



**The Libertarian Homeschooler**

**Guest: Ana Martin**

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**Ana Martin runs the popular Facebook page *The Libertarian Homeschooler*:  
[facebook.com/TheLibertarianHomeschooler](https://www.facebook.com/TheLibertarianHomeschooler).**

**WOODS:** Let's start with some background about you. How long have you been homeschooling and how many children have you homeschooled?

**MARTIN:** Well, I have my two sons, and if you count my oldest, who's 13, you could say that we've technically been homeschooling since he was born. Because there wasn't any time where we said, now we're going to start homeschooling. So we've been homeschooling more or less for 13 years.

**WOODS:** So you're not a case where there was some horror show with the local school and you said that's it, I'm pulling these kids out?

**MARTIN:** No, no. I knew well in advance of having children that we were going to be homeschooling. In fact, it was one of the first things that I said to my future husband when we went on our first date. I said, I am going to be homeschooling any children I have and if that's a problem we should go Dutch. I knew well in advance that we would be homeschooling.

**WOODS:** So why? What's the main reason, or main couple of reasons?

**MARTIN:** Well, the first reason—when I was younger I really wanted to build a better beast. I was looking to make someone who would be stronger, faster, and would get to the same place but younger and better. But as I was homeschooling our older son, and particularly as our second son began to get older and more aware, it became clear that we were going to have to do something different. Because what we were doing with our older son, which was really pretty rigorous academically, wasn't going to work for our younger son. So we had to figure out something different for him. And at the same time we realized, okay, this academic model for our oldest son, he's doing it because he loves us, but what he started doing is memorizing, regurgitating, and forgetting and that really wasn't what we wanted him to do. So we had to scrap everything we were doing and begin again. We started to follow his interests more. And what we found was that he was still getting what he 'quote-unquote' needed but just in a different way. So that's really what we did. That's still how we homeschool. Does that answer the question that you asked?

**WOODS:** I think it does. What do you say to people who hesitate because they feel like they're not smart enough? That if they sent their kids to school there would be experts there who would teach their kids what they need to know, but my kids are going to need some advanced material somewhere down the line and I am not qualified to impart it to them.

**MARTIN:** Two things. The first thing is that the big secret about homeschooling is it changes the culture of the family. And it changes it in a really good and powerful way. What happens is, as you are teaching your children and trying to figure out what do they need now? What is appropriate for this age? What are they going to need when they get out into the real world? You reintroduce yourself to these concepts that maybe you felt really rusty about, and you become much more interested because you're coming at this as an adult. But you're also teaching it, so you really have to own it now, and the culture of the family changes. You become much more fierce and also intellectually fearless. And maybe that's not the culture of your family right now, but once you start homeschooling something changes and you become a different person intellectually and academically. So who you are now and who your children are right now, particularly if they are in school, that is not who is going to be there even a year from now. So yeah, you may feel like you are not qualified but it is coming.

**WOODS:** Wow, that's a bold statement. You know what I was expecting? I was expecting you to say, well, there are a lot of options that you have out there to bring in tutors, the Internet has a lot of resources on it. I was not expecting that answer.

**MARTIN:** It happens and that's why it's a big secret. Nobody expects this to happen. People are scared. They say, "Gosh, I didn't even graduate from high school." But what happens is you've got skin in the game now. You don't want to cheat your children. You want what's best for them. You do whatever is necessary to educate your children, and the person who has the will to do that is the person who is qualified.

**WOODS:** All right, but let me just raise the objection that is on everybody's minds. They'll say, I don't know calculus and I am never going to know calculus, and no matter how much I love my kids I am never going to figure out calculus.

**MARTIN:** Sure, and you don't have to. If calculus is not something you want to do—for me it's German. My son is a musician; he wants to learn German. I really don't want to learn German. I'm going to find someone to teach him German. I can find someone on the Internet. I can find someone in my town. I can find another musician to teach him German. There are lots and lots of different options. So many options now that weren't even available five or ten years ago. Now you can do calculus on the Internet. You can find a calculus teacher sitting in Hawaii waiting for you. You can do calculus at your community college. You can do calculus with a soup to nuts curriculum. You've got so many options.

