



# AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

**What  
you  
need  
to  
know  
when  
you  
need  
to  
know  
it**

## Saturday Evening Spring Social:

**Eat, Drink, Dance, Chat, Schmooze, and Support a Good Cause**

**April 21, 2012**

First Parish of Sudbury, Unitarian Universalist

327 Concord Road, Sudbury, MA

6:00 – 9:00 PM

### Entertainment by Teenage Homeschoolers

Our entertainment includes performances by accomplished homeschooling teens:

- Claire Dickson, winner of three *Downbeat Magazine* Student Music Awards for Jazz and Blues vocals
- More to come

### Silent Auction

AHEM is seeking donations for the silent auction from individuals as well as businesses and organizations. Please let us know if you have a skill or item you would like to donate: [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info) or 781-641-0566. All proceeds from the Silent Auction will benefit AHEM, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

So far auction items include:

- One berth aboard the schooner Shenandoah for Sailing Before the Mast II, June 18 - 22, 2012  
[www.perducoeducation.com/](http://www.perducoeducation.com/)
- Two night cabin stay at Four Springs Farm, Royalton, VT
- The Works from The Boston Book Lady
- Pair of tickets to any show in the Charles Mosesian Theater in New Rep's 2012-2013 season
- Admission for 2 adults and 2 youths to Old Sturbridge Village
- Admission for 4 to Mass MOCA
- Admission for 4 to Historic Deerfield
- Admission for 2 adults and 2 youths to EcoTarium
- Admission for 4 to American Textile History Museum
- Bertucci's "Dough" certificate
- J.P. Licks gift card
- Family movie night bundle

### Book Sale

Bring books, CDs, DVDs, games, and other educational materials in good condition that are ready for a new home and browse what others have to offer. If you would like to arrange for pickup before the Social, email [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info) or call Cindy at 774-249-0806. Any leftovers from the sale will be sold to benefit AHEM or donated to charity. (No toys, stuffed animals, or clothes please.)

### Pizza and Dessert Bar

Pizza, hot and cold beverages, and scrumptious goodies will be available for purchase all evening. Bring your sweet tooth and indulge!

### Dancing

There will be dancing for all ages.

All proceeds will benefit AHEM. AHEM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

### How to reserve in advance

We're glad that you are interested in joining us on April 21!

To reserve in advance, please register online at [ahemsocial.eventbrite.com](http://ahemsocial.eventbrite.com). Register by

March 30 for discounted admission. Online registration will be open until April 14. No refunds after April 14 for online registrations.

If you prefer, write a check for \$7 for each adult and teen, \$5 for each child age 5 – 12, under 5 free, to Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. (AHEM); include names of all people in your party, ages of children, your address, and email and telephone number; return it all in an envelope addressed to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Mailed reservations must be postmarked no later than March 30, 2012. No refunds after March 30, 2012 for mailed reservations. Confirmation will be sent via email (preferred) or enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

You will be added to the *Friends of AHEM* list unless you specifically opt out. *Friends of AHEM* receive special notices of upcoming AHEM events.

*Space permitting*, you may also pay at the door. Cost at the door will be \$10 for each adult and teen, \$8 for each child age 5 – 12.

### For the latest updates on the Spring Social

Visit <http://www.ahem.info/Events.html>.

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The information in this newsletter does not constitute legal advice; it is provided for informational purposes only. AHEM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible.

## Current State Scene . . .

### Legislative Update

The following is a summary of the education bills that have been filed during the current 187th Massachusetts Legislative session (2011-2012).

**S 185**, *Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz, Democrat, Boston*; AN ACT RELATIVE TO DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY was redrafted to raise the mandatory age for school attendance from 16 to 18. The bill was reported favorably out of the Education committee and has been sent to the Ways and Means Committee for a cost analysis. AHEM will have more information on how to respond to this bill once it is assigned a new number.

