

Home Grown: Adventures in Parenting Off the Beaten Path, Unschooling, and Reconnecting with the Natural World

by

Jennifer Alisia Garrett



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Synopsis

The charming story of one family's mission to build a deeper, lasting connection to land and community on their Vermont farm. When Ben Hewitt and his wife bought a sprawling acreage of field and forest in northern Vermont, they were eager to start a self-sustaining family farm. But over the years, the land became so much more than a building site; it became the birthplace of their two sons, the main source of family income and food, and even a classroom for their children. Through self-directed play, exploration, and experimentation on their farm, Hewitt's children learned how to play and read, test boundaries and challenge themselves, fail and recover. Best of all, this environment allowed their personalities to flourish, fueling further growth. In *Home Grown*, Hewitt shows us how small, mindful decisions about day-to-day life can lead to greater awareness of the world in our backyards and beyond. In telling the story of his sons' unconventional education in the fields and forests surrounding his family's farm, he demonstrates that the sparks of learning are all around us, just waiting to be discovered. Learning is a lifelong process—and the best education is never confined to a classroom.

Sort review

"In this fine and eloquent and moving book, Ben Hewitt takes a principled stand for the unconventional childhood, for the intellectual and emotional and soulful nurture of nature."—Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle* "Ben Hewitt walks you along the lanes of his small family farm right into the heart of parenting. He does not judge the new normal of life's fever-pitch pace but fills you with the courage to follow your hopes, which may well transform your family."—Kim John Payne, MEd, author of *Simplicity Parenting*, *Beyond Winning*, and *The Soul of Discipline* "This fine book may make you wish you'd grown up in a very different way."—Bill McKibben, author of *Wandering Home* "What kind of parent doesn't send his kids to school? The kind that thinks maybe kids learn best when 'learning cannot be helped'—when kids are so excited about the world that they master the skills they need to explore it, the same way they mastered crawling, walking and speaking." —Lenore Skenazy, author of the book and blog, *Free-Range Kids* "Hewitt provides a beautifully written handbook for those of you considering unschooling. And if you're already unschooling, buy ten copies to hand out to friends and family who ask you how it works."—Penelope Trunk, blogger, entrepreneur, and home-schooling advocate "This is a beautifully written, honest, introspective, soul-revealing, and soul-stirring account of one family's choice to live close to nature and to allow their children to learn naturally, without school, in a self-directed manner. The book's biggest message, I think, is that we do have choices; we can chart our own lives, we don't have to follow the crowd if we don't want to."—Peter Gray, Research Professor at Boston College and author of *Free to Learn* "This book fills me with both sadness and joy. My sadness is for the millions of children locked in schools, looking out the windows as the precious days of childhood pass them by. My

joy comes from knowing this eloquent book will inspire many to choose a different path.”—Charles Eisenstein, author of *Sacred Economics* and *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible* "Ben Hewitt's thoughtful and elegant prose cuts through the noise of modern life to reveal the incredible public value and personal satisfaction of being rooted in one's environment, nurturing meaningful relationships among family and friends, and learning with and from children. You don't have to live in a cabin in Vermont like the Hewitts to benefit from the book; you can enjoy their story and embrace their spirit to take control of your life and learning to achieve your own unique ambitions."—Patrick Farenga, publisher of *The Legacy of John Holt* "An inspiring read that reminds us the world can offer more to our children than classrooms and cubicles; and they, in turn, can contribute more than test scores and paychecks."—Shannon Hayes, author of *Radical Homemaking*"Everyone with a relationship to children should read this book... for the sake of tomorrow's generation." —Joel Salatin, farmer, Polyface Farm, and author of *Folks, This Ain't Normal* About the Author BEN HEWITT is the author of *Saved*, *The Town That Food Saved*, *Making Supper Safe*, and articles for magazines such as *Bicycling*, *Discover*, *Gourmet*, *Men's Journal*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Outside*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Yankee*, *Taproot*, and many others. He and his family live in a self-built, solar-powered house in Cabot, Vermont, and operate a forty-acre livestock, vegetable, and berry farm.Excerpt.

© Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The Reckoning A BIT MORE THAN FOUR YEARS after we first walked the land we would eventually purchase, Penny and I became parents when our first son, Finlay, was born. (Rye was born nearly three years later).Of all the things I have learned since becoming a parent (and sometimes, it feels as if this might be everything I've ever learned), perhaps the hardest to accept is that it is selfish and possibly even dangerous to desire particular outcomes for our children. This is in no small part because we cannot be masters of our children's fates, and to pretend otherwise is to engage in both delusion and hubris. This does not stop parents from trying, of course. We are forever attempting to engineer our children's lives, most often in ways we believe will deliver them to some predetermined future, and I often remind myself that whatever stories my sons choose to write with their lives are not mine to tell or even to imagine.This is not to say that we are helpless to direct our children. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of the simple fact that our sons and daughters will always find ways to surprise us, and that often these surprises will thwart specific hopes we might have held on their behalf. In my experience, the more specific the hope, the more likely it will go unfulfilled. But of course I cannot fully stop myself from wanting on my boys' behalf. I am their father, after all. I am only human.Of all the things I want for them, connection to place and a sense of knowing how they fit into this world usurps all others. I want this for them more than happiness, because I think mere happiness is a shallow elucidation of the human experience, and by itself is not a particularly sturdy emotional foundation upon which to build a fulfilling life. I want this for them more than success, at least insofar as our culture has come to define success as being a product of money and power and recognition. I want this for them more than physical vitality, because I believe that

good health—and not just health of body, but also of emotion and spirit—is only possible when one feels connected to and secure in their place. To be clear, this does not mean that my sons must remain on this land until the end of their physical lives; while the connection I'm talking about can surely be instilled by a particular place, this connection can also travel, because this connection is a bond that cannot be broken. It is permanent and unconditional, and it is impervious to distance or circumstance, much like the bond between siblings or parent and child. In this sense, it is not even a connection to a specific place; it is a connection to oneself. It is a sense of understanding how one fits into a great, vast world in which both beauty and tragedy can overwhelm. I don't know precisely what this connection looks and feels like, in part because Penny and I are learning the shape of this connection alongside our sons. Like most children of our generation—indeed, like most children of our sons' generation—we did not grow up free to determine our place in the world. Like most children, we were told our place. We were not told this unkindly, nor without tremendous love. We were not told this overtly. Rather, we were unquestioningly expected to do as the majority of our childhood peers did, with little consideration given as to what was truly being asked of us and what the cost might be. Along with the vast majority of our peers, Penny and I passed the formative years of our respective childhoods in school, as students of what we were told we must learn. That there are other ways of learning was never considered. That there are other things to learn, many of which cannot be measured or graded or segregated by subject, was never discussed. That our prescribed educations might actually erode our self-confidence, rather than develop it, occurred to no one. It is not difficult to understand why these things were not considered or discussed; it is not difficult to understand why it occurred to no one that passing the majority of our childhood in school might strip us of confidence. Because the same thing happened to our parents. To call into question the wisdom of convention requires a degree of self-assuredness that rarely survives the eroding impact of standardized, hierarchical education. Such questioning also places one in the uncomfortable position of cutting against the cultural grain, of being perceived as arrogant, eccentric, perhaps even dangerous, and few parents—including Penny and myself—wish to be perceived in this manner. I realize there is nothing I can do to guarantee that Fin and Rye will develop the connection I speak of. The uncomfortable truth lurking in every parent's heart—including mine—is this: we cannot know what will become of our children. This is what I mean when I say it might even be dangerous to desire particular outcomes for our children, because the almost inevitable truth is that at least some of our desires will remain unfulfilled. Ever since Icarus disregarded his father's advice and flew fatally close to the sun, children have surprised and defied their parents, and I sometimes think my greatest challenge is to not grant surprise and defiance the power to disappoint me. So, yes, I cannot know what will become of my sons. But I also know what I have seen, which is that the more freedom and autonomy I allow my children to follow their passions and to learn on their own terms, the more passionate and eager to learn they become. The more engaged they become. And, inasmuch as I grant myself the same freedom and autonomy, the more engaged I become. The more I learn. Since Penny and I