**WOODS:** You mentioned learning German. I just can't help mentioning that when I was in grad school I got the bright idea that I wanted to learn how to read German, because I thought that would be a cool thing. So over the summer I took a German for reading knowledge course over at Union Theological Seminary, because it was right near Columbia. And it was full of theologians who wanted to be able to read Martin Luther in the original German, and then just me. Just some guy. I figured I would learn German. German is the hardest. It makes Latin look like Spanish. I consider Spanish the model language: every word is pronounced exactly the way you would think it would be, it's got very consistent rules in how it works. I love Spanish. German is just horrifyingly difficult to learn.

**MARTIN:** And thank goodness I don't have to teach it. Do you know what I mean?

**WOODS:** That's right! Isn't that wonderful? You've been liberated from this! I wanted you to appreciate just what a gift you've been given in not having to do that. I mean no offense to the German speakers out there, and I am going to get some emails, believe me, saying no, German is very logical. Yeah, I know it is very

logical, yet it is so weird in the way the sentences are structured. Anyway this is getting completely off-topic here. When somebody says I think I am interested in homeschooling, I think I am ready to take the plunge but I don't know what step one is, what is step one?

**MARTIN:** It depends on the person, but usually what I suggest is getting to understand the child. Pedagogically I'm a Montessorian, and I think that the work of Maria Montessori, the work that she has done on the child, is really sound. I can always rely on the work of Montessori to give me a really good idea of where the child is in terms of needs, capacities, development. That is so helpful. But the other thing she does that might be even more important is she tells us how to observe our children, how to deal with them and how to really look at them and see what it is that they are doing. It's almost like observing a creature in the wild. You're looking at them and you are thinking, "Oh, they must be doing this because...." And you have this preconceived idea of why they might be doing whatever behavior. But really it's something different, and if you observe over and over and over again, you get a better idea of what the truth is, and that's one of the most basic things about Montessori: is she teaches you how to observe, and that is so critical in homeschooling. How to observe your child. So that's where I would start, with Montessori. I would begin with maybe *The Secret of Childhood*, or *The Absorbent Mind*. *The Absorbent Mind* is a little bit chewy, but there are also some really good websites out there for the beginner.

**WOODS:** That leads me to a question where we might have some disagreements, but I don't want you to say what you think I want you to say. You don't strike me as the type to do that anyway.

**MARTIN:** No, I won't do that. Sorry.

**WOODS:** What I gather from what you are saying here is—well, first of all, I don't want to just gather. Do you favor the so-called unschooling approach, or how does that differ from a Montessori approach, if at all?

**MARTIN:** It really doesn't differ significantly from the Montessori approach. In fact, something that made me feel really good, I was at a conference with Montessori last summer and somebody that I really respected in the Montessori community said, "So what are you doing with your boys?" And I said, well, we are really sort of following them at home, following the child at home, and she said, "Oh, you're unschooling." And I thought yeah, but I don't really want to say that because that brings a lot of baggage with it. The word unschooling unfortunately has a lot of stuff attached to it. So yeah, we unschool in the sense that we follow our children, but I think people get the idea that if you're unschooling you are basically leaving them to their own devices, and really nothing could be further from the truth.

**WOODS:** Well, I'm not so sure; I think there are some things that could be further from the truth than that. How do the kids learn multiplication tables if they're being unschooled?

**MARTIN:** Interestingly, there's a story. My nine-year-old son, not too long ago, I said to him I just want to see where you are with math, so can I give you some addition to do just to see where you are? And he said, "I already know addition. Can you check me in multiplication instead?" And I said sure, and so I drew him a multiplication chart with one through ten at the top, one through ten on the left-hand side, and he filled it in. I have not taught the child multiplication, but he knew how to do it. So now remember, I went to college. I have little letters behind my name. This to me is scandalous. I did not expect this. I really thought the child wanted to sit down with me and learn his multiplication tables. So this to me had come as a really big surprise. I don't know exactly how this happens, but he is showing me that he does things on his own without telling me what he's doing, and then I just come back and I check. It sounds like voodoo or magic. That is exactly what it looks like when I drew this chart on the whiteboard and he filled it in, and I thought,

who taught you this? How do you know this? I don't know how that happens. But he's around us doing math all the time. He's around us when we are reading all the time. He's around us because we are really, really geeky, while we are diagramming sentences, and thinking about music. And he learns a lot of music. Maybe that has something to do with it. But he is around us learning all the time and just seems to absorb a whole lot.

