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[00:00:00] [Sound of book pages being rapidly flipped.]

Courtney: [00:00:12] Welcome, listeners, to the Good Enough Homeschool podcast where we cheerfully eviscerate popular homeschool curricula. In today's show, we'll introduce our new cohost, AJ Campbell. Hey, AJ!

AJ: [00:00:22] Hello!

Courtney: [00:00:24] Shouldn't homeschooling be joyful? Finally, we'll talk about the Well Trained Mind and associated materials and what we love. Honestly, we really can't think of much, anything? That we dislike about it. But let's begin with AJ. Full disclosure, we love AJ!

AJ: [00:00:40] Thank you.

Courtney: [00:00:39] He's an admin on the SICT, a tutor, and one of our wise sages of homeschooling. AJ, tell us about yourself!

AJ: [00:00:46] Well, thank you for having me here. I'm super excited about this, this is wonderful. I've been listening to all the episodes since you started and have been really enthusiastic about what you're doing. So I'm honored and very pleased to be here. I have been working in education since the 1980s, yes. I am ancient of days. And I have been actively involved in the classical homeschooling world for about 15 years, I'd say.

[00:01:09] I started out as a homeschooling parent and then was a cottage schooler, we can—maybe we'll talk about cottage schools at some point in the future. Then I was a classroom teacher and an administrator at a classical school in New Hampshire. That was in approximately 2008-2010. Now I am a private online tutor working with homeschooled students. And I teach writing and literature and Latin. And I'm also the author of *The Latin-Centric Curriculum*, which was a classical homeschooling guide that's now out of print, but was published by Memoria Press.

[00:01:40] Also, I have another curriculum called *I Speak Latin*, which is, as it sounds like, a Latin curriculum for elementary-age kids. And on the

personal level, I'm married to a woman named Ann who is a web designer. We have one adult daughter, Ruby, who is currently taking a pandemic-induced break from studying graphic design. Ruby was homeschooled part time. We had several bouts of homeschooling, as you will, in between other types of education and she ended up finally in a public charter school in Massachusetts. My family and I just moved from there, from rural western Massachusetts, to sunny Orlando, Florida. The City Beautiful, as we call it.

[00:02:19] You can find me at [QuidnamPress.com](http://QuidnamPress.com) and also on the Secular Inclusive Classical Teachers Group on Facebook.

Courtney: [00:02:27] Our question of the day: shouldn't homeschooling be joyful or Instagram-worthy? Don't kids learn better when they're joyful about it?

[00:02:35] Jen, you probably, as a homeschooler, have been under more stress than, in some ways than AJ and I, because you had five at a time.

Jen: [00:02:42] It was a lot, honestly. I only had four in school at a time, but I had five children. I had a freshman in high school, 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and a 1<sup>st</sup> grader, and then I had a new baby. Those years were crazy.

AJ: [00:02:56] Oh, honey.

Jen: [00:02:57] So let me just say, if the internet culture had been around during those years when I was a young mom, I would have failed entirely. Especially for parents of bigger families, the pressure to have every kid look put together, your house spotless, and every kid happy in order to Instagram your life to everyone you've ever met and people you haven't met. It's too much.

[00:03:19] Many people have been thrown into homeschooling now, and it's those Instagram-worthy homeschoolers that make it look impossible. In real life with a bunch of kids or even one young kid, you can do two things well on any given day. My priorities are: meals, school and household cleanliness. And the last one often falls off my radar.

Courtney: [00:03:40] I'm pretty sure my children don't understand that most families actually move laundry from baskets into drawers within 24 hours.

Jen: [00:03:48] Oh, that's crazy.

AJ: [00:03:48] I don't know any of those families. Who are these people? I've never met these people.

Jen: [00:03:51] One more thing. I think homeschooling has been mostly joyful for me. The look on your kid's face after she finally grasps a concept is amazing. It's joyful for both of you. Now, am I personally joyful, all day, every day? Of course not. But I love teaching my kids. The other side of that is that we were not Instagram-worthy.