cannot know what the future holds for our sons, we have chosen to focus intently on what the present offers them, on how the small moments of their days can teach and nurture them in ways that are both intentional and, often as not, unintentional and entirely unexpected. We have chosen to educate Fin and Rye in the context of a life-learning process known colloquially as “unschooling.” This means that our sons do not attend public or private school, and they do not follow a structured curriculum, unless exploring the fields and forests around our home can be considered a “curriculum.” They are not assigned homework, and they do not take tests. Their performance is not graded, nor is it compared to the performance of their peers. They are not compelled to sit at a desk, or to study any particular subject for any particular period of time. There is a popular perception linking homeschooling to religious beliefs. In a 2007 National Center for Education Statistics survey, 83 percent of homeschooling parents said that providing “religious or moral instruction” influenced their decision to educate at home. Of course, “moral instruction” can occur in the absence of religious instruction, so it’s impossible to know with certainty if a full 80-plus percent of the estimated two million US homeschoolers are motivated by religion. What is indisputable, however, is the public perception that homeschooling families are, by and large, stridently, if not fundamentally, religious. We do not identify with any particular religion (which does not mean we are not spiritual). In fact, I am not aware of a single homeschooling or unschooling family in our community—and there are many—that chooses home education in order to provide religious instruction. Perhaps our community is merely anomalous, or perhaps our experience is indicative of a shift in the broader community of homeschooling and unschooling families. Probably, it’s a little of each. Whatever the case, it is clear that most of the homeschoolers we have contact with choose home education for roughly the same reason we do: their vision for what a child’s education should and can be does not align with what the institutionalized educational system offers. Often, they are further motivated by a desire to spare their children the indignities they suffered at the hands of the public school system. The first known recorded use of the term unschooling came in 1977, in the second issue of a magazine called *Growing Without Schooling*: “GWS will say ‘unschooling’ when we mean taking children out of school, and ‘deschooling’ when we mean changing the laws to make schools non-compulsory and to take away from them their power to grade, rank, and label people i.e. to make lasting, official, public judgments about them.”¹ *Growing Without Schooling* was published by the late John Holt, an educator and author of the seminal *How Children Fail* (along with ten other books on the subject of children and education), which forwards Holt’s observation that children are innately intelligent and inclined to learn. The problem, according to Holt, is that these innate qualities are actually stunted by institutionalized education, which is simply unable to serve the individual child in the context of its need to usher large groups of youth through a standardized, performance-based curriculum. Apparently, at least a few people agree, because *How Children Fail* has sold over one million copies. Holt was a proponent of both homeschooling and unschooling, which are understandably often confused and thought to be one and the same. This is because unschooling generally occurs at home and can rightly be

