



## Episode 806: Homeschooling Shouldn't Intimidate You

Guest: Laura Blodgett

**WOODS:** I haven't talked homeschooling on the show for quite a while. I was looking back at earlier episodes, and I think I had Anna Martin on about two years ago or something. She's the Libertarian Homeschooler.

**BLODGETT:** Yes, I remember hearing that one.

**WOODS:** Yeah, yeah, it's a great one, but it was a while ago, so I know I've had a lot more listeners since then, and I know there are a lot of people on the fence about homeschooling, because they already get the benefits – although, actually, you know what? I'd bet they don't fully get the benefits. Let's get back to that in a minute. What they see are burdens. What they see are burdens. What they see are difficulties: a lot of work, a lot of responsibility, and it's scary.

**BLODGETT:** Right.

**WOODS:** So can you start off by maybe just trying to put people's minds at ease about all that? Did you have that fear?

**BLODGETT:** Well, I think that any responsible parent begins that journey of trying to teach their own children with those kinds of fears, much like when you first have a baby you have those kinds of fears. It's perfectly normal for a responsible person to have those concerns. But as we all know, once you have the baby you dig in and you do it. You take care of the little screaming infant that is so odd to you in your experience.

So I think one of the biggest things that people get hung up on is what this education is supposed to look like, and they think it's supposed to look like what the government says it's supposed to look like. And it's not. That ruins it in a lot of ways.

**WOODS:** So what is wrong with the government's model?

**BLODGETT:** Well, it's impersonal. It's assembly line. It's full of propaganda. You know that. It's lacking in relationship. It assumes a whole lot of things about what education is that it isn't, and it presumes that you have to stuff a lot of information in their head, which they don't even do a very good job of. But also there's so much wasted time and bureaucracy. I've seen some studies, and I know just from some very – Well,

I went to public school, so I know from my own experience, and then one of my oldest daughters just participated in band for a semester, and the time wasting is phenomenal.

**WOODS:** Oh, the time wasting is unbelievable. I went to public school the whole 13 years, and in particular for a kid who gets what they're saying — yes, I get this point, but the other kids don't, so I have to sit there for I don't know how long every single day while they repeat something again and again and again. This is just mind numbing.

**BLODGETT:** Right.

**WOODS:** And that's just one of the problems: is the lack of individual attention. How about the subject of what you're going to teach your kids? You could just take an off-the-shelf curriculum and then just teach that, and that can work, but maybe you might think that's also kind of assembly line. So how have you been doing it?

**BLODGETT:** Well, like a lot of people again who started, I started with presuppositions that it had to be a curriculum, and I discovered year by year that my kids did better, we enjoyed it more the less we used a curriculum. In fact, in the first couple of years, towards the end of each year, say maybe March, it was like we were kind of tired of using the curriculum, so I just stopped and we just sort of read and played. And I was astonished at how much we still interacted and learned, even though all we did was sort of read stories and do chores. Everybody was happy, and everybody was learning.

**WOODS:** Now, when you say "everybody," tell people how big a family are we talking about.

**BLODGETT:** Oh, just seven kids, and I say "just seven" a little bit tongue-in-cheek obviously, but it's one of my standard responses to people when they say, "Oh, how can you do that with seven kids?" and I say, "Well, what is the average class size?" My kids have it good.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's true. Yeah, only size. Right, that's a great class size.

**BLODGETT:** Yeah, and then they might say, "But, all the subjects at once?" Well, it's so integrated. I have a neighbor, whom I love dearly, who has been known to say, "Oh, I'm not a Laura Blodgett; I couldn't do what you do." And I said, "I don't think my life is what you think it's like. It's so much more fun." Yes, it's hard work, because taking care of kids is hard work. Everybody's tired at the end of the day; everybody makes their priorities and choices — Now I got a little off track (laughing).

**WOODS:** Well, let me ask you: let's try and describe what it is like homeschooling so many kids. Were they all school age at the same time?

**BLODGETT:** Well, they are 13 years apart, so I was into high school at the same time I was starting the youngest. But because I know them all so intimately, because I was their instructor, plus with their father highly involved in many ways, I knew what they needed. We had such a high level of communication that it wasn't merely the struggle

to convey information, to convey ideas, to understand their questions, to understand how to interact with them to help them discover things.

**WOODS:** Well, all the same, there is the practical question of having little kids who need much more supervision even just to keep them quiet, then you have kids who are older who have more difficult material that you then have to go help them with. The image I think that's in people's minds is you running around ragged from one child to the other like whack-a-mole.

