]:

Well, from the, for the first year, I ended up through the recommendation of of a of a neighbor friend using school in a box. And after about three or four months, I realized that I can do this by myself, and I took to heart some of his teachings. I also found, a Charlotte Mason approach which is very similar and I lots of time outside, lots of time in nature, lots of reading out loud, foundation of our education. The the breakfast table, the lunch table, the dinner table, it was all time for reading out loud together, memorizing scripture, memorizing poetry. And it it was, it was fun. It was game like to the children, but in a but but in a good game kind of way. And, and the reward was

always, you know, just family time together. And that seemed to fuel our desire to continue on with the homeschooling, lifestyle.

Carole Joy Seid [00:04:15]:

That's beautiful. Did you have some favorite authors as a family or you personally?

Jennifer Stowe [00:04:22]:

Yes. Oh, yes. Now you've caught me off guard for favorites. I'm thinking of the younger years and maybe I could do some titles, like Johnny Tremain, Matchlock, Gun, oh goodness. We went into the classics and we did like, all of the Austin books, all of the Dickens books. And I was trying to think of, like, Rimmer Goodin. We liked a lot of her books. Mhmm.

Jennifer Stowe [00:04:50]:

Yes. And Mary Rae, Rosemary Sutcliffe, you know, some some of these titles of authors from a little bit of the past, a little bit older authors.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:01]:

That's right. Books that have stood the test of time.

Jennifer Stowe [00:05:05]:

Mhmm. Definitely.

Carole Joy Seid [00:05:05]:

Yeah. Yeah. I love that. So how did our paths cross? I'm not sure if I remember you telling me this.

Jennifer Stowe [00:05:12]:

I wrote you a letter, and I had been homeschooling for for almost twenty five or six years and then I had a little grandson. My oldest son got married and had his first child and he was approaching the homeschooling age. And, my son and his wife were committed to homeschooling, but they didn't really know where to turn. My daughter-in-law had been homeschooled in a very different way, and she wasn't really familiar with the approach that we had done. So I was looking around on the Internet, for any kind of podcast or something like that that could help her, in this quest for an outdoor lifestyle, a whole book lifestyle, a family lifestyle of homeschooling. And I found homeschool made simple. Remember listening to at least, 15 or 20 of your podcasts, and I would listen out loud in the kitchen while I was making a meal. And the kids were saying, mom, this is the way you did it.

Jennifer Stowe [00:06:13]:

I thought you invented this or, you know, something like that. And I realized that everything you espoused, you had been saying consistently for a number of years. You'd never changed with the tides or the the new flavor of home schooling. And that was my frustration because I had found so many resources that were the latest and greatest, but they missed the mark on the foundation and the beauty of home schooling and made it much more of a task and a kind of, work, and I never found homeschooling. I mean, I'm sure some days we had strife, but I never found it to be a chore or work. It was such a joy. So I found you while looking for help for her, and I was hooked. I listened I started at the beginning and just went through years of your, podcast.

Jennifer Stowe [00:07:05]:

And I thought, you know, this is a woman that I resonate so deeply with, and I just have to reach out and thank her for her years of ministry.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:14]:

Oh, Jennifer, you are such a blessing. Well, I remember reading your lovely letter and looking through the beautiful books, and I think two of the things really stood out. One was the book of quotations. Talk to the listeners about that and what the title is, and it just I felt like I wrote it myself. And my granddaughter, who is such a book lover, she just loves that little book and walks around quoting it to me. Grammy, listen to this one. Or she'll read it. She'll read the quote and she'll say, who's it by? And then I'll guess, Chesterton.

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:47]:

She'll go, no. And then it'll be you know, so and we just have fun with it. So tell us about how that became about. Such a great resource.

Jennifer Stowe [00:07:56]:

Yeah. I think in about when the kids hit about sixth grade, you know, maybe teenagers, pre just early teens, I started having them, once a week we'd go through a pile of quote quote books. And they would just write out quotes that they liked. It four or five quotes a week. They didn't have to be on a subject. It didn't have to there were no requirements. Just quotes that that they liked. And we had a little notebook.

Jennifer Stowe [00:08:21]:

And they built on that for years. And when my oldest daughter, Julia, when she, was in her early twenties, she found her quotes book that she had handwritten for years, and

she was just enamored. She thought, oh, I forgot half of these quotes. And and she, is a is, like a self trained graphic designer and she said, I'm gonna put these together in a book and just self publish it. So she called it the eclectic miscellany, miscellany, sorry. And she ended up putting the quotes just the way they were written in her book. She thought about organizing and cataloging, and then she said no, she just would put them in, kind of all tumbled together. So you might have, Coco Chanel next to Chesterton.

