



. . . And They Lived Happily Ever After

By Janine Wilkins, Homeschool Representative

Once upon a time, we decided to homeschool our children; and then, they graduated. The end.

Confession of a HEN

My name is Janine, and I am a HEN, a homeschooling empty nester. I came across that term in a Google search that completely validated my empty feelings. It seems like one day I was panicking about my youngest child's transcript and dual enrolled classes; and then, all at once it was over! I found myself with no curriculum to buy, no co-op to run, no schoolroom to re-organize; it was over! Twenty-seven years of planning, dreaming, scheduling, figuring out, praying, and teaching came to a complete halt. Such long and busy days. Such short years. I thought I was ready. I had already gone back to work part-time in the field of my bachelor's degree. I was prepared, or so I thought. The reality began to creep up on me that last summer before the youngest left for college. I started having waves of sadness with butterflies in my stomach.

It Will Be OK

Just in time, God came through with a message, "It's gonna be okay." We were in a caravan bringing the youngest to college. I was driving alone when I heard this song for the first time on the radio: "Though the mountains may be moved into the sea, Though the ground beneath might crumble and give way, I can hear my Father singing over me, It's gonna be okay, it's gonna be okay" ("Into the Sea" by Tasha Layton). That song grabbed my attention because that was the very passage I prayed long ago throughout the exceedingly difficult pregnancy with my college-freshman-to-be son. Eighteen years ago, God used Psalm 46:1-2 to comfort me: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart

of the sea” (ESV). It was my prayer then, and it became my prayer as I faced the upheaval of an empty nest. It will be OK.

God Knows All About Us

Homeschooling took every bit of my energy and creativity. I could not even imagine finding something to do with myself that I could possibly enjoy as much as homeschooling. As soon as I started working full time, the delight of leaving the house every morning and getting paid for work wore off; I realized I did not really like the job. I loved my co-workers, but the work itself was just boring. I decided to take a sabbatical year to clean up after 27 years of homeschooling and pray about what I should do next.

The answer to that prayer was a surprise offer to do what I loved most! I am now getting my master’s degree, and I am serving as a graduate assistant to the speech and debate team at Park University, just five minutes from my house! It is like a dream come true, although I never dreamed of something this good!

Take time to dream about your life after homeschooling. This math lesson may seem like it will last forever, but it will not. What will you do after homeschooling?

Young homeschooling parents in 2022 are ahead of me. Many have “side hustles,” or they have created a job situation that allows them to homeschool and work. My three daughters are homeschooling or plan to homeschool and have figured out how to do so while simultaneously advancing in their chosen careers. But while I was homeschooling, the only “side hustles” I had were babysitting and serving the homeschooling community. I never gave a single thought to what I would do next, because what I was doing took every bit of my focus. That was a mistake; I wish I had been better prepared for that inevitable empty September.

Advice from a HEN

Here is my advice:

1. Dream about what you would like to do when you have finished homeschooling.
2. Be specific. How do you see yourself spending your days?
3. Ask yourself what you enjoy so much that when you do it, time zooms by (<https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-flow/>)
4. What would you need to have to make that happen (education, investment, space)?
5. Will you need to make an income?
6. What steps can you take now to pull those things together?

This summer, in addition to dreaming about the curriculum and activities and plans for September, take some time to dream about the future that will come after the next few Septembers. “Happily ever after” comes even after you finish homeschooling.

Janine Wilkins lives in Parkville, Missouri. She has homeschooled three daughters and one son. Her son has finished his first year of college. She currently is working on a master’s degree and serving as a graduate assistant to the Park University speech and debate team. She recently returned to serve again as a homeschool representative on the Nazarene Educators Worldwide Council. You may contact Janine at wilkinsfamily6@yahoo.com.