considered a subset of homeschooling. But unschooling is also very different from traditional homeschooling, which relies on textbooks, study time, and in some cases, prepackaged curriculums. I don't mean to suggest that Fin and Rye do not spend plenty of time with their noses in books, or that they don't study things. On both accounts, they very much do. But the subjects of their study are extensions of their natural interests and passions. These subjects are not assigned to them; they are chosen by them. It is within the context of these choices—of their personal interests and passions—that they learn the rote, essential skills such as math and spelling which enable them to function in the world. Perhaps the best way to clarify the connection between unschooling and homeschooling is to understand that all unschooling is homeschooling, but not all homeschooling is unschooling. It should also be said that the two are not mutually exclusive; indeed, we know many families that combine elements of both unschooling and more traditional homeschooling. One of the beautiful things about choosing to educate your children at home is that it affords you the freedom to explore and experiment. And, not incidentally, it allows you to observe your children, because you cannot truly know how your child responds to a particular learning style unless you are there to witness its effects. Of the educational options available to parents in America, unschooling is surely the least formal and structured. For precisely this reason, it is also the most difficult to describe with any accuracy, if for no other reason than that it has no exact definition. Wikipedia calls it “a range of educational philosophies surrounding the primary belief that education is a greater undertaking than school,” which I suppose is close enough, although the word range certainly leaves plenty open to interpretation. But then, that's sort of the point: Unschooling cannot and should not adhere to any particular definition. It should be as fluid, imprecise, and individualized as the families and children practicing it. In this regard, it is the antithesis of contemporary institutionalized education, with its strict adherence to schedule, standardized testing, and age-group learning. The definition Penny and I have settled on is “learning through living.” It is perhaps no more precise than what Wikipedia offers, but it feels most accurate and honest to us. Finlay and Rye live their lives. And as they live, they learn. Having spent the past few paragraphs attempting to define un-schooling, I must now admit I don't even like the term all that much. To me, it suggests undoing and rejection, when in fact we strive for a style of learning that is active and inclusive, that encourages engagement and leverages a child's natural curiosity and love of learning to nourish body, mind, and spirit. If that sounds far-fetched, I contend it is only because we have come to expect so little of our children's education. Furthermore, we are not undoing school; Fin and Rye have never even been to school. There is nothing to undo. And while they do not attend a formal educational institution, we are not so much rejecting this option as actively choosing an alternate path. In fact, we are grateful for our town's public school and for what it brings to our community. Are there problems inherent in institutionalized education? Obviously, I believe there are. But I am not blind to the fact that home education is simply not an option for many parents, even if it might be their preference (this fact, which is directly related to issues of income and debt and other cultural expectations surrounding success, will be a subject of discussion in

further chapters). Given this reality, I am extremely thankful that at least our community has the option of keeping its school-aged children in town. So I describe and use the term unschooling with a slight sense of unease, simply because I do not believe it is an accurate description of what we are actually doing. Likewise, I'm pretty sure it's not an accurate description of what most unschooling families are doing, although I suppose I should leave that up to them to decide. But as many misgivings as I have about its use, there are three things the term unschooling does very well. First, it is concise. To describe our educational path with full accuracy would require a lot more than a single word (in fact, it appears that it requires an entire book!). Second, it is evocative. Almost everyone has associations—some pleasant, some not so much—with school. Simply because the term includes the word school, it is almost guaranteed to trigger an emotional response. And third, it demands attention, particularly in a culture that places so much emphasis on education. “Unschooling? What’s that?” At which point, I am always happy to provide a greatly expanded definition of my sons’ learning. For all these reasons, and because I have yet to settle on a better term, I will continue to use the word unschooling to describe how my sons learn. When I explain my children’s unconventional educational path, I am often confronted with skepticism. “What if they want to be doctors?” people say. “How do they learn?” I am asked. “What if they want to go to college? Don’t you worry about socialization?” I have heard these questions so often that it is almost as if I can see the thought as it migrates from brain to tongue. I can hear the question before the question has been asked. The answers to these questions are at once simple (respectively: “If they want to be doctors, they will.” “They learn because learning cannot be helped.” “If they want to go to college, no one will be able to stop them.” And “No, we are not worried about their socialization. Don’t you worry about what schoolchildren are socialized to?”) and complex. They are complex because so much of what we want for Fin and Rye and so much of what we want for ourselves cannot rightly be measured by the contemporary metrics of achievement. Every so often I think of the fact that Penny and I have chosen to exchange the security of moneyed wealth for the freedom to pass our days with as much autonomy as possible. Or the fact that our days are full of labor, of muscles made sore by long hours gathering firewood or stacking hay bales, sweat accumulating on our brows before the sun has even cleared the eastern horizon. Every so often, most often in the midst of some chore turned tedious by repetition and fatigue, I find myself thinking, “I don’t have to do this.” And then: “Is there something wrong with me that I want to?” There is not, of course, and whatever fleeting moments of doubt I might experience are the result of allowing those voices and the well-meaning logic they convey—that we should worry that somehow our sons will not find their way into whatever career they desire, or that we’d be better served by taking steady jobs that could afford us the luxury of hiring out whatever unpleasant tasks need doing—to ring louder than the beliefs and experiences that guide us and bring so much beauty and balance to our days. In both my family and in others, I have seen that parental expectations for childhood education are often corrosive to living with that sense of balance, as we allow ourselves to become swept into the river of extracurricular activities and expanded “opportunities.” We do this with only the best of