**H 1906**, *Rep. Garrett J. Bradley, Democrat, Hingham*; AN ACT RAISING THE COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE TO 18 and **H 142**, *Anthony Cabral, Democrat, New Bedford*; AN ACT TO PREVENT DROPOUTS would both raise the compulsory attendance age to 18. Both bills were reported out of the Education committee. It is likely that their provisions have been incorporated into S 185, above.

**S 1743**, *Rep. John A. Hart, Democrat, Boston*; AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE DENIAL OF DRIVER'S LICENSES FOR TRUANTS This bill amends MGL Ch. 90 by adding a section requiring that an application for a driver's license or learner's permit be signed by a parent or guardian and be accompanied by certification from the school district that the applicant is enrolled in high school or, - among other possibilities - "a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses . . ." This bill would seem to require homeschoolers to present an approval letter or other certification from the school district that they are engaged in an approved homeschooling plan prior to obtaining a driver's license. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Transportation in January 2011 and received a hearing on March 12, 2012. AHEM has filed an opposition letter which will be included in the hearing testimony.

**H 1909**, *Rep. Antonio Cabral, Democrat, New Bedford*; *Rep. Stephen R. Canessa, Democrat, New Bedford*; *Rep. Kay Khan, Democrat, Newton*; AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN was reported out of the Education committee. We are following up on where it stands now. This bill would effectively lower the required school attendance age by making kindergarten mandatory.

There are no changes that we know of to **H 1081**, *Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston*; AN ACT RELATIVE TO DETERMINING THE MANDATORY MINIMUM AGE FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE or **H 1964**, *Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, and others*; AN ACT RELATIVE TO DROPOUT PREVENTION, another bill that would raise the age of attendance.

AHEM is in contact with the Education committee and the Ways and Means committee to sort out where these various bills now stand, and will report on ways you can respond if you have concerns about their passage.

## Around AHEM . . .

### Faces at AHEM

#### Meet Erin Matica

Erin Matica lives in Worthington, MA with her husband and five children, who range in age from six to 16. Nearly three years ago she realized her life-long dream of living on a small farm when she and her family moved out to the Berkshires from the North Shore.

The Matica kids have never been to school. Erin and her husband made the decision to homeschool when their eldest child was one year old, after hanging out with lots of La Leche League/homeschooling friends and reading John Holt, John Taylor Gatto, *Growing Without Schooling* magazine, etc. Erin thinks homeschooling was the single best decision she and her husband have ever made for their family.

In another life, Erin was an oncology nurse but has been home full-time since her first child was born. She loves exploring the world with her family and thinks that life is way too short not to have a really good time. Growing and learning along with her family has been both liberating and empowering. As an AHEM County Contact for Western Massachusetts, Erin loves assisting other families in their homeschooling endeavors by providing information, support, insight, and inspiration.

## Clearing Our Throats . . .

### Unschooling as a Feminist Act

By Wendy Priesnitz

When I was a young mother, I wore a t-shirt with the words: "The hand that rocks the cradle rocks the boat." The phrase put a spin on a 19th century poem entitled "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World" by American poet William Ross Wallace. I understood at the time that becoming a mother was increasing my desire to create change in the world, although I didn't know where that would lead me. I had already realized that, as the feminist movement espoused, the personal is political. I had already challenged a few assumptions about how life was supposed to work - including rejecting both the style in which I'd been parenting and the institution of school as an effective vehicle for education.

As much as I didn't like the rules of the status quo, I also didn't like labels - even the ones that accompanied my rebellion. In fact, I've fought my whole adult life to avoid descriptions of myself that involve isms and ists. I dislike being referred to as an environmentalist, an activist, a feminist, a humanist, a homeschooler, a radical unschooler, a life learner... although each of those words describes an aspect of my life and work. As helpful as such labels can be to connect with others who think similarly, they can also constrict, separate, polarize, alienate and confuse. And because they name groups with a specific set of "membership requirements," they help perpetuate stereotypes.

