



## Love in a Time of Homeschooling

By Laura Brodie  
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### Introduction

"I had always thought of homeschooling as a drastic measure. . . . But when my daughter decided that she would rather hide in a closet than complete her homework, I knew that it was time for me to become a schoolteacher, if only for a little while."

After years of watching her eldest daughter, Julia, struggle in a highly regimented public school system, Laura Brodie determined to teach her ten-year-old at home for a year. Although friends were skeptical and her husband predicted disaster, "You can't be serious," Brodie had visions of one ideal year of learning. The monotony of fill-in-the-blank history and math worksheets would be replaced with studying dinosaurs and Mayan hieroglyphics, conversational French, violin lessons, and field trips to art museums, science fairs, bookstores, and concerts.

But can one year of homeschooling make a difference? And what happens to the love between mother and daughter when fractions and spelling enter the relationship? *Love in a Time of Homeschooling* is a funny and inspiring story of human foibles and human potential, in which love, anger, and hope mingle with reading, math, and American history. As today's parents ponder their children's educations, wondering how to respond to everything from homework overload to bullying to the boredom of excessive test preparations, homeschooling has become a popular alternative embraced by millions. Short-term homeschooling is the latest trend in this growing movement.

Brodie gave her daughter a sabbatical to explore, learn, create, and grow—a year of independent research and writing to rejuvenate Julia's love of learning. The experiment brought out the best and worst in the pair, but they worked through their frustrations to forge an invaluable bond. There is a wonderful story no parent should miss.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What were the concerns that prompted Laura Brodie to decide to homeschool her daughter Julia? Were those concerns addressed in the year they shared?
2. What kind of curriculum did the author formulate for her daughter? If you were going to homeschool your child, what would you want your child to learn?
3. Describe Julia. What challenges does a child like Julia offer to a teacher? What about her mother, Laura? Did her biases and expectations contribute to Julia's outlook on school and learning? Talk about Julia's relationship to her mother. How did their interactions shape Julia's homeschooling education?
4. Why do some parents succeed at homeschooling while others do not? Would you call the author's sabbatical year with Julia a success? What were some of the achievements of their year together? What problems did they encounter? How might those disappointments been avoided?
5. "There's nothing like homework to squash a child's joy," Brodie writes early in her story. What is homework? Why do schools seem to give so much of it? Try to remember your own school days. What were your homework assignments like? Why do schools assign homework? How can it be made better?
6. While the author admires some of the good teachers her children have been exposed to, she is critical of the modern educational system. Knowing the frustrations the author herself sometimes encountered trying to engage her daughter, what would it be like to teach a classroom full of Julias' children who often preferred their own private worlds to the common one we all share?
7. What can schools do to address the concerns of parents like Laura Brodie and the needs of bright yet sometimes challenging students like Julia? What do we need to do as a society to help them achieve those goals?
8. If you have children, what is your relationship like with them? Do you think you could homeschool your child? Has *Love in a Time of Homeschooling* changed your thinking on the subject?
9. "Genuine education involves writing, making connections, and drawing conclusions." Do you agree with this assessment? The author teaches English to college students. Would a math or a science teacher offer the same assessment? What about an art teacher?
10. The author raises some challenging questions about letting children exclusively pursue the subjects that interest them, while ignoring others. "Much as I understand the need to follow a child's interests, how does a ten-year-old know where her passions lie unless she is first introduced to the myriad possibilities in the world? A child might skip one concert, but should she skip math because she dislikes it? Or Science? Or history?" How would you answer this?
11. As a nation, how do we view education? What are your views on the subject? Is education necessary? What constitutes a good education? What might be the impact for our children and our society if more parents chose to homeschool their children?

12. What if we gave children the choice to only learn about what interested them? How does that relate to what is happening in the greater society, as more people are only reading or watching what they want? How is that affecting us as a nation?

13. Have more involved parents, the fears of stranger danger, and the increased pressure to succeed at an earlier age helped to devalue the role of imagination and dreaming in children's lives? How can we add more creativity to children's lives, as parents, concerned adults, and as a society?

14. At one point, Brodie offers to pay her daughter a quarter for following through on a lesson. Should children be rewarded for doing what is expected of them? Is it wrong to pay children to do schoolwork or study? If we transform education into a monetary exchange, what does that say about its value? Does money have a place in education?

15. Laura Brodie was filled with self-recrimination when she lost her temper with Julia. Is she placing too much blame on herself and not enough on her child? How would you have handled the kind of frustrations she faced? How might a parent instill discipline? Was the author too focused on her daughter's avoiding failure? How far should a parent or a teacher push a child toward success? If the author sometimes had a problem getting her own daughter to focus at home, how can teachers with classes of twenty and thirty students per class teach effectively?

16. What lessons did a year of homeschooling provide for student and teacher? For daughter and mother? What did their experiences teach you?

### **About the Author**

Laura Brodie received her B.A. from Harvard and her Ph. D. from the University of Virginia. The author of *Breaking Out: VMI and the Coming of Women* and *The Widow's Season*, a novel, she teaches English at Washington and Lee University. She lives in Lexington, Virginia, with her husband and three daughters.