**BLODGETT:** (laughing) Well —

**WOODS:** Not that you're whacking the kids, but do you understand my point?

**BLODGETT:** Yeah, I know, because I've obviously had these discussions many, many times with people. It is hard to explain the dynamic of a family that is used to being together. And maybe you know the phenomena of when a child or two is gone for a little bit, and they come back home, and it's sort of like you have to reestablish connections. You have to reestablish what the priorities of your family are, what the rules are — I mean, it can even be that way when you go visit grandma. No, no, no, you're at home now. This is how we do things. I'm still in charge.

And when you start out the day with your kids regularly, and the life that you have with them revolves around the home, there are not the same pulls and pressures and conflicts that you have when they're going off to an institution every day. So when I begin the day with them, they understand that they are a priority to me. And yes, we have our disciplinary problems — or we did; they're all adults now. But it wasn't on the same level of fight and conflict that it is when they're just coming home from another place.

**WOODS:** Describe then for me what a typical day in your house would look like when you were at the height of homeschooling.

**BLODGETT:** Well, I'm glad you put it that way, because I think that's an important thing. But I'd also, before I say anything about that I would like to emphasize that I have known a lot of people who have taught their kids at home. I've known them, all family sizes, all economic statuses, all personalities of both moms and kids. And one of the beauties of teaching your own kids at home is that you can be so creative and so responsive to everyone's particular strengths and weaknesses. And so even though I share my ideas and how we did things, they're what fit for family, and they really should only serve as a jumping off place or an idea board, so to speak, for other people, and they should never listen to my story or anybody else's story and think, I have to do it this way, or if I do it this way this is exactly what will work for us.

**WOODS:** Okay, so having said that, what's it like? What am I going to find if I were to go in a time machine and step into your house?

**BLODGETT:** So strangely enough, I had to give limits to at least a couple of my kids. I had to tell them they could not get up before 5:30.

**WOODS:** That's funny; I've never had to tell our kids that.

**BLODGETT:** (laughing) Yeah, and it kind of surprised me too, but again, I think it's because the whole process of the day and what the day held was exciting for them. And even at a young age, they knew what they had to do, and they could just get it done. And then when they got it done, they had more free time. They weren't locked in a room somewhere.

So typically, though, we started our day at about 7:00, and I fixed them breakfast, and I had a variety of home-cooked meals that I fixed them, but they all got the same thing. I did not cater to different tastes every morning. And then we got busy with chores, and I had put together chore charts. We rotated different things, but they all had a taste of different things they had to clean. And we put on music, and we sang, and I supervised them and helped them.

And the next thing that we generally did was Bible reading, because one of the reasons that I wanted to teach my kids at home was because I wanted that to be an important part of their life. And that involved some memorization, which in an of itself is a very good skill to learn. And then after that we would get into things that would maybe be more difficult for them, that take more concentration or more brain power when they're fresher. It could be individual things; it could be something that we're doing all together.

But I was always learning to be more and more flexible, because that would be my weakness: that I tend to be more organized; I tend to have an idea and be goal-oriented. But I found along the way how much joy and excitement there was in learning things that were made available to us for various reasons.

Then about lunchtime, my kids loved lunchtime, because I read to them during lunchtime. And we read usually part of an informational book that was just a couple of pages. A couple of examples: one was *Basic Economics* by Thomas Sowell. That was when they were a little older, but I didn't necessarily just read things that were suited to the younger kids. I mean, even when we had little kids I read one that was called *Mathematics: Is God Silent?*, which was fascinating and talked about things like the Fibonacci numbers – am I saying that right? I don't know if I'm saying that right.

**WOODS:** Oh yeah, Fibonacci, sure.

**BLODGETT:** Yeah. And then we read one about the life and times of Genghis Khan and another one about Muslims and different things – things that we would need to discuss, so we would just go a couple of pages at a time. And then we would read a story. I would read a story. I would often record it. I actually have boxes of tapes – because that was in the dark ages – of stories that I have recorded, and they go back and listen to them, and that's fun. And it's interesting to me, one of the unexpected results of that was the idea of them recording stories. And so I have lots of recordings of them doing certain things, and it was sort of speaking and reading practice for them at a whole different level. You know: when you have to listen to yourself, you learn things about what you sound like.

**WOODS:** Yeah, sure.

**BLODGETT:** And then we did memorization. I have a couple of really fun books of poems, so we used poems that they could relate to, like about elephants chewing bubble gum, just weird things like that. There was one about one girl's imaginary dragon by Ogden Nash, which actually a lot of people would recognize that name. And we made various games, and they learned all kinds of skills about memorizing and studying through what to them was just a game and were fun things. So yeah, after all of that was done — And then would have some breaks. They would play outside depending on their age and what they would get to. To be honest, I enjoyed the process of teaching them so much that sometimes my husband would come home and say, No, honey, that's enough. They're done now.