Courtney: [00:04:11] You didn't try and make it look perfect.

Jen: [00:04:12] No.

Courtney: [00:04:12] It doesn't have to be perfect, because you're gonna mess up. It's like parenting. In any giving parenting situation, you're gonna mess it up, and that's okay. The goal is to mess up as little as possible, but nobody's perfect. Homeschooling, nobody's perfect. It's okay to be able to stop and say, this is not working and we need to switch it up. But is that something that you can put in an Instagram photo? No.

Jen: [00:04:34] That's so true.

AJ: [00:04:34] It really is. And I also try to remind people that if your child is in a brick and mortar school, there are going to be days when the teacher messes up. This is reality, we are all humans, and that we will all have good days and bad days. Kids will have days when they are off their game. You will have days when you're off your game. This is just life. We need to be generous with ourselves and with our children, and honestly, with our homeschooling peers about what goes on. Nobody's perfect, really.

Courtney: [00:04:57] I think that's a great point, AJ, is that we need to be honest about it.

AJ: [00:05:02] I really think a lot of homeschoolers, frankly, have been sold a bill of goods with Instagram, and honestly with some homeschooling authors who present this kind of romanticized picture of homeschooling where it's all, sit on a blanket out in the park, our lovely children in their pinafores are going to go romping around and doing their nature study and drawing beautiful things and watercolors. But the reality is this is not all tea parties and poetry and wonder.

[00:05:25] My junior high civics teacher used to say to us: "This isn't romper room, people." And honestly, I think he was right. Learning is hard. There's no way around the fact that some days are going to be really rough. I would say, we shouldn't even aim for joy. Don't have that as a goal, really. It's too abstract, and honestly what I think we should be doing is prioritizing relationships. And this is where homeschooling really

shines because we have time and space, and most importantly, the knowledge of who our kids are that makes it possible to meet their individual needs.

[00:05:55] We do have an obligation to instill a good work ethic, but we can do that without being harsh or punitive. And joy also comes once a child has done the work to get good at something, so until then, maybe what we could be shooting for is a sense of satisfaction. What Jen was talking about before, when your child grasps something, and you have that moment of both feeling good about what you've just done. You can take satisfaction doing something that's hard and making it through that.

Jen: [00:06:20] Ooh, that's good. I like that satisfaction.

Courtney: [00:06:21] And you know this, too, I'm sure, AJ... In a classroom, we call that the lightbulb moment, and a lot of teachers live for that. The reward of the profession.

AJ: [00:06:30] Exactly.

Courtney: [00:06:31] But when you send your kids to school, you outsource that to the teacher. Part of the bargain that you make with your teacher, they get to see the lightbulb moments and they do the hard work of getting your kid there. Which is fine. But in homeschooling, we get it all. We get the lightbulb moments and the hard part. Lightbulb moments are beautiful, but I agree. This idea that you should find joy in homeschooling is deceptive.

[00:06:51] Obvi, kids can't learn when they're in full meltdown mode. I mean, we've all dealt with children in meltdown mode.

Jen: [00:06:56] Yep.

Courtney: [00:06:58] There is a vast and varied plane between, "Oh, mama, thank you for teaching me this, this is so cool!" and crying, screaming tears. So many sullen students have been poked and prodded and nagged their way through long division or learning phonics. Because it's hard. And it's okay to say to your kid, yeah, this is really hard. And I know you don't want to do it, I get that, honey, I do. But we're going to do it anyway because if we just avoid everything that's difficult then... Oh, they're supposed to be joyful about it, so if they're not joyful, I must be doing something wrong. You didn't do anything wrong. You avoid all of the things that don't bring joy, then you have a hard knock life.

[00:07:43] I don't know about you, but I don't find any joy in paying my taxes every year.

Jen: [00:07:47] One phone call to the cable company will—

Courtney: [00:07:50] Disabuse you.

Jen: [00:07:50] Alleviate any of that.