Jennifer Stowe [00:09:13]:

Yes. But there's a little bit of charm in that and then at the end, she puts some blank pages encouraging people to continue adding quotes And, yeah, it's just a it's just a nice little pocketbook that is, lovely to dip in and out of.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:29]:

I love it. I think it would be a great gift. I just see it in so many uses, giving it to your bridesmaids when you get married or, like, so many fun uses. And it's available for purchase. Is that right?

Jennifer Stowe [00:09:43]:

Yes. Yes. I think we have to go to Julia's website to get that, and I can give you that information.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:50]:

Okay. We'll put it in the show notes so our our fans can listen, to you and then search out that little booklet. It is a darling little book and beautifully designed as well. Not just well done, but artistic as well, which, you know, both both sides of the corner are so valuable. And then you sent me a book, kind of with photos and beautiful commentary on different historic days that you created. Do you wanna share a little bit about those days? Because that is such a practical inspiration to the things that I teach. So tell us about that.

Jennifer Stowe [00:10:30]:

Yes. Yes. Thank you. That's called our Book of Days, A Guide to Lifelong Learning. And what it seems like happened every time we would finish, studying a different time period, the kids would want to, have a little display of their craft items that they had, mhm, that they had created or dress up in a costume, have some food tied to the time period. And we'd invite our grand their grandparents and, or neighbors, that sometimes our church friends would come. And we'd have, like, a little day. We just did just a a homeschool day.

Jennifer Stowe [00:11:06]:

And sometimes we'd have other families that would participate. And, of course, I always took pictures. And after a few years, I thought, oh, I'm just gonna create a keepsake journal for the kids or for our, just for the family. And the more it grew, I thought, well, maybe this would be a little bit of an encouragement for other people. And so Julia, again, just put it together as a little book that we have up on Amazon. And it's a record of what we did but it's also just some fun ideas. I I I love collecting ideas. And so I shared a few of the things that we did in that book.

Carole Joy Seid [00:11:40]:

I love it. So give an example of a unit that you studied and then what you did to kind of flesh it out at the end, please.

Jennifer Stowe [00:11:48]:

Right. So say for example, we were studying, oh oh, okay. For example, we studied Lewis and Clark a couple of times. At the end of the study, we might the boys might dress up as Indians. We would have the girls in prairie costumes if they wanted. We would do some leaf row, prints in a journal imitating the journal that they kept of the plants they encountered. We would have some, oral recitations of passages that they might have memorized. And then, of course, we'd have a campfire and a stew simmering or, something like that.

Jennifer Stowe [00:12:23]:

And it would just be a lot of fun.

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:26]:

It sounds wonderful. And our homeschool group here in our community does something very similar. And I, always say these children will remember this the rest of their lives. They may not remember much that you've done as they grow older, but they will remember these days where they're all together with their community. And just that family of God interaction, raising our kids with like minded families who are living life the same way we are and valuing the same things and traditions. And in our, group, we always do a type of folk dancing that's part of it. The food is part of it. We all have assignments that we have to, you know, be a a character from history and give a little recitation, like you say.

Carole Joy Seid [00:13:15]:

The music of the period. It is just so much a part of what we get to do that you just can't do in a classroom because of the limitations of crowd control. But we have the freedom and the flexibility to live life with such joy and and just that the bonds that our

kids have with one another. And the parents, in the book, I think it's called Hold On to Your Kids, he talks about that children should be friends with their parents' friends' children. That's complicated. But in other words, as you're friends with adults and, your kindred spirit and you're doing life in similar ways, that that is the natural place for your children to connect with friendships. And they almost become like cousins with each other, and the adults are like aunts and uncles for the children. And, excuse me, that's what I saw in that book, and it was such a blessing to me.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:16]:

I love it. Well, if you, meet a young homeschool mom, what are some of the things that you tell them, like you did with your with your daughter-in-law, for example? What are some of the pieces of advice looking back maybe that you wish someone had told you?

Jennifer Stowe [00:14:35]:

Oh, I'm glad you asked that question. I think the well, the first thing I told her was you need a library card and a bible and a math curriculum, and that's it. I think a wise woman may have said that.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:47]:

Yes. Yep. Yep. Well, it's all doctor Moore as you know.

