

Life is Good



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"One Improved Unit" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OIU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

I've spent the last five days with a large group of radical free thinking children and youth. They are so radical, that neither their meal times nor their bed times are set by anybody but themselves. They are even so radical that that they are never punished for "bad" behavior nor rewarded for good. And every one of them and every member of their families will tell you that "life is good." Indeed, life is good, and the 2013 LIFE is Good Unschooling Conference was well worth the 26 hours we drove (from Salt Lake to Vancouver, WA) to get there and back.

Foreign Culture

Whatever my expectations were upon arriving at the conference, they were undermined the moment I stepped into the conference area. What I witnessed was something completely foreign to me. Children of all ages running to and fro, wearing crazy clothes, some with crazier hairdos, and many peddling their various supplier bought or homemade wares. Dozens of young entrepreneurs, artisans, musicians, scientists, and athletes were everywhere. It was a bit of a cultural shock, and it never let up the entire conference.

My son was quick to make a few friends and spent the rest of the conference with nary a thought of mom and dad. He found himself building forts, battling with nerf guns (inside and outside), peddling his own acquired (don't ask me how) wares, and playing video games that he never played before with kids he couldn't name. My daughter too was quick to make a few friends, but spent most of the conference with mom and dad.

So It Went

The first day ended with a giant musical festival featuring music of all types, from many ages. We were treated with singing, keyboard, guitar, cello, violin, drums, and finished with an adult band. It set the bar for the rest of the conference.

The second day was filled with circle chats and “lectures” from seasoned unschoolers sharing their experiences and wisdom with us newbies. A talent show finished the day.

The third day was again filled with circle chats and “lectures,” but added several Q&A sessions. Several grown unschoolers demonstrated their complete normalcy and ability to address a crowd and answer questions about their experiences growing up. Several unschooling moms answered questions with dads following on the fourth day. This day finished with a “better-than-Prom” extravaganza that, for me, was symbolic of the unschooling philosophy with everybody, from all ages, dancing and moving together in their own preferred way.

The last day had an even more helpful (to my wife and I) circle chat and, as mentioned, the Q&A dad’s panel. My family left for part of this day to explore neighboring Portland, OR. When we returned, we were treated with a show by Rhys Thomas, his “Jugglemania & Science Circus.” The entire family thoroughly enjoyed it.

Final Thoughts

As I said, the conference was well worth the time, energy, and expense put into it. We had our challenges, mostly with pulling our kids away from their fun, or even with giving them their space away from mom and dad, but we survived. My son is already begging me to return next year. We just might do that. But I also plan on attending some other unschooling conferences. The standard’s been set pretty high. It will likely not be beat, but at least it can be met. With renewed enthusiasm and commitment, we’re excited for what the future holds.