Courtney: [00:07:53] I also think that making everything easy and happy for students robs them of some personal agency. A little worry at the back of my mind is, what are my children going to do when I'm not there anymore. When they're out on their own and they're independent adults, will I have given them all of those skills? Will I have given them the ability to do hard things and know that they can be successful? By helping them scaffold that right now, I can teach them that they can successfully engage with things they don't like.

AJ: [00:08:23] 90% of adulting is stuff we don't like, really.

Courtney: [00:08:28] You were talking about relationships, AJ. Working through the hard stuff together really helps cement your relationship with your children. For a lot of parents, it's almost wait until your dad gets home. It's Mrs. Yurkivitch is going to be so disappointed in you if you don't do your math homework. We need to get it done for school tomorrow. And instead that disappointment, and the joy, comes to you. "Look mama, look what I did! I made this thing." Or "I drew this" or "I wrote this nice sentence."

[00:08:53] You kind of have to be both the carrot and the stick.

AJ: [00:08:56] There's definitely a level of complexity that comes into our relationships with our children when we are both parent and teacher. For some people, that simply doesn't work. There were definitely stretches of my experience homeschooling Ruby where having those two things meant endless conflict. Part of the reason that we chose at various times to send her to school is that I could outsource being her teacher. I could not outsource being her dad.

Courtney: [00:09:19] Just because we homeschool doesn't mean that we don't acknowledge that that's not for everybody.

AJ: [00:09:23] Exactly.

Jen: [00:09:24] The homeschooling lifestyle is not for everyone. And I don't mean it in an elitist way. I really do think that some kids do better having

a teacher that's separate from their parent. Some parents just don't have the temperament or any desire at all to teach their kids. And it doesn't make you a bad parent to not want to take all of that on. Nor does homeschooling guarantee your child's pathway to a certain kind of adulthood. You can take all this time and homeschool your kid. Things can still go wrong, and I think that's another thing that really no one talks about. It's really no different from any other sort of education. It's not like all public school kids end up on this path, or all private school high school kids end up on this path.

[00:10:12] Once kids become adults at whatever age you want to say that is, they're still going to make all their own decisions. It's not really going to matter what school they went to or if they were homeschooled.

AJ: [00:10:21] I mean, I certainly think it's useful to have those skills. These things are required if you're going to be doing almost any kind of career. If you're doing college or if you are going to be licensed to be a contractor, for example. You're still going to have to deal with the idea that there are outside standards that you have to meet and you need to be able to do those things.

Courtney: [00:10:38] I think a lot of people don't realize there's research on the number of homeschoolers, but also the kind of homeschooling that people do. What homeschooling looks like in families with multiple children, because I read, if I recall correctly, something like 50% of families with multiple children who homeschool will put one kid in public school and homeschool another child. It's not all or nothing even within the same family.

AJ: [00:11:05] As you mentioned earlier, what we're seeing with this idea of pod schooling is very much what 10 or 15 years ago in the classical homeschooling world you called a cottage school.

[00:11:15] So cottage schools are something a little bit in between individual homeschooling and a co-op. So typically what you've got is a small group of kids who are being taught by one or two, maybe three teachers, who are not the parents of those children. They might meet one or two or three days a week, and then the other—

Courtney: [00:11:36] Do they get paid?

AJ: [00:11:36] It depends on the situation. And that term, I think, was popularized quite a bit by Memoria Press, so typically you'd meet two or two and a half, maximum three days a week. And then the off-days,

people are at their own homes doing what you think of as more traditional homeschooling.

Courtney: [00:11:51] Pod schooling is great. That's such a catchy name.

AJ: [00:11:54] Pod schooling is basically cottage schooling for people in the tech world.

Courtney: [00:11:59] Let's switch gears a minute and talk about Well Trained Mind and associated materials.

Jen: [00:12:04] I had been homeschooling under a year, maybe, when I read the first edition of The Well Trained Mind. We had signed up with a full Catholic curriculum with Seton, actually.

Courtney: [00:12:14] Like you do.

Jen: [00:12:16] Like you do. But then I read The Well Trained Mind and then I started handing it around to everyone I know. I loved it. Now I'm a fan of DIY in every area of my life.