intentions, believing that such things will advantage our children, without considering the toll these activities and opportunities extract, the hours and days spent scurrying and hurrying, too pressed for time to simply sit and enjoy the spectacle of a setting sun or the warm wetness of a July rain shower. All of this does not mean you must be a parent to appreciate these ideas, in part because this book is not solely about children, but also because children need the support and love of many more people than just their parents. The role of mentors in a child's community is rarely spoken of and, in fact, has all but disappeared. True, some communities offer mentoring programs, but they tend to be reserved for children whose home life defines them as being "in need." The reality is that all of our children are in need of meaningful, mutually respectful relationships with adults and elders to facilitate learning and help children understand their role in their communities and, by extension, the world. As I will discuss in more detail later, we have gone to great lengths to seek out mentors for Fin and Rye, and the critical importance of their role in our sons' lives cannot be overstated. In fact, the critical importance of their role in Penny's and my lives cannot be overstated, in no small part because the mentors we have found are drawn to the relationship through a passionate embrace of the specific knowledge and experience they embody, but also a sense of their responsibility to pass this knowledge along. After Rye recently decided to take a break from banjo lessons, his music teacher, Sarah, reminded him that she would always be available to help. "Even if it's twenty years from now, you can call me with any questions, whether it has to do with music or not," she said. And with that offering, she demonstrated the generosity this passing on requires, the hours spent in the company of our sons, the slow transference of skill and wisdom and, as important as the taught skill itself, an ethos of sharing. Having chosen such an unconventional path in both the manner we educate our sons and the way we pass our days, growing most of our food and remaining close to our home, there are times it feels to me as if my family's voice is lost in the crowd, and it can occasionally feel as if we occupy a lonely space. I do not mean "lonely" in the sense of lacking meaningful personal relationships, but in a broader cultural sense of living out-of-step with so many common goals and expectations. We drive decades-old cars with curmudgeonly contentment, and our thrift-store shirts bear patches on their patches, small scabs of cloth to cover the wounds inflicted by our labors. We tend to measure our wealth in terms of trees planted, time spent wandering the woods, and meals taken as a family. We do not earn very much money, and we do not care to, in large part because we believe that whatever time we might devote to earning money is generally worth more than anyone can pay us. There is a certain sociocultural isolation inherent in these choices, although I have noticed that the more fervently we embrace them, the more frequently we seem to connect with others who are making similar choices. For their part, Fin and Rye seem generally unconcerned that they might be perceived as different. Recently, we attended an outdoor concert in a small city. The boys wore frayed camouflage pants, rubber barn boots, dangling belt knives, and—the *pièce de résistance*—a pair of felted wool caps they'd made of fleeces shorn from our sheep. "Everyone is staring at us," said Fin after half an hour or so. "Does it bother you?" I asked. "No, I think it's

