



## Episode 1,193: Insights from 17-Year-Old Unschooling Listener and Budding Historian

Guest: Noah Tetzner

**WOODS:** Tell me about your podcast. First of all, tell me your age.

**TETZNER:** I'm 17 years old.

**WOODS:** How about that? All right, so tell me about your podcast.

**TETZNER:** Yeah, so I run a podcast called *The History of Vikings*. I launched that about three months ago, and of course it's about Vikings and Norse mythology, and it's really exciting. The show features all sorts of exciting guests, professors from Oxford, Harvard, Yale. We even had one of the leading scholars of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and he sort of talked about the relationship between *The Hobbit* and Norse myth. And yeah, that's my podcast. It's enjoyed by thousands of people each week, and we just launched a YouTube channel, so it's a lot of fun and it's really exciting.

**WOODS:** That is fun. So the website is [TheHistoryOfVikings.com](http://TheHistoryOfVikings.com).

**TETZNER:** Yeah, that's right.

**WOODS:** All right, great, great. So I do want people to check that out. I am of course going to link to it at [TomWoods.com/1193](http://TomWoods.com/1193). But there's something broader that I want to discuss with you, and that is your unique — let's say your unique educational background. Here you are 17 years old, a listener of *The Tom Woods Show*, so you already have a brain that's highly discriminating and able to perceive value when it spots it. But I'm interested in your — I mean, I know you were schooled in private school for a few years, you went through homeschooling for a while, but then you've done so-called unschooling, and that is the part that even I don't quite fully get. I'm not saying I would send the goons to your house and put your mother in jail or something; I'm just saying I don't quite get it. So talk to me about that.

**TETZNER:** Yeah, so I guess the easiest way to go about this is just to explain what unschooling is, first of all. And unschooling is very similar to homeschooling in a way, and it is actually a form of homeschooling. And what unschooling is it's basically lifelong learning. It's a philosophy that promotes a kind of thinking as if school didn't exist. And because I'm unschooled — and I guess unschooling is very different in many different families and a lot of people go about it differently. But because I'm unschooled, I can really have the opportunity to learn what is practical for myself and my life and what my family feels is practical for me. So for example, I spend a large amount of time working on everything that I do with *The History of Vikings*, the podcast, talking with guests; I'll research all sorts for that, exciting

stuff, writing articles and all that. And I also obviously study other stuff: history, theology, literature, great literature. And so that's what unschooling is. And I suppose it's interesting to note that, while all unschoolers are homeschoolers, not all homeschoolers are unschoolers. So if that makes sense, that's basically what unschooling is in a nutshell.

**WOODS:** Now, you're obviously a very bright, well-spoken guy. I think the concern that some people have is that not everybody in an unschooling environment would use the time wisely. Maybe people would just play video games all day. And they would say, even though the education system's a mess and it's got all kinds of problems, surely at least having somebody barking at you in front of a classroom is better than you sitting in front of video games all day. And I think that's the main concern. It's not so much that we're worried that you, Noah, would have a problem with it; it's that most people wouldn't be suited to it. Or a lot of people may not have academic interests, and so what does their so-called schooling consist of?

**TETZNER:** Yeah, no, I think you're right in a way, and I really don't think that every child would do well in an unschooling situation, because there's a lot of teenagers especially that are obviously just super unmotivated and really don't even have an idea as to what they're interested in, don't know what they want to do with their future. So people like that, it's probably best to put them in a semi-structured setting, whether that be more traditional homeschooling with more structured curriculum or maybe even a private school. But yeah, like you said, I don't think that we should be sending our kids off to school, obviously simply because, while many kids are unmotivated, this is true, our job as educators and our job as promoters of free thinking should be to try to get our young people excited and helping them to find their passions and what they're interested in. Because if you ship someone off to an institution, they will only learn what somebody else thinks is necessary for their personal lives, which of course that's just a load of crap. Everyone's different. Everybody has their own dreams, their own goals, their own career, and education is really something that differs greatly from person to person. And it should.

**WOODS:** Fair enough. I've heard that said. But on the other hand, I think most people would say there's a certain bare minimum that we all need to know, and that's going to vary. People are going to think everybody needs to know this array of things, and other people think people should know that array of things. But maybe those people aren't wrong. Maybe those people are right. Maybe everybody ought to know these certain things, and they're not going to learn that unless it's under some form of duress. I think that's the concern. And also, the idea that the student should be deciding what's best for himself, I get the attraction to that, but certainly somebody who's six years old or seven or eight, how are they going to know what's best for them? We just sit and let them play until they decide they want to learn how to read? I don't think that's going to persuade a lot of people.

**TETZNER:** No, and I think you're right, and like I mentioned, there are many different types of unschooling, and the people who would I think disagree with a lot of what you're saying would probably be classified as radical unschoolers, people who just literally let their kids play video games all day and don't make their kids brush their teeth, don't make their kids eat vegetables. That kind of unschooling is actually very harming to a child, I would say. But especially with older kids — and I really think that unschooling is the most beneficial in the teenage years and in the older stages of a child's development and educational experience — is it's really about, just like I said before, getting motivated in something and choosing your own path. But no, I completely agree with you. I think that sort of unschooling is actually very hazardous to one's health.