Courtney: [00:12:26] They rehab houses, she's really not kidding.

Jen: [00:12:29] It's true. So, it spoke to me. I was not one of those people that were put off by the amount of work. I liked the idea of, here's this framework, now you gather up everything that works for your family. Here is, also, how you should teach it. I liked all of that. But I have to say, I liked it even more as the company grew and they started putting out the scripted curricula. The scripted curricula would be a program, well, even Saxon is scripted in math. You're going to have a teacher manual, and it's going to say, "Week one: Day one: Teacher—today we are learning about blah blah blah." Underneath that, it would say something like, your student can answer this, this, or this, and it's all correct. Or, if your student says this, you want to correct them.

Courtney: [00:13:16] It lays it right out there for you.

AJ: [00:13:19] My I Speak Latin curriculum is completely scripted. It tells the teacher exactly what to do and say all the way through to get the desired result. A lot of people were homeschooling, but they didn't have the confidence to do that do-it-yourself kind of work. Nor can they necessarily afford to hire a private tutor to teach their kid Latin. I'm happy to do that for anyone that wants their kid to learn Latin.

Courtney: [00:13:41] AJ does this, folks. If you need a private tutor, look him up.

AJ: [00:13:44] The idea of using spoken Latin in the classroom and treating Latin as just like any other world language. Teaching people to speak it like Spanish or French, and I wanted to make that available to other Latin teachers. What is considered now the traditional way to teach Latin is what we call parts to wholes. In other words, you start at the level of sounds and individual words. You learn all of the forms, and then eventually you build them up into sentences and you're constantly translating back and forth between Latin and whatever your native spoken language is. That's in the context of Latin, that's parts to whole.

[00:14:20] Whole to parts would be something like, you are given a Latin text, you can read those sentences and understand them because of all of those cognates. You learn your grammar and your endings and all of those things after the fact. After you have actually understood the language as a whole language.

[00:14:38] Many Latin programs actually are somewhere in the middle.

Courtney: [00:14:41] I love that you can run that down for us, because to me, that's one of the best parts of The Well Trained Mind book is that it has all of these suggestions for different subjects with pros and cons. Back when we were all going to newsgroups, pre-YouTube review, pre-podcast, to have this solid serious text, where Susan Wise Bauer gave you solid details about different programs. I don't know where you all were living, but where I live, there is no cute little local homeschooling store. They don't have it in the library. If I want to look at something, I have to buy it, and then I've invested money and I may or may not be able to use it with my child. So to have these kinds of reviews ready for you and know that they're all going to work in this classical method, that was huge.

Jen: [00:15:28] Oh yeah. First of all, if you don't know what any of these things are called, there really was nowhere to search them out. To have this book where you could look under a subject and then see all these companies provide this curriculum for this subject for this age group. Being told what they were called was huge. I still say it is the biggest bargain in the homeschooling world. And Susan herself was homeschooled.

AJ: [00:15:52] Yes. There are things in that book that she's said, and I know this from my own experience as a homeschooling writer, things that her publisher insisted be included, like how much time should be spending on spelling with your second grader per day. She would never have put that kind of prescriptive stuff in there if Norton hadn't insisted. Because it gives people the wrong impression of the way homeschooling works. It's not like the timer goes off, we've done seven minutes of whatever

and now we're moving onto the next subject. It's much more organic than that.

[00:16:20] There are people who pick up a book like *The Well Trained Mind*, which, frankly, it's a door stop of a book. It's huge if you buy the actual print copy. And they look at it, and they think, "Oh my God. I have to do all of this?" And the answer is no. You don't have to do all of this.

Courtney: [00:16:35] Nobody does the—

AJ: [00:16:36] Nobody does the whole thing, not even the author. So.

Jen: [00:16:40] Exactly.