**WOODS:** Well, back up for a minute. When you say you're sitting around diagramming sentences, that does sound like you were imparting instruction. I assume your family doesn't diagram sentences just for fun. That does sound like a structured educational—

**MARTIN:** That's so sad that you should say that because in fact we do diagram sentences just for fun. There is a really fantastic app that you can put on your tablet or something. It's called SenGram. And yeah, we actually do sit around and diagram sentences for fun. So some people don't do that, but there are all sorts of great educational apps. I'm taking us off on a tangent maybe you want to go through later.

**WOODS:** No, do it now. Yeah, sure.

**MARTIN:** There are great apps that you can use. There is a wonderful app, and this is part of a process called Dragon Box. Everyone who has seen my page knows how much I love Dragon Box. It's algebra but it's algebra in a very theoretical way and it's a lot of fun. Even my nine-year-old is sitting there doing algebra on the tablet. He doesn't know it's algebra but our thirteen-year-old is doing the same thing. When I work with him I print out the PDF form which shows all the things that you are learning. And there's a whole list of things that Dragon Box covers, and it's a game. And so we do this and then what I will do is take out maybe a page from an algebra workbook or something, and I will put out some problems and say what would you do if you were faced with this in Dragon Box, and you'll solve the algebra problem without having cracked the book. These things happen. And there's so much of this out there that it is amazing. Children are learning essentially the things that they want to do, which really surprises me.

**WOODS:** So is this the kind of discovery, when you discover apps like these, that you share with people over at the Libertarian Homeschooler?

**MARTIN:** Yes, exactly.

**WOODS:** I am not a unschooler. I understand it. I'm okay with people who do it. It seems to have good results in some cases, but I wonder: can this really be for everyone? I can't imagine that all kids could actually follow something like this, and at the end of it you find that they are doing algebra and whatever. Or could it just be that your experience just happens to be with gifted children?

**MARTIN:** I thought you'd say that. Yes, my children are gifted. I think that John Taylor Gatto said that genius is as common as dirt? We have to really be able to observe our children. To look at them and to think what are your sweet spots. Where are you really, really great? And we spend about 80 percent of our time in that sweet spot, and the place where they are really fantastic. My oldest son, who is an organist, he's a pianist, he sings with the boy choir, a lot of the things that he does have to do with music. He spends two hours a day on the organ, two hours a day on the piano, at least two hours a day doing choir-related things. But also music history is very interesting to him. Composition is very interesting to him. Right now he is reading a book which you and I would probably think, there is not a chance I am reading that. It's about the glorious pipe organ and its American masters. Who picks up this book? What 13-year-old child is reading it? If you can allow your child to do what it is that they really love for an extended period of time I think you'll find

that this happens.

Now some children really love a good workbook. That child should not be discounted. And some children really, really love a curriculum, and that child should not be discounted either. It really depends on the child. Some of them really want that structure. Every day at six I sit down at 9 o'clock and do this thing. Some of them want something completely different. Every day I go into the kitchen and I bake for three hours, and maybe that person is going to be a fantastic baker. You don't know. So really following the child I think is really important. And like I said, some of them are going to do so well with the curriculum. So, so well with it very structured. It really depends on the child. But I don't think that we can centrally plan for an individual, and children are individuals, so I really want to follow the individual.

**WOODS:** What about this? Suppose you have a student who does seem to be suited to a standard, structured curriculum. Here's the question that I was driving at that I didn't fully get to because I think you and I could just talk for hours, going off and tangents and stuff. What I wanted to get at, where I think we may have disagreement, would be: would you favor a curriculum that is expressly a libertarian curriculum, or would you feel like that's kind of imposing ideas on the kids instead of letting the kids discover them for themselves?