hilarious.” Then he ran off to be stared at some more. This sense of being out of step is one of the challenges I face in my life and in the principles I apply to raising my children: to not lose sight of my truth in a world that in so many ways tells me it is false. There is little support for our choices in the mainstream economy and in the omnipresent messaging that supports this economy, and I believe there is little support for our choices precisely because there is little profit to be realized from them. The decision to revere our time more than money, or the things money can buy, is not profitable for anyone but us. The decision to remain largely at home, or in our immediate community, finding our inspiration and entertainment in the people and natural world surrounding us, is not profitable for anyone but us. The decision to invest in our relationships—not merely with other people but with the plants and animals surrounding us—is not profitable for anyone but us. The decision to simply be discerning—about what we buy, how we pass our time, what influences we allow to shape our lives—does not line anyone’s pocket. In this regard, this book performs one more function, albeit a decidedly self-serving one: It is a reminder to myself that just because the path we are following frequently deviates from the norm, we are not crazy. It is a reminder to act from the place of clarity that tells us that the world we imagine is not impossible, impractical, or illogical, as individuals or as a collective. In fact, it is precisely the opposite: it is reasonable. Beauty, kindness, generosity, abundance, and connection are products of profound reason. They are the only rational response to a world that so freely offers these qualities. They are all around us, embodied by both humans and nature, and I owe my children the opportunity to recognize this fundamental truth. Over the years, I have observed something astounding. The more Penny and I provide our boys the opportunity to view the world in these terms, the more they reciprocate by offering the same opportunity to us. I remember a morning last summer, when Rye called to me through the open kitchen window to where I stood, washing egg yolk off the breakfast dishes. “Come outside, Papa,” he said. “Come look at this!” My boy was bent over the lifeless body of a star-nosed mole, a victim of our cats’ predatory instincts. He showed me the moles’ front paws, with their talon-like toes. He showed me the small appendages that ringed its snout, twenty-two in total. Later, we learned that the mole uses the 25,000 sensory receptors on these appendages to find and identify food. “That’s amazing,” said Rye, and we joked about what I’d look like with twenty-two tentacles protruding from my face. “Not much different,” said my son, and I feigned offense. Or I consider all the times Fin has returned from one of his woods rambles with a hatful of wild edibles. He brings fiddlehead ferns, blackberries, spruce gum, and honey mushrooms. He brings goatsbeard and toothwort. Since he rarely travels without a length of fishing line and a hook tucked into a pocket, maybe a pair of brookies, their skin wet and glistening. He builds a fire and cooks the fish on a hot rock until the flesh is white and flakey and falls away from the bone. Without my sons, I would not have known of such a creature as the star-nosed mole, and those twenty-two tentacles. I might have known of fiddleheads and blackberries, but not of spruce gum. Certainly not of goatsbeard and toothwort. I would not have known how to cook a fresh-caught trout on a hot rock, or that the world even held such possibilities. Ever since that morning Rye showed me the mole, I

occasionally think of those 25,000 sensory receptors and I wonder how many of my own receptors have gone dormant from lack of use. I marvel at how many of them my sons have helped me coax back to life. How many more are just waiting for the right combination of factors to awaken, to whisper stories about how the world is and how I might find my place within it? And I realize that my failure to hear these whispered stories is the direct result of perceiving myself as standing apart from others and from the natural world. But of course I do not stand apart; none of us do. We are all interconnected and interdependent, and because of this, we are all only as rich as we enrich those around us. I did not learn this in school. I learned it from my children. Read more

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Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children
How to Raise a Wild Child: The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature
Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder

What people say about this book

Elizabeth, "A great book for homeschooling parents. I really love this book, but as much as I love it the narrator on the audiobook I just couldn't get into. But the book itself deserves a purchase!"

Meg Hauser, "beautiful book. I first heard about it on the Just a lovely, beautiful book. I first heard about it on the Ben Greenfield podcast, and was immediately intrigued. I've always wanted to have a remote farm. Reading this book made me even more aware of how far removed the vast majority of people are from the things that really matter: the raw, pure spirituality that can only be found when one is deeply connected to nature; the deep satisfaction and vitality that comes from producing your own food and being in touch with the land and the animals; the presence and joy that comes from actually seeing your children grow up and explore the world: not from afar while they're in school and you're working, but from actually raising them at home. I love how Ben's sons have that kind of freedom to explore the woods and whatever books and subjects are just interesting to them. While I, myself, attended public school, I spent my afternoons (at least in elementary school) out in the woods in my backyard. I did like school, however, especially for all the wonderful friends I made and the interesting things I got exposed to that I wouldn't have found on my own. That's the main problem I see with unschooling that Ben didn't really address. If you're attending a good-quality school, you get to learn about things that you might have never found otherwise. The structure was good for me. I think an ideal situation, at least for me, would be to home-school my children in their elementary-school years, when they can develop self-confidence and interests free from social pressure and certain indoctrinations. And they can get plenty of nature time. But by middle school- and high school-age, I do think (good) formal schooling becomes incredibly valuable, both for socialization and structured learning. It's sounds like Ben's sons might be a little bit too unstructured, and not respectful of their parents or of their place in a larger society."