And certainly at such a young age, there are things that you need to learn. We all need to learn how to read. We all need to know basic math. I think it's important that we all learn our history, especially the history of the United States. We learn how money works. Things like that are just absolutely vital to a child's life. But we can go about that in very nonconventional ways. We can go about that in ways that interest people. There are different types of learners, and perhaps when teaching somebody about economics, we actually get out the dollar bills, we get out the coins, and we actually count it out with those smaller children so that they're really engaged. So it's just about finding ways to suit their educational needs. But no, I would definitely agree with you there.

**WOODS:** All right, so you went to private school for several years, and then you went to go be an unschooler. So why didn't you just stick in a private school? Why wasn't that meeting your needs? Because I think some people would think: private school, you don't need homeschooling.

**TETZNER:** Right. Yeah, so I was actually homeschooled for many years before I went to private school. And then I went to private school, and in the beginning, it was really a nice experience. I suppose the reason why my parents decided to send me to private school — and I know many homeschooling parents listening probably feel these same feelings, is they feel like, oh, my kids are getting to the high-school age and I don't know how to teach them hardcore math and I don't know how to teach them some of the more difficult subjects, science and that. So perhaps that's why my parents sent me off.

But when I was there in the beginning, it was a really good experience, great history teacher, really was able to showcase my passion for history there. But a lot of the stuff was just stuff that I was learning and it didn't really line up with what I wanted to do. And I was spending so much time, eight hours a day at school, plus coming home just absolutely mentally and physically exhausted, no time to chase after the dreams that I had. So I think that it was really about learning the things that my family and I felt was important for me to learn instead of somebody else who had plans for my future, wanted me to grow up into something that they decided.

**WOODS:** All right, so describe for me your typical day.

**TETZNER:** Yeah, so I the school that I went to — and I do not speak ill of that school. It's actually a very good school where I live in Wisconsin here. But I would wake up at 6:30; school started at 7:30. Went to school. The different class days alternated between the Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes and then the Tuesday-Thursday classes, and the Tuesday-Thursday classes were more of the science/math ones; Monday-Wednesday-Friday were more of the history omnibus classes. And yeah, just one class after the other, world history, chemistry, algebra, just sort of what you'd expect — logic. A leadership class was actually another one. Basic Christian doctrine, because it happened to be a classical school, classical Christian school. So that was sort of the basic day, but then school ended at around 3 o'clock. I would come home with loads of homework, because it's academically rigorous, and if I wanted to do well on the homework, by the time I got home at 3 o'clock, if I started it right away — and I know this was typical of the other students upon talking to them — I wouldn't get done until probably 6 or 7 at night, and by that time, I've had no time to rest, I've had no time to spend with my family, and I've have no time to do the things that I really get energy from.

**WOODS:** So what I was more or less driving at was what is your day like now?

**TETZNER:** Oh, sure. Yeah, so my day now – well, it's the summer, I suppose, but that's kind of irrelevant because –

**WOODS:** Right, yeah, homeschooling or an unschooling day, what would it look like? Of course the whole point of unschooling is that it's different for everybody. I just want to know what it's like in your case.

**TETZNER:** Yeah, sure. So yeah, I actually do have a set time with my parents where I wake up – believe it or not, I wake up at about 7:30 to 8 o'clock every day, and I'm actually excited to get up because I don't have this sort of drudgery looming over me. But I get up. I eat breakfast, do that whole thing, get ready for the day. And there's actually – well, it's not like a full curriculum that I do. It's not like an eight-hour curriculum. I do actually use some I guess you would say structured books. I use, it's called Notgrass History, so I learn about currently the Middle Ages, and I'm actually learning about all sorts of the medieval cultures there while reading classic books that go with it. *The Art of War*, *The Cat of Bubastes*, all sorts of these classic books that go with it. And I do that, and then I also read the corresponding literature comprehension that goes with that. And after doing that, I'll probably log in to my computer, work on my podcast for a while. And that all probably gets done at around 1, 2 p.m., I would say. Then after that, I go outside, enjoy nature, go for a bike ride, and spend time with my family.

**WOODS:** Why the Vikings?

**TETZNER:** You know, I've always been interested in history, and actually, my favorite time period in history is probably like the Napoleon era, but one thing that really got me into Vikings was actually the mythology behind the Vikings, the Norse myths, the tales of Thor, Odin, and Loki. And I discovered that because I was reading one of the Norse sagas, the saga of the Völsungs, and I just remember being so enamored by these characters and these stories and obviously how different they were from how the Marvel movies portray them. But then I was super fascinated in the people behind these myths, the people who worshipped these gods, the Vikings, and just there are so many misconceptions surrounding them. It was just insane. No, but that's why I am really passionate about the Vikings, is the mythology, I would say, the great stories in history.

