

I've got my children back!

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It is all about balance! The never attainable, slippery, always out of reach “work-life” balance. Yet, this dichotomy does not quite work for me. Family is life, friends are life, self-care/hobbies are life, caring for my living spaces is life, work is life! Balance is that constant struggle between which “life” needs to be prioritized at any given moment.

One thing confinement has done for me is to RECENTER my time with my children. I surrendered right away to the fact that I had to readjust my schedule around theirs. My husband did so as well. I would be writing a completely different story right now if he didn't! I also need to acknowledge that neither of us lost our jobs, at least not yet. The support of my husband and our relatively secure finances need to be mentioned to situate these reflections within their proper context.

In the past adjusting our schedules around our children would have felt like a “chore”, something that needed to be taken care of and figured out temporarily (like when they are sick). This time, knowing it would be for a longer period of time put us in a different space.

What does it look like to be home with my children all day long? What kind of space is school going to have? How can I make sure that they can learn in an enjoyable atmosphere, and without turning homework into a power struggle between me and them?

When our school started to share academic materials, it was wonderful to see how our teachers stepped up and worked very hard to support us parents at home. At the same time, it was challenging to recreate the school environment and adapt its curriculum to our home. It did not make sense anymore. Meanwhile, I was noticing how much my children loved being at home, spending time with us (did I mention the extra kisses I was receiving?) and coming up with their own curriculum!

I started to realize how much of their development I was “delegating” to the school. I am not thinking about their academic development, but about their development as caring human beings. I realized that it was no longer possible to rely on the school, and that I was no longer willing to do so. I wanted my children back! Hey, guess what: I already have my children back, and I want to continue to have them back!

That is when I started to consider the idea of homeschooling for the next academic year. I told myself: 10 years from now, what will we all remember about our COVID-19 time? Will we remember the time spent learning together while the world was trying to figure out how to deal with this pandemic? Oh, yes!

When this idea started to settle down, I felt an overwhelming feeling of excitement, joy, and peace. I started to imagine (and practice) being able to **LEARN WITH** my kids, **ABOUT** them, and **FROM** them. I started to imagine gardening with them, cooking with them, doing art with them, creating science experiments with them, exploring nature with them - in a word, doing with them all the things I usually struggle to find the time for.

There is no doubt that I am also concerned about not being able to endure this lifestyle for a year or so (they are almost 5 and 7. They've got PLENTY of energy!). I am afraid about how this choice will impact my work, my time with my husband, with my friends, my own time, and all the other things that I call "life."

Again: it's all about balance, and it will continue to be that slippery, unachievable, and out of reach kind of thing. But for some reasons, I don't quite seem to be able to shake off the excitement of having my children back!

It's Tom Sawyer's Time!

During this time of confinement, my husband had the idea of introducing our children to one of his favorite cartoons: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the 1980 Japanese anime re-adaptation of Mark Twain's homonymous novel (1876). What an idea! Our children loved watching the whole series and they came up with all sort of Tom Sawyer inspired games: dressing up like Tom and Huck, with their iconic straw hats and suspenders, they started to talk like their characters, picking up a 19th century Missouri-like American English: "I reckon not!"

Not surprisingly, my kids were not the only ones who fell under the spell of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. What caught my attention while watching this cartoon during this time, and as I am pondering the idea of homeschooling my children? I noticed how little importance school had in Tom and Huck's lives. Nonetheless, their knowledge about life, their sense of justice, their moral character is far deeper than that of any other adults in the fictional town of St. Petersburg. Two scenes, in particular, stood out to me: the scene of the death of Indian Joe, and the final scene, in which Huck, who has become "the rich boy", starts going to school.

When Indian Joe accidentally dies by falling into the crevices of the cave where he was hiding, the people of St. Petersburg react with a cheerful applause. Tom Sawyer is deeply disturbed by the reaction of his fellow citizens and comments by noticing that while Indian Joe had done things that were wrong "he had never been given the opportunity to be anyone else."

In the last scene, Huck starts going to school after he and Tom have found the treasure, Huck has become rich, and found a custodian. On the very first day of the new academic year, Tom is threatened by his new teacher to stand alone in the corner of the class because he was not listening. As Huck hears the threat, he exclaims: "that's it. I'm out of here!" Similarly, Tom, while he had hoped that his new female teacher would treat him better than the old one, he reaches the conclusion that "teachers are teachers, and school is school".

These stories made me think about what **learning** may look like during the time of COVID-19, a time in which school is no longer at the center of our children's lives. For me, it's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn's time! It's a time of exploration and adventure, it's a time to live closer to nature, it's a time for deeper connections with our families and small local communities. And if at the end of this time my kids turn out as wise, courageous, just, and caring as these legendary and inseparable friends, I am ready for it!