School is where we learn to sort, segment and label in that manner, where knowledge is broken up into subjects and students are grouped by age and their ability to perform on tests. And the post-secondary world has turned segmentation of knowledge into an art. So I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised the first time an academic feminist scorned me because of my advocacy of life learning and its apparent support for the stay-at-home mom. However, it had never occurred to me that unschooling and feminism were mutually exclusive. In fact, I am quite certain that it, in all its label-defying glory, is the ultimate feminist act, for a variety of reasons on which I'll elaborate in this article. But over the years, I've encountered many people – including some self-doubting life learning feminist moms – for whom the picture isn't quite that clear.

I wasn't always quite so sure of myself and once upon a time was even apt to wonder if my outlook on education was at odds with some of my other progressive stances. That changed when I began to observe young children and how little respect they and their caregivers receive.

I trained to be a teacher in 1969 but realized after just a few months that neither I nor most of the students wanted to be in the classroom. So I quit teaching. Researching a more suitable career and curious about how children learn (something that hadn't been a major part of the teachers' college curriculum), I spent some time working at a daycare center.

Daycare centers were not that prevalent in the early 1970s, but my developing feminism led me to believe they were crucial if society was to move beyond the nuclear family and its smothering hierarchy. But I was astonished at how undervalued and underpaid the entirely female staff was, especially for work that was so stressful and so important... and at what uninspiring places the centers were. I am a questioner by nature, and that experience inspired a lot of questions: Why was our society apparently undervaluing this work? Was it because women were doing it? Or did we value the care of the next generation so little? What is "liberated" about paying other women a minimal wage to look after our children so that we can have high paying careers? Does one have to have a paid job in order to be a feminist? Why do women have to embrace the male model in order to challenge patriarchy? Is there a third way?

My husband Rolf and I soon chose to begin our family. Once pregnant, I struggled to understand why feminism wanted me to make a choice between my rights and those of my future children. We decided to create a life that would affirm the rights of all members of our family. And thus it became my life's work to advocate for children's right to be raised and educated with respect and without the "isms" – sexism, racism, classism, ageism, consumerism and other elitist or destructive social influences.

Motherhood focused my early political consciousness. It helped me understand how the choices I make in my personal life are linked to those I make on a larger scale. I remember thinking that a mother's body is the first environment for human life, so I'd better ensure I was providing a clean, nurturing place for my unborn child to grow, as well as ensuring a safe, respectful world for her to live in after birth. And that's when I began to

weave change-making into my life.

At the personal level, one of the things this meant was that our children would learn without school. And so my husband and I set about creating circumstances to allow that to happen. With the panache of youth, we started the family business that publishes this magazine, thinking we would all stay at home together for the next decade or so, happily living, learning and making money together. While the fairy tale didn't turn out exactly as hoped, our lives taught our children – by experience, which is the best kind of learning – about making a living, about working out differences, about the need to be critical of the power structures in society and in the microcosm of family and personal relationships... and much more.

In some ways, what I was living has since been defined as "empowered mothering" by York University Women's Studies professor and founder of the Association for Research on Mothering Andrea O'Reilly. However, I don't identify with this label any more than any others because O'Reilly's stance is woman-centered, rather than child-centered. She describes empowered mothering as using the role of mother to challenge systems that smother women's choice, autonomy and agency. And that seems to leave out children's choice, autonomy and agency. Dismantling patriarchy is crucial to creating a whole society but we can't accomplish that by ignoring the rights of another group of people.

Perhaps O'Reilly and others in the educational industry think that our public schools are taking care of the kids. But they're not. As I wrote in my book *Challenging Assumptions in Education*, our public school systems perpetuate social hierarchies, disempower children, coerce them – supposedly for their own good – and encourage a destructive level of consumerism and consumption. Furthermore, they are not democratic because they don't allow children and young people to control their choices and their daily lives. School teaches submission to power based on size, age, intellect and sometimes ability to bully, and there are race, gender and class biases, and even sexual harassment. The very structure of schools delivers a hidden socioeconomic curriculum of standardization, competition and top-down management by experts.