**WOODS:** Wow, that's pretty good. But what about — again, I know these are sorts of questions you get all the time, but you get them all the time because they're real concerns. How do you teach them advanced subjects that you might not be very knowledgeable in?

**BLODGETT:** Yeah, I think that — Well, you know that there are online resources. A lot of things, you'd be amazed what you can learn along with your children, and more than one time I would be studying something that I had not been recently up to speed on and I would say with them, Okay, explain to me what you don't understand, and as they would be explaining it to me, they would go, "Oh, I get it." And I would say, Wait, wait, wait, explain the rest to me (laughing).

But also, for me, one of the areas that I did not have expertise in was speaking the Spanish language, and it was really important to me that they learn this from a young age. So we found a tutor, who actually happened to be a family friend as well, and they went to see the tutor once a week. And then I also, learning from her and understanding some basics about how to try and be in a language daily, had them watch movies and do certain tape drills and certain things, so it was a combination.

**WOODS:** All right, I have a couple of more really practical things that I know are on people's minds, and I'm going to ask that after we thank our sponsor.

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All right, I said I wanted to talk about practical things. Here's a really practical thing: what kind of recordkeeping do I need to do, both for their future college application, let's say, and also for any government busybody who might come knocking at the door?

**BLODGETT:** Well, that's just going to depend a lot on which state or country that you live in. I know that, for instance, I have a very good friend who grew up in New York, and I just shudder at what I see her mother having to do for recordkeeping. But I also know that her mother successfully taught eight kids at home and wouldn't have done it any other way, so even though she had to struggle with that she did it.

I didn't have to do a lot for the government — or, how should I say that? In Idaho there is not a certain recordkeeping required or anything that I have to turn in on a regular

basis. And in fact, a lot of people I know moved to Idaho to teach their kids at home for the freedom that we have here. So what I devised is a weekly chart system, where I kind of divided it into subjects, but — Sometimes we filled it in as we went along; sometimes we made plans. It was just a tool. And that way if anything came up, we would have something to fall back on. And also, when it came to writing out high school transcripts I could go back and use that very successfully to write transcripts. I did very thorough transcripts for all of my kids to enter college.

**WOODS:** I have to ask you something else that's going to also sound like I'm just checking off boxes, but again, these are the concerns people have — or they're the criticism people have of homeschooling. And the one these days that I find the most laughable is socialization, because I think about the kinds — Look, I'm going to be very blunt about this. When I think about, frankly, the kinds of kids that they would be hanging around with in so-called normal circumstances, kids whose parents are totally screwed up, who have all kinds of problems, who don't know which end is up, their kids are even more convinced, and your kid's hanging around with them all day long has just got "bad news" written all over it. I mean, if I wanted to socialize kids properly the very last thing I would do is send them to the Prussian indoctrination factory. That would be the worst place to socialize them.

**BLODGETT:** Right, I am very frustrated also that somehow that is the standard of what we think would be a good place to send our kids to learn to get along. From a young age, there is nothing like the security of the home and the continuity of the relationships. I mean, who do you have the most trouble getting along with in your life? It's the people you live with. So it's the best of every possible parameter for learning social skills in the home, and when they get to be older, they sort of naturally branch out.

And one of the things that I have seen about teaching my kids at home and for others that are taught at home is that when they've had that kind of security and "iron works on iron" kind of thing, when they get to be the teenage years, the teenage rebellion thing is not a given, because now they are able to function as adults more, and they are expected to in most homeschooling families that I've been around. I mean, anybody can try and mimic the institutional setting in their home and kind of ruin a good thing. But I didn't have teenage rebellion and all of that, because my kids were free then to function as adults in the home. And it was kind of funny, because it was very frequent that other people would see my kids in various social settings that we would venture out into, and they were like, Oh, can I have them for this, or can I have them for that? Are you going to send them to high school now? And I'm like, No, they're wonderful now. No, get your own.

**WOODS:** Yeah, exactly. Well, let me ask you this: we've talked a little bit about using a curriculum or what it is you're going to teach the kids, but to what extent did your children have input in what it is they were learning?

**BLODGETT:** That's really hard to — what's the word I'm looking for? Because I was trying so hard to be responsive to who they were that I think I was intuitively aware of what they were interested in. For instance, I have one daughter who's a graphic arts major now, and I knew she loved to draw. And so I just provided all kinds of art supplies to her, and she just, when she was done with some of the more formal studies

that she had to do according to us as her parents, she just sat for hours and drew. So I would say she had a lot of input into that.