Courtney: [00:16:40] It's important to note here, I say, it's guidelines. It's not a prison. On a day-to-day basis, the only thing I actually use is a checklist. Gwen is 12. She's old enough now that I can be like, hey, read these chapters please. And she gets up in the morning and she does all of her reading independently by herself. Am I going to put 6 am on a schedule? No, I am not. While I'm eating lunch between classes, answering student emails. Hey, Gwen, tell me about chapter five and she'll run down and give me a narration.

[00:17:08] I know I come off as really intense, but really it's just a way to keep me from being disorganized. Oops, I forgot to do spelling, here it is on the checklist. Let's do that. Sit down real quick, kid, and we'll do it.

[00:17:18] When I see those color-coded, really pretty 9:15-10:15, we're going to play outside, kid schedules, I just cackle to myself because I don't know anybody who actually keep a whole household daily schedule like that. Maybe you did, Jen, when you had [crosstalk] kids.

Jen: [00:17:33] I was just going to say, I actually spent several years doing that and it was the only way I was going to get everything done with all the kids and to make sure that they were doing things on their own because they knew that at 2 o'clock, they were going to have to check in with me. Because when you have more than one or two kids, you have people in other parts of the house that you can't see or hear or they go outside. I really did have a schedule like that and it saved our homeschool during that time period.

Courtney: [00:18:02] See, different things for different folks. Did you schedule, AJ, when you were homeschooling?

AJ: [00:18:07] I did and I am an inveterate list-maker and I love a good schedule. I really do. Color-coded, the whole nine yards. My daughter,

not so much. My lovely schedules invariably got thrown out the window pretty much as soon as she got ahold of them. But I ended up doing more or less what you described with a checklist.

Jen: [00:18:25] The only thing I will add in is that my color-coded schedule nearly always off on the times but it was in order. So it was sort of a loose schedule.

Courtney: [00:18:34] But do this, and then we will do this, and then we will do that.

Jen: [00:18:37] Right.

Courtney: [00:18:39] In full disclosure, I teach for the Well Trained Mind Academy, so I am going to recuse myself from any discussions of the school. However, I really like Story of the World. And y'all, I know it gets hate. I get that. I understand that and I understand a lot of the criticisms, why. But I think it's still the best on the market for young children, five, six, seven year olds, in terms of what it does. I'm actually using that with both of my children right now. Gwen is taking classes from the academy this year, she's using Writing With Skill 3, and The Creative Writer. Elena is using the Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading and we're doing Writing With Ease, which she loves, and First Language Lessons.

[00:19:20] But the reason I'm using these with Elena is because I used them with Gwen and I saw how well they worked. Jen, and I, and I think AJ, too, correct me if I'm wrong. We're really interested in curricula that work. That is our number one priority. Does this thing work? We really don't care so much about whether it's secular, because secular really depends on your definition, or whether it's religious, and what does being religious, exactly, mean? So we're really worrying about effective.

[00:19:51] Jen and I are going to toss out, and I'm sure AJ will, too, curricula that may be religious, but what we're worried about is what it's for, and how effective it is. I have been publicly shunned for my curricula choices and sometimes I've been shunned because I chose a secular curricula, and sometimes I've been shunned because I chose a religious curricula. You really can't win.

Jen: [00:20:16] Hey, I've been shunned for letting my kids watch Star Wars.

Courtney: [00:20:19] Gwen was kicked out of a playgroup because I taught her how to read.

Jen: [00:20:23] Yeah, yeah. I, yeah.

Courtney: [00:20:26] Mm-hmm.

Jen: [00:20:27] Also, I don't ever make my own bread, and so at one point I had to tell my older boys at homeschool gym to not talk about the fact that we buy bread.

Courtney: [00:20:36] We used 75 pounds of flour in the last six months, speaking of making bread.

Jen: [00:20:43] See, when I'm busy making a house, you're making bread.

Courtney: [00:20:47] Right, the only—

Jen: [00:20:47] I can't do everything.

Courtney: [00:20:49] —remodeling I want to do on a house is, like, changing the décor on the wall.

Jen: [00:20:53] Oh, don't get me started on that.

Courtney: [00:20:56] When we talk about classical education...