**MARTIN:** I would definitely favor a strictly libertarian curriculum. This is perhaps a little bit too stern, but some of the things that are not negotiable in our home are Austrian economics, political theory—like right now my 13-year-old is reading Hans-Hermann Hoppe's *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism*.

**WOODS:** That's a hard book for 13-year-old, but he will get something out of it.

**MARTIN:** We're reading it together, and so we read and then we read again, and make sure that we've extracted the meaning out of the sentence and then we move on. And when he was one year younger we read Rothbard, and also at the same time we are reading Menger. I don't think that you can deny a child what is true. I don't think you can deny a child the knowledge that the moon goes around the earth and the earth goes around the sun, and in that exact same way I don't think you can deny a child the understanding of human action. You can't deny them the understanding of scarcity. You can't deny them the understanding of property rights.

**WOODS:** Right.

**MARTIN:** I think these things are absolutely non-negotiable. They have to know these things.

**WOODS:** I'm particularly sensitive to this because in a minor way I am in the public eye because I'm an author, and I do a lot of public speaking, and everybody kind of assumes that my kids are all going to be carbon copies of me. And if that should happen, if it turns out that they agree that their dad is right about things, I'm not going to be sad about that. That would be great. But I always take care to explain to them that they are entitled to think things through on their own and they don't have to reach the same answer that I've reached to be accepted by me, and to be part of the household and be loved and secure. I always make that clear to them, even though when they ask me what I believe about a particular issue, I give them my answer and I justify it. Typically they do find that it makes some sense. But they do understand that they are free to be individuals and I always want them to understand that. When I was a professor I always told students, do not write in your paper what you think I want you to say. I will give you an 'A' if you take Daniel Webster's view over Abel Upshur's view of the Constitution, even though I like Upshur, as long as you make a coherent argument and have a command of the material.

So I have always been sensitive about this. I don't want to be perceived as forcing something on them. I think of it in terms of: I have this wonderful edifice of knowledge here that took me a lifetime to acquire, and I would just so like to give them a leg up, to give them a chance to read books that I didn't even know about it until I was 20 years older than they are now, and to just see their little eyes open so early on would just be exciting for me. But on the other hand, if they want the other side of the story all they have to do is pick up the *New York Times*. They are surrounded by the other side of the story. There's no way I can keep it from them.

**MARTIN:** Yes, we listen to NPR just to that same purpose. I understand exactly what you're saying. Now there is the fear of indoctrinating your children. I think that for me the principles of Austrian economics are just so basic that it would be like indoctrinating somebody about gravity.

**WOODS:** Or what a noun is or something.

**MARTIN:** Correct. There are first principles. I think you really need to have those in order to understand the world. I don't think that you can really understand history until you've got a really good understanding of human action, property rights, economics are incredibly important. And so I want to give those to our children before we start talking about history. Because if you can't look at history through the eyes of economics—I think that is really the lens that is most useful I suppose if I had to choose one; how do you know if you're looking at just a court historian indoctrination books? You don't. So I think we really have to give that to our children first.

**WOODS:** Now let me ask you to address one of the most common objections to homeschooling. The socialization objection, that the kids aren't going to know how to interact with other people because they are cooped up all day with one or two other kids. They are all by themselves all the time and they're going to be socially inept.

**MARTIN:** Sure. Let me give you a little backstory on that, because that's such a completely crazy thought. Way back when, when homeschooling began, people took the children out of school. The choice essentially was to sit at the kitchen table and do school at home. And I've been told this by people who knew homeschoolers way back when. We're the first generation in our house. And yes, sometimes people work, that's what they were doing, and so that piece of mythology has a little tiny bit of truth to it. Now these people who started homeschooling, I can do what I am doing because they did the legwork. They did all that difficult work before I could do this. So we are really thankful to them. Also because of the work that they did we have tremendous opportunities all the time. We have homeschool co-ops. We've got homeschool sports. We have academic classes that we take together. My youngest son just performed in *The Wizard of Oz*. There is so much out there. If you wanted to you could fill up entire days, weeks, months, years with homeschool activities, and you would never even actually have to be in your house. You can be out of your house all day long, every day. So in terms of socialization there are so many possibilities. Sometimes we have trouble figuring out exactly when we are going to come home and do what we really think we need to do. You've got to get two hours of piano and we've got to leave now so that we can get this done. The other thing that's really exciting is that your children can be with toddlers, with babies; my 13-year-old son hangs out with children who are younger than he is, children who are older than he is, but he doesn't hang out with the adults because we make it our point to surround him with adults that are interested in the fields he is interested in. So we are going to—for example, just last week, we were at Mark Thornton's lecture in downtown Atlanta, and my son is there with all of his friends with whom he can talk about economics or policy questions, and so he's with adults all the time. But not only that, when he's, say, at