In short, schools – and society in general – treat children the way women don't want to be treated. They don't trust children to control their own lives, to keep themselves safe and to make their own decisions. In this way, feminism and life learning are one and the same because they trust people to take the paths that suit them best.

Aside from allowing academic freedom, life learning is about living more mindfully – acting altruistically (instead of earning gold stars or the approval of authority figures), respecting individuals for who they are, overturning discrimination, being aware of and remediating the conflicts inherent in our society, working cooperatively, and learning about and improving the world by living in and acting on it.

Life learning parents care deeply about children's choice, autonomy and agency. They respect young people's right to make their own decisions (within parameters that address their physical and emotional safety, of course). They understand that when children are part of a community, they have an interest

in making that community function well, taking responsibility for their actions and contributing to the group.

One of the stereotypes about life learning that results in feminist criticism is that of too much togetherness – children who are home alone with mom all the time, tied to the umbilical cord or the apron strings. On the surface, that’s based on ignorance. But aside from the fact that life learning kids typically spend more time in their communities exposed to a more diverse range of people and experiences than kids in school, the apron strings criticism denigrates the value of the mother-child relationship. Being an activist of any sort is more than resisting; it’s also about providing positive alternatives. Parenting practices like cosleeping, prolonged breastfeeding and family-based education are powerful and nurturing alternatives, which provide the early security that leads to independence.

One of the questions I asked almost 40 years ago – the one about paying for childcare in order to have a career and retain the feminist label – is still on my mind. These days, some feminists are working to solve that conundrum through the use of tax credits or other methods of financially rewarding caregiving parents; others believe higher quality childcare, workplace reform and better pay for childcare workers is the solution.

But there is, as I mused so many years ago, a third way. What if we overturned the male model of success that feminism adopted in creating equal opportunity for women? If we reject the idea that success is only about money, we can forge new attitudes toward what’s important in life. Challenging the notion that feminism relates only to equal opportunity within the workplace and can only be obtained by a full-time paying career is controversial, but there is a growing movement that

questions the tradition that well-being is based totally on economics. As I wrote in the last issue of *Natural Life*, the Genuine Progress Indicator is one tool that has been developed to factor caregiving, pollution and other positives and negatives into the accounting that we know as GDP. One of the proponents of that idea is feminist and environmentalist Marilyn Waring. The author of the book *If Women Counted*, she was one of the first to suggest that the GDP sustains the institutionalized enslavement of women by focusing solely on production and consumption in the market sphere, thereby rendering women’s unpaid work invisible.

Taking the notion further, Australian academic, author and social commentator Susan Maushart asserts that motherhood needs to be at the center of human society, from which all social and economic life should spin. Society needs to “acknowledge that bearing and raising children is not some pesky, peripheral activity we engage in, but the whole point,” she says. Warehousing kids in daycare or school so mothers can get on with what they see as their real lives is not part of that vision, but we need to find ways to ensure economic security for women of all classes, and extend the vision to include fathers as well.

It has been said that feminism is the radical notion that women are people. Even more radical, I would suggest, is the notion that was printed on a t-shirt my young daughters once shared: “Kids are people too.” At this point in history, allowing them to live and learn in the real world, unfettered by the discrimination inherent in compulsory schooling, is the best way to honor that idea. We need to find ways to make that possible without diminishing anyone else’s rights. Then we will truly be on the way to creating a more egalitarian society.

*This essay first appeared in Natural Life Magazine. Reprinted with permission.*

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## SPECIAL NOTICE!

### This may be your last issue of *AHEM News* unless you act now!

Friends of AHEM without Internet access\* must complete and return the following form to continue getting *AHEM News* hard copy. The date of your last issue is above your name on the mailing label. Our goal is to utilize the most efficient and effective option of communicating with our Friends that uses the least amount of resources.

- ☐ I do not have Internet access. Continue to send me *AHEM News* hard copy.  
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