

## WHY I DO RESEARCH ON HOMESCHOOLING

When my older daughter was little, she attended a private school here in DeLand. It was a good school, but over time there were more and more things we weren't happy about. She came home tired and stressed out every day, kind of like I did when I came home from my work here at Stetson, and I thought, "Childhood isn't supposed to be like a job!" She wasn't really learning very much, either, at least not academically. Most of her work wasn't exciting or challenging, and we could see her becoming mentally lazy. And what she *was* learning was rather disturbing. She was learning to be cliquish and picking up other negative social behaviors.

And then there were the "incidents" — those upsetting events that seemed to come with frustrating regularity. One in particular I remember was when she was perhaps 6 or 7. At the beginning of the year, in order to see how well the children could read, her teacher cut a newspaper up into pieces and gave each child a piece. The children were supposed to circle every word they could read on their section. Unfortunately, the teacher didn't bother to look at the pieces before she handed them out. Our daughter was a very good reader by this time, and she proudly brought home a story about a man who murdered his wife and children with an ax. There was a picture, too, of a body being wheeled out of the house on a gurney. She had dutifully circled every word in the article except "mutilated."

One fateful day when she was in second grade, after her teacher had done something particularly disappointing, either my wife or I — there is still lingering doubt about who actually fired the first shot — one of us said, "We can do better than this ourselves!" And not too long after that, my wife began talking about homeschooling. I had heard of it, of course, but at that time we knew of only one other family in DeLand actually doing it. My wife did some research and then announced that she wanted to try it. Out loud, I said, "Hey, if you want to do this, go for it!" (The expected good-husband response.) But inside I said, "This is crazy. This will last about a month!"

Well, I was wrong. As time went by, we also began homeschooling our son and our younger daughter. And as time went by, I got hooked on homeschooling. It was a lot of things that did it, really, but one day stands out in my memory. It was early on, when the kids were pretty little. We were studying deserts, and I decided to read part of *Wind, Sand, and Stars* by St. Exupery to them. St. Exupery, who wrote *The Little Prince*, flew a mail plane in Northern Africa when

he was a young man. One night his plane crashed, and *Wind, Sand, and Stars* tells of his struggle to survive in the Sahara desert. Eventually, he and his copilot gave up hope of rescue, and decided to try to walk out of the desert.

It's a great story, and as I came to end of each chapter, my kids would not let me quit reading. "No! Read more!" they'd say, "We've got to find out if he makes it!" I read chapter after chapter—that's pretty much all the school we did that day—and I noticed that, as I read the realistic descriptions of relentless heat and desperate thirst, the kids started tugging at their clothes, taking sweatshirts off (this was in winter), even panting a little. As soon as they found out that St. Exupery and his copilot were rescued by a passing nomad—lost, near death, almost ready to give up, they saw a most unexpected thing, a camel walking by—both kids rushed to kitchen and begged for big glasses of ice water. Wow, I thought, way cool! This is the way to learn!

We homeschooled our three children for more than 20 years altogether, and now our older daughter is homeschooling *her* children. And in 1993, I decided that I wanted to do research on homeschooled children. Back then, homeschooling was so new that it generated a lot of controversy, but there was very little (good) research to answer the questions being debated. It was all heat, no light, and I hoped that my research could provide a little light.