We have one daughter who is a professional chef now, and she knew she wanted to cook from the time she was in high school, and in particular then for her last year of high school, every single course that I would need to put on her high school transcript I designed to be revolving around the idea of food and culinary arts. So I think we did a pretty good job.

**WOODS:** What would you say to somebody who is on the fence and thinking, you know, maybe I am too busy to handle it? Or look, both of us need to work. I can't stay home and do it. How do you answer that?

**BLODGETT:** I know that there are some cases where people have extenuating circumstances, but I also know that when two parents work there are a lot of extra expenses, that you just end up spending money differently. And I've seen so many families effectively stay home on very, very tight, low budgets. So it can be done, and I think with a little brainstorming with other people who are trying to do it or who understand budgeting or possibilities you can do it. As far as time, I think getting back to what I said about how it looks different for everybody, I think any kid who spends time at home even just playing all day is probably learning better, is going to engage in learning in a more constructive way for them than going and staying for hours in a public school. There is an old joke about that among my homeschooling friends, is that 15 minutes doing any studying at home is better than a day at a public school.

**WOODS:** All right, so let's say somebody has listened to this episode and says, I think I may want to take the plunge and try this, I'd bet those people are going to want to read something: a book, a website, some resource just to get their feet wet. Is there one you can recommend?

**BLODGETT:** Well, I haven't been connected with the homeschooling community online that much, because my kids kind of graduated before that became a big thing, but I do write a blog called [TheHappyLibertarian.com](http://TheHappyLibertarian.com), and I have written a number of things about homeschooling there. And I also love to try and encourage people, so if anybody sends me particular questions, I would love to write a blog addressing those questions.

**WOODS:** Wow, sure enough, here I am looking at it right now. I know I've been here one other time at least: [TheHappyLibertarian.com](http://TheHappyLibertarian.com). Yeah, there it is. How about that? Wait a minute. Did I promote this on the show?

**BLODGETT:** No.

**WOODS:** I didn't promote this? Gosh, it looks so darn familiar to me. Well, anyway, we're going to link to it certainly. This is Episode 806, so [TomWoods.com/806](http://TomWoods.com/806). [TheHappyLibertarian.com](http://TheHappyLibertarian.com). Wow, and there you are still – regular posts, wow. There are a lot of blogs that get started, and they're gung ho for about three days, and then they say, Eh, forget it. But not so here. Oh, this is great. This is a great place for people to start. And there is a contact button on here?

**BLODGETT:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Ah, sure enough indeed. Okay, well, good. Definitely start with TheHappyLibertarian.com. That's good. All right, any parting words? They don't have to be super wise or anything.

**BLODGETT:** Just don't be afraid to enjoy your time with your kids and be the person that they – or the parents, both – that they look to for their inspiration and wisdom. Kids were given to parents first, and there is nothing about teachers that make them superior to parents.

**WOODS:** Fair enough. Those are excellent parting words. Those are a model of parting words. Well, Laura Blodgett, I appreciate your time. I want to also tell people, by the way, not only are you – and I deeply appreciate this – a member of my Supporting Listeners, SupportingListeners.com, but also you were a guest aboard the Contra Cruise this past October. And I see you in the video, by the way, that we made of it. Can I put you on the spot to say a word about your experience on that cruise? And actually, before you say anything, you were concerned about motion sickness, and I've been on many cruises, never had a problem. And I said, Don't worry, everybody. It's going to feel like you're standing on solid ground. And sure enough, it was actually far rockier than any cruise I've ever been on, and I felt so bad. So I kept checking on you to make sure everything was okay.

**BLODGETT:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** And you seemed fine after a while. But apart from that, what did you think of the experience?

**BLODGETT:** It was really fun. I really enjoyed meeting you and Bob, and I will treasure the friendships that got started on that cruise for the rest of my life.

**WOODS:** Isn't that funny? We all felt that way. Bob and I, when we planned this whole thing out, we were thinking – we're not narcissists, I promise you, but we were thinking, Well, this is all going to rest on how well we entertain people. And you know, we did a decent job of that, but it turned out that the people actually had a part to play, and I just think we had an unusually good, fun, nice, outgoing, just wonderful, bright group of people. We couldn't have asked for a better group. I thought that was probably the highlight, yeah.

**BLODGETT:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** So that's great, so I want to try to get as many of them back so we can have a big, tearful reunion some time in the future. If – *If* – I'm not saying there will be, right? Who knows what the future will hold? But just in case, on the off chance that we decide to do it again, it would be great to get people back. Well anyway, Laura, I appreciate your time. I know listeners are going to benefit from what you had to say, so thanks so much.

**BLODGETT:** Great, thank you.