



Remarks by Janet Kassel at the Opening Session of the WPA 18th Annual Home Education Conference on May 5, 2001, titled *At the Threshold*. Published in WPA Newsletter #69 - August 2001 pp. 9-10

I stand at the threshold of unknowing.
I have been here before.
My heart reminds me
that just as I am
certain
that I do not know
where the path is leading me
I am also
certain
that I will be lifted up
and carried across the abyss.

It is exhilarating to fly
with the faith of a child
because I can go where no one thinks I
can go
and I can land
safely home
because I have totally given myself
to the flight.

I am standing at the threshold.
I have been here before.
I AM STANDING AT THE
THRESHOLD OF UNKNOWING.
It is not a safe place
but it's the only place
I can stand
if I wish to grow.
I stood here
as I faced my husband
when I made my pledge
to love him always.
I stood here
when I first held my first child...
my second child
my third
and
I knew with assuredness that I was incredibly
unsure.

Who **are** these people?
Who would they become?
How can I
a mere mortal
possibly help them be
safe and secure...
become what they were made to be
even before I knew they were?
I stood in this shadowy threshold
and watched them grow
and knew
for certain
that I could not give them over to the train-
ing of strangers.

The task
of loving

and holding
and training
was given to me.

It is risky
and terrifying,
but that is what it means to live,
and that is what I have elected to do.

This is not a feeling
but a choice
I have made,
knowing
for certain
that I do not know
but
that knowing will grow
out of the choice to love
and discovery will happen.

Where else is this possible
for me to cherish
and nurture
and protect
but in the sanctity of my home
so that one day these children will fly?

Homeschooling is so much a part of my fami-
ly's life
that I barely think about it anymore
in terms that can define it.
It is like breathing and walking.

But 20 years ago
I thought about it all the time.
I did not know how to describe it or to do it
only that I had no other educational choice
that would work for my family.
I tried it on,
one year at a time.
It was at first, an uneasy fit.

I felt watched. I felt vulnerable,
all the while hoping to appear confident
and calm especially in the eyes of my children.

And it was for my children
that I dared to dream
that homeschooling was a do-able thing.
My husband and I were living on the edge
and it took immense trust.
We were living on the edge.

First we were an incorporated private school
and then after 1984, when the current law was
passed,
we became a home-based educational program.

Back then I was assaulted by questions
from all corners:
from parents
siblings
friends and strangers.
What are you doing?
Is it legal?
What about socialization?
Aren't you depriving your kids?

I felt a deep sense of dread in social situations;
would someone ask me the dreaded "home-
schooling question?"

This past week I had several very different con-
versations.

At a town board meeting several moms were
complaining bitterly about their kids in school;
the current testing dilemma; the inadequate
attention
students were receiving; the over crowding
and of the excuses offered by teachers and staff;
the critical comments, punitive tactics
and other perceived abuses experienced
even by those considered to be "successful."
They turned to me and said, "Oh, you
are so lucky!
You don't have to worry about this! You
homeschool!"

And a teacher friend of mine was lamenting
the system.
He is taking early retirement.
He says he doesn't care anymore;
that he isn't supposed to let it be known
that he teaches to the test.
Teachers **are** made to teach to the test!
He says it is ruining kids and it has ruined him.
He no longer teaches to the child's needs.
He's quitting.

He says he hates standardized tests, but his
hands are tied.
He says, "Oh, you are so lucky!
You don't have to worry about this!
You homeschool!"

The threshold
is where we are most
of the time we parent.

If we homeschool
it is **always** where we are ...
discovering and inventing the
process ...
continually reassessing and evaluating.

If we are beginning
if we are ending
we are still embarking

day to day
into unknown terrain.
It is adventure and risk
It does not feel
safe
but it is where we need to be.
It takes a great deal
of faith and trust
and nerve and courage
and support from others
who are as determined as we are
to keep the momentum going.

From time to time
in my life
I have had to journey into the desert.

sometimes
I feel lost
isolated
vacant
dull
empty
silent
at a dead end
but
it is in this desert of unknowing
that I have found
my truest reality
the vibrant quietude of life

The desert
is full of life
clean
arid
free
subtle
open
waiting
daring
challenging
inviting
eternal
risky

for me
the journey into the desert
is the journey of my life
a venture into the unknowing
a leap into the abyss of faith
a dreadful and wonderful opportunity
to grow as a woman; a wife; a mother.

This is the great experience of homeschooling:
the chance to grow in ways I never
imagined;
the chance to grow into the person I
was created to become;
to unlearn much and to learn so very
much more.

This great gift of being with my sons
day to day
has proven to me that great things are possible
in my life
and even greater things
are possible in theirs.

What if I was not free to take that journey?
What if there was a law that said I could not?
What if I always had to prove myself to others
on their educational or spiritual terms?
Isn't this what most people have to do?
Is this what we want for our children ...
for ourselves
to be required to perform for others
to be what "THEY" want us to be?

My journey into the desert has taken me to the
edge of my world.

I am always experiencing the new
the uncharted
the next thing.

I am
hopeful
moving
upwards and beyond
risking
daring to try
being dragged
by the exuberance
of my unfettered children
those who, unencumbered by unreasonable
restrictions,
have dared to enjoy learning
have dared to relax while working
hard
to become while remaining
to keep while letting go.
They are comfortable with paradox
and I am learning.

We stand at the threshold
of the impossibly possible
we stand in the shadow of greatness
we venture forth always
at the threshold of the next thing
and it is awesome,
this journey.

Wisconsin provides an environment
in which we are accountable to ourselves;
we are free to define this Great Experiment
on our own terms according to our own prin-
ciples and beliefs.

It is process not product;
it is movement not result;
it is taking one day at a time on faith;
finding joy and satisfaction;
allowing time to work on the real
things;
discovering how to love
how to be.

Wisconsin has a good homeschooling law.

I am not sure how I would cope in a state
where I needed the approval
of the legislative body or educational system ...
a system that does not value or understand my
priorities as a parent.

I cannot imagine how a restrictive law would
impact the daily routine of our lives.
I only can feel gratitude and thanksgiving for
not having to imagine that.
I hope we can all continue to follow our own
consciences and philosophies
working together to maintain our freedoms
so that we can all come as close to our goals as
is practical and healthy;
that we can raise practical and healthy children
and know we are doing the very best thing
in our own way
according to our own values and beliefs.

Our Wisconsin law is important and fragile.
We need to remain vigilant.

Think of a law that you didn't do any
thing about,
that you thought would never get
passed
or that you were unaware of until after
it passed,
and now you need to work to undo
the harm.
How hard is that to do?
How much time is that effort taking?
What are you giving up in order to cope
with the loss of time and energy?
What is this effort taking away from
your lives?

Think of a law
that if it were changed
would radically alter your life.
Remember, it is easier to keep a good law than
to repeal a bad one.

We must continue to pay attention;
to remain vigilant for all our sakes.

Thank you for caring so much for your children
If you don't who will?
Who could?

Thank you for working to maintain the rights
we all have;
for informing yourselves;
for sharing your insights.

We all stand at the threshold
not really knowing where we are
but certain where we want to be
with our families
at peace
growing
journeying onward
toward our larger vision
a greater hope

always
another day
another threshold
a safer
better future
for our children. ❖

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