Jennifer Stowe [00:14:55]:

So that's that's what I love to start with. And the one thing that you recommend that I really wish I had known, and this is the one thing that I always tell new moms that I talk with, is start with the pilgrims. Do not start with the ancients in the time on the timeline. Yeah. I love your approach of starting with American history for the young years, and then when they have a a little bit more maturity and understanding, you can go back to creation and work through the ancients. And I didn't do that, and I found that my kids were knowledge heavy and a little bit confused. I mean, they could they could talk about, you know, Hammurabi, but they couldn't really understand, some of the finer points of what made Egyptian gods different from their god when we first started talking. So I really encourage parents just start with American history for the first I think you recommend till fourth grade maybe or third grade and start in fourth grade.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:55]:

Yes. Mhmm. Fourth grade. And Mhmm.

Jennifer Stowe [00:15:58]:

Boy, do I that is my one regret. Now, I mean, we caught up and we we did okay, but it's so much easier just to start in that spot. And the other thing that I tell their moms is always write down what you did in a day. Don't have, a lesson plan of what you should do in a day because it's very, a defeated feeling when you look and you didn't do anything on the lesson plan for maybe a prepackaged curriculum, but you did take a nature walk and you collected eggs from a neighbor's chicken coop and you talked to the postal worker as she delivered your mail and you wrote a letter to grandma. And so write those things down instead. And over time as you reflect back and you look at what you've accomplished, if if you even keep that kind of a record, it's very encouraging instead of feeling defeated. So those are my, like, right off the top, recommendations when I talk to new moms. And I also love to tell them, you can do this.

Jennifer Stowe [00:16:58]:

You can do this. You can do this. Don't don't don't listen to the naysayers. You can do this.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:04]:

I love it. So what you're saying is don't do a lesson plan like a teacher would do in a classroom, but write down what you do after you've accomplished it. Yes. And that's exactly what I teach. Are you sure we're not twin sister sister separated from birth? That's exactly what I teach. Yes. Because that allows the flexibility and the freedom that we have in homeschool. Whereas if you have a classroom as I did as a school teacher, you have to have a plan for that day, and it better be kept to the letter because otherwise, it's chaos.

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:41]:

But in the tiny little student body that we're, you know, raising up here, we have it's good to have some goals, like we're gonna finish ancient Greece by Christmas or something like that. There's nothing wrong with having those big goals, but not hour by hour, 09:00 on Tuesday, do this kind of thing, which is even what box curriculum very often does and why it just makes me wanna scream and run out of the building because we are not having school at home. Doctor Moore used to say, if you're gonna have school at home, send your children to school because it would be more fun than having school at home at your dining room table with a ball and chain around your ankle. And it's the opposite of homeschooling. Wouldn't you say?

Jennifer Stowe [00:18:27]:

I would agree. Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:18:29]:

Now did you live in a community where there are other like minded families, so you were all kind of doing this together?

Jennifer Stowe [00:18:36]:

Well, we moved every two years for, the twenty seven years of my husband's service except for that one time period in in Washington DC where we stayed for five years. But every time we moved, we were so very grateful to find a community of homeschoolers. Usually connected to the church that we landed in and that we found so many wonderful ideas because we move so often and we kind of were able to to take from the just the cream off of everybody's experience and, implement what we loved into our own homeschool, family homeschool. So we, were very fortunate to have rich communities everywhere we lived. And in fact, my kids now, my eldest is 20 I'm sorry, 32. And they all have very good friends from around the country because they made such good connections while we lived a couple of years in so many different places.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:36]:

Wow. What a legacy. And now you're in that that grandmother stage where now you're pouring into the next generation.

Jennifer Stowe [00:19:44]:

Mhmm. Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:45]:

Isn't that the best of all?

Jennifer Stowe [00:19:47]:

Yes. It is. Yes.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:50]:

Well, Jennifer, this is such a joy, and you and I have to get together in person very soon because when I'm coming to Nashville, I would love you to be there that day. So we'll talk more about that. But would you mind praying for our listeners as we close?

Jennifer Stowe [00:20:06]:

Oh, thank you, Carol. Yes. I'd be happy to. Father god, we love you, and we thank you for this time that we've had to share the beauty and the blessings of homeschooling. Thank you, Lord, that you've given us the freedom to do that in this country. And I just ask that this message that Carol and I were able to, share would encourage mothers

who are perhaps in the throes of homeschooling and feel just a little bit weary, but also encourage the mothers who are thinking about perhaps beginning their homeschooling journey. And lastly, that it would be an encouragement to the mothers in perhaps high school that they finish strong, that they don't have to change course for the high school years, that they can finish well with their children, and they really can do it. Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of, being able to speak on Homeschool Made Simple, and thank you for Carol's ministry.

Jennifer Stowe [00:21:03]:

May it live long and encourage many for your glory, Lord. In your name we pray. Amen.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:10]:

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