church on Wednesday nights singing in the adult choir there are people there who are in their 60s and 70s. So there is this whole wide array of people of different ages, different demographics, different income levels, religions, creeds, colors. Everybody is available to him. It's not just sitting in a room with people your own age from your zip code. I mean, how unnatural is that, to be sitting in a room all day long with kids your age who make the same money that your parents do and they are essentially having all the same experiences you're having? It's a little bit weird because you know only three percent of the children are having this experience, but I think that the socialization is just different as a homeschooler.

**WOODS:** One last thing, and this is a practical objection. Don't you need to have at least one parent at home, and isn't that difficult for a lot of families to manage these days?

**MARTIN:** Some people, what they do is they flip their day. After work everybody comes home. Children come home from their childcare. Parents come from their work, and they will devote an hour or two to the basic lesson for the day. You know, whatever you were doing: English, math, history, or science. And then the next day they go back to their childcare situation and they do their homework. And then they do it again the next day. Sometimes homeschooling can be done on the weekend. It can be done at night. And it's getting done so much faster. I think about 2 1/2 hours is the maximum that is needed for the most basic of homeschooling curriculum.

**WOODS:** Before I let you go, give us the overview of what the Libertarian Homeschooler is all about. You've got a huge number of likes on Facebook. People can get there by going to Facebook and typing in The Libertarian Homeschooler, and you can get that directly by typing [facebook.com/thelibertarianhomeschooler?](https://facebook.com/thelibertarianhomeschooler?)

**MARTIN:** That's it. Yes.

**WOODS:** Ok. So tell us about it.

**MARTIN:** The Libertarian Homeschooler page happened at the same time as, I'm sure you're familiar with this, the Keynes and Hayek rap. Do you remember that?

**WOODS:** I sure do.

**MARTIN:** Well okay, at that point I had started listening to Milton Friedman on YouTube, and so he was my gateway drug. I came to Austria by way of Chicago. I was watching the Keynes and Hayek rap and I just thought, why don't I know any of this? And I went to [Mises.org](https://mises.org) and started reading widely and really it was you and Bob Murphy. My friends would come in and would listen to you and Bob Murphy lecture and the reason that we chose the two of you was because our boys really like to hear you all talking.

**WOODS:** Okay.

**MARTIN:** So we really started digging into the Austrian School, into economics, and into philosophy, and all that, and I thought, other people really need to know this, so I started the Libertarian Homeschooler. And people are really curious about homeschooling. They've heard about this mythical beast, the homeschooler, and they want to see what it looks like, and that's what we do on the page. You get a little glimpse into our day-to-day life, and we just look like normal people with our kids all day long, and that I think gives a lot of people a lot of hope, it encourages them, and it makes them think, "Hey, I can probably do this." And if I make mistakes we talk about that. We say, you know what? I did it again. I still haven't learned this lesson.

A lot of it is just practical relationship stuff, but I also like to put up notes and links to great stuff like [Liberty Classroom](#), which we also love.

**WOODS:** Thank you.

**MARTIN:** There's great stuff out there. And there's a terrific list of notes that took a really long time to compile that people can look at on the page. It says "Notes March 2014," and it goes towards a libertarian view on the rights of children. We look at Rothbard, and Hoppe, and Walter Block and a few other people, all the way down to a list of books that are really easy to find a libertarian thread in. Like *The Little Red Hen* or *Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose* and things like that, so it's sort of a smattering of everything Libertarian homeschooler.