

Educated: A Must-Read

To be honest, I didn't want to read it. I dragged my heels on buying the book, thinking it would be an irritating diatribe on homeschooling or a shallow attack on the deep complexity of parenthood. I thought it would be one long whine from a now 30-something acclaimed writer with a Ph.D. in history complaining about how her parents had ruined her life. I thought I would hate it. But as Tara Westover's book, *Educated: A Memoir*, hit *The New York Times* bestseller list for one week, then another, and another, I relented. I'll hold my nose and swallow, I told myself. It will be good for me.

From the first page, I was captivated and, cliché as it is, I truly couldn't put it down. I read the book swiftly, entranced by Westover's vivid depiction of growing up in rural Idaho in a religious fundamentalist, survivalist family. School was where the devil hides, often clothed as socialists, or so her father said.

In piercing prose, Westover offers an eloquent illustration of conviction blurring into paranoia, ideology into lunacy. She describes how fragile those lines can be.

Without blame, Westover's memoir serves as a sharp reminder for homeschooling and unschooling parents that with freedom comes responsibility. The freedom to educate our own children, or to facilitate their own self-education, is tempered by the constant, demanding obligation to provide them with resources, support, and opportunities to widen their world. Benign neglect or willful indifference toward a child's education are incompatible with responsible homeschooling and unschooling.

Still, despite the unimaginable obstacles Westover encounters during her childhood, her book showcases the extraordinary human drive to self-educate. Her life story reveals the almost primal instinct to seek out and synthesize knowledge, even when those most dear to you may actively dissuade you from doing so. It shows how capable we are of self-directed learning and mastery, even when barriers seem insurmountable. Westover writes:

Learning in our family was entirely self-directed: you could learn anything you could teach yourself, after your work was done. Some of us were more disciplined than others. I was one of the least disciplined, so by the time I was ten, the only subject I had studied systematically was Morse code, because Dad insisted that I learn it. 'If the lines are cut, we'll be the only people in the valley who can communicate,' he said, though I was never quite sure, if we were the only people learning it, who we'd be communicating with. (p. 46-7).

While Westover was able to overcome childhood neglect and violence, and succeed as a self-directed learner, her book is a candid reminder that Self-Directed Education is an education philosophy and lifestyle that families *choose*. It is not a default or a lapse or an inevitable outcome of alternative education. It is not laziness or apathy. It is capital letters, not lowercase ones. Choosing Self-Directed Education for your children requires significant thought, effort, and vigilance on the part of parents. Whether it occurs mostly at home or at an unschooling learning center or self-directed school, Self-Directed Education is a commitment to providing the time, space, support, and opportunity for interest-based learning to thrive. It is freedom *and* responsibility.

Educated is a powerful memoir, a testament to the human capacity to self-educate, and a reminder to parents about their educational duty, however and wherever their children learn. It is definitely worth adding to your spring reading list.

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