**WOODS:** How is it possible that somebody who's 17 years old is already listening to a libertarian podcast like this one?

**TETZNER:** Well, you know, I don't think I'm a very unique case. I think that one thing that we're really starting to see just sort of in the years coming, in recent years is I think young people are really starting to get involved in politics, and I would say that's actually probably a good thing. I think it's because politics is really in our face, these pressing issues, whether they be foreign, domestic. Yeah, so I suppose politics is really in our face nowadays. It's always on our phones. The mainstream media blasts news stories like they're going out of style.

And my attraction towards libertarianism I would say really came out of my love for history. I've always been fascinated with the Industrial Revolution, and that was really the time when

America was sort of coming into its own and becoming a world power. And I really started — in this 2016 election, when a lot of people in my peer group were really getting super excited about Bernie Sanders because of socialism, I remember sort of looking at socialism as an ideology and then looking at history and looking at how there's never actually been a nonviolent, successful socialist society and government.

And again, just going back to sort of the great titans of the Industrial Revolution, or the robber barons as some people would like to call them, I just fell in love with capitalism as an ideology, this idea that you can create a good or service and sell it and provide for your family, I just think that's — and I could go into great detail, but I just think that's just such a great thing. And I remember reading the book, I think it's by Thomas DiLorenzo, called *The Problem with Socialism*, and I read that when I was about I think 15 or 16 — or no, I would have been younger, 14 or 15, and that was really sort of like the gateway to discovering your podcast.

**WOODS:** How would you have known to look for DiLorenzo's book? How would that book fall into your lap? I ask these things because I'm curious to know the different ways the ideas eventually get transmitted to people, and I know that a lot of folks who listen, we all have our own stories and we're genuinely interested in hearing those of other people.

**TETZNER:** Yeah, I just — you know, it was sort of this socialism that was so present. Bernie Sanders and the 2016 election and so many young people, just unprecedented amounts of young people latching onto him and supporting him. It was like something that we've never really seen since the 1900s, early 1900s. But I just knew something wasn't quite right with socialism. When they started talking about free college, I was kind of like, okay, I'm not too keen on paying for somebody else's way. When people like my family and other hardworking taxpayers are doing everything they can to support their own families and pay for their own way, why would they support somebody else? So socialism as an ideology was just such a huge turnoff, because I'm very sort of individualistic and individual-minded. I didn't think that was a very good idea.

But I remember I was just in Barnes & Noble and I was looking in actually the history section, and *The Problem with Socialism* was right there on the shelf, and I picked it up, and I loved that he talked about the great Austrian economics in the book. That was really exciting, because these people lived long ago. They were a part of history. And just really digging into that. And then I've always listened to podcasts, so I probably typed in "libertarian" or something like that, you know, "capitalism," "pro-market" or something like that, and *The Tom Woods Show* came up. And Stefan Molyneux, I actually am a big fan of him as well, and then I saw I think he was on your show before, so that was really exciting for me to listen to, as well.

**WOODS:** So what comes next for you? You're going to be turning 18, and that's the magic number where people go off and do their own thing, whether college or otherwise. So what do you have in mind?

**TETZNER:** You know, as far as my career is concerned, *The History of Vikings* is really growing. It's really becoming sort of a force to be reckoned with. So if I could — and this is entirely possible. I've already been putting plans in place to start monetizing the show. I've recently joined a network. But I think I'd eventually like to do something in podcasting full-time. But as far as right off the hook, I'm really in a unique place. My dad owns his own small

real estate business, as does my uncle, so I'll probably end up working in there as soon as I graduate homeschool or whatever and start making a considerable amount of money right off the bat. So that'll be a really exciting thing. But yeah, the show, my podcast, it's continuing to grow. Certainly I would love to really be able to spread my passion for liberty education with people. I've talked to Brett Vennoite from *School Sucks*, Professor CJ from *The Dangerous History Podcast*, and these are all — and your good self, Tom, you guys are all really great heroes of mine, so it's really exciting to be able to have these discussions with folks like you.

**WOODS:** Any final words you'd like to share with my folks?

**TETZNER:** Yeah, Tom, thank you so much for having me. Yeah, for those of you who are thinking about homeschooling, thinking about unschooling, currently have your kids in the school system, I would really encourage you to keep listening to *The Tom Woods Show*. There's a great documentary out there and book called *Indoctrination*. I highly recommend that. And you can always feel free to check out my podcast. It's just simply *The History of Vikings*.

**WOODS:** All right, very good. So *The History of Vikings* is the podcast. We'll link to that at [TomWoods.com/1193](http://TomWoods.com/1193). And when I got your email, I thought, what the heck? Let me give you a chance to say some words to the folks and also let them know that we have young folks in the world who are listening, who are learning stuff, who are going to do great things in the future. And I'm glad to have had a chance to get to know you. Thanks so much.

**TETZNER:** Thank you.