Annie Snyder, "Definitely makes you think!. Excellent book with great points. Reading this book while having small kids definitely makes you consider a lot of stuff. I wish the ending was a more broad description of what the outcome of unschooling was. Overall a great book."

ncfarmchick, "These Stories May Change the Way You Do Everything as a Family. Having read all of Hewitt's books and as a regular reader of his blog, I thought I knew what to expect when my pre-ordered copy of "Homegrown" arrived. As wonderfully inspiring and beautifully written as I knew it would be, it surpasses my expectations. Part of the appeal Hewitt's stories have for me is the similarities of his sons to my own two boys (though mine are younger - only 2 and 3 years old.) I have almost started to think of the Hewitt boys as my own boys' older counterparts and this book gives me a glimpse into what may lie ahead for us. I particularly like the final essay in which Hewitt ponders his family's future and offers gentle suggestions for embracing a life as part of the natural world and finding your place in it. Of course, everyone's story is different and

Hewitt very clearly makes it known that his family's choices are not right for everyone. I think his level of humility and kindness is rare in someone so clearly passionate about a subject. It would be so easy to become preachy even when advice and comments are well-intentioned but Hewitt never comes close to even a hint of condescension in his writing. His style is picturesque but accessible as if the reader is having a conversation with a good friend who happens to be a great story teller. While homeschooling, and even unschooling, are not as unusual an educational choice as they once were (here in NC, the number of homeschooled children just recently surpassed the number of children who attend private schools), there is still a lot of questions and uncertainty about this lifestyle choice among the general population. I recommend this book unreservedly to anyone interested in homeschooling, unschooling, crafting a life in harmony with nature, and those who just want to create a more beautiful world for their children to grow into - whatever that means to them.”

TaraRegester, “Ben Hewitt does an amazing job of bringing up questions about how we educate If you are looking at this book and thinking you are going to get a day by day manual on unschooling, you might need to look somewhere else. Ben Hewitt does an amazing job of bringing up questions about how we educate our children, simply by living his own life. It isn't a book about saying the way things we do are wrong but a depiction of how Penny and Ben made a conscious decision of how to reclaim time and life. It is a book about their deliberate quest for happiness. It made me more than think about how we learn as humans and why society has decided competition should drive education. I have found myself discussing and recommending this book without any intention to bring it up in conversations. His words have stuck with me. Beautiful writing and something I intend to live on my bookshelf. Well done Mr. Hewitt and thank you for opening my mind.”

cheryl cunningham, “A thoroughly enjoyable read!. Really beautifully written. It focuses less on the parenting aspect of unschooling than I had imagined and instead is about their family's way of life as a whole. Still thoroughly enjoyable with the honest thoughts of parents who have chosen to educate in an unorthodox way.”

C, “Interesting insight of one approach. Reads easily, gentle slightly rambling style, which works in the context of portraying the life he describes. Like taking a mental holiday into someone else's life.”

Tabitha, “Brilliantly written ‘feel good’ book.. Love this book read it in about 3 sittings! Restored my faith in my decision to home educate. Well worth a read.”

Walter, “Five Stars. Enjoyed this, well written.”

The book by Jennifer Alisia Garrett has a rating of 5 out of 4.8. 207 people have provided

feedback.

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