AJ: [00:20:58] I think that I'm a little bit of an outlier here because I actually do think that what has come to be called classical education in the homeschooling world, particularly in North America, is not actually classical. What it really is is a solid liberal arts education but it is not, I think, distinctively classical. The short version is that if you hear people talking about classical education in terms of the grammar stage or the logic stage and the idea that there are these developmental stages for kids that are somehow linked to the stages of the medieval trivium. So, grammar, logic, and rhetoric. You are then in the realm of Dorothy Sayers' ideas.

[00:21:40] There's a lot of history there, but I think the important thing to understand is that Dorothy Sayers was suggesting, and what Susan Wise Bauer and the Well Trained Mind have picked up on is not connected to the historical understanding of classical education. At least not directly. Sayers herself did not describe her ideas as classical education because she had one herself. Classical education already had a definition. The term she actually uses for her ideas is neo-medieval education.

[00:22:11] I tend to hew to the older definition, which is classical means the classical languages and the classical cultures, so Latin and Greek. If you were to say to any European, or any British person, for that matter, that you were giving your children a classical education but you weren't teaching them Latin, they would look at you like you had three heads because there is no classical education by that definition, without the classical languages.

[00:22:36] So having a history progression that is chronological or having the idea of stages rather than subjects, historically, that is not what classical education has meant. Now, I hasten to say that that doesn't mean that the Sayers trivium doesn't work. Or that there isn't really, really good research that indicates that these developmental stages are real. That kids do actually memorize really easy when they're young. They do develop at puberty, a capacity of logical thought that they didn't have when they were smaller. Those things are actually true.

[00:23:08] I would also say that those things are not really original to Dorothy Sayers. We already have these built into American education. We have elementary school, we have middle school, and we have high school. Those are, quote-unquote, the "trivium" stages, right there built into the way we do schools.

[00:23:21] I'm kind of the curmudgeon about keeping the definition of classical education quote-unquote "pure" in the sense of saying, it really does have to involve the classical languages in some capacity. However, that doesn't mean that something like the Well Trained Mind is not a fantastically strong program. We'll give your kids a good education.

[00:23:39] What Susan has said is that she refers to it as neo-classical. I'm willing to live with that particularly because the Well Trained Mind does emphasize the importance of Latin. Not so much as a language in and of itself, but as a means to some secondary benefits. Vocabulary, grammar, understanding, and to a certain extent, logical thinking because you really do have to analyze sentences in Latin to translate.

Jen: [00:24:04] I would add to that, that you can't forget as a consumer that they have a product and they're going to spin their descriptions and defend their position because they're selling something.

AJ: [00:24:17] That's true. It really is.

Courtney: [00:24:20] So here, buy this thing. It will make your child smarter, it will make them more logical, it will make them better able to depend their faith, it will make them a better person. Learn Latin.

Jen: [00:24:30] And also, we sell Latin. So. Hey.

AJ: [00:24:33] Right. And I will admit that when I, probably for the first eight or maybe even ten years that I was interested in classical education, I bought into that stuff completely. I promoted that, myself, in The Latin-Centered Curriculum.

Courtney: [00:24:44] We want to make wise ethical choices when buying curricula and making sure that we purchase curricula and materials from publishers that we want to support with our dollars.

AJ: [00:24:57] Yes.

Courtney: [00:24:57] And sometimes that may mean compromising and purposely seeking out things that are used because you don't want to give that initial first round of dollars to the publisher.

[00:25:06] I feel really strongly that I need the best and maybe my definition of the best will change from year to year or month to month or even week to week. But I want to do my very best at the time, and sometimes, yeah, that's going to be a religious piece of material.

Jen: [00:25:22] My controversial choice is Joy Hakim's History of US.

Courtney: [00:25:26] Which I love.

Jen: [00:25:29] I own—I know, and I love it, and we're using it for high school, so I know that there are a lot of people that would disagree with that. But I find it accessible, I find that you're going to have a better conversation if your kids aren't struggling over the language in the book. I just don't have a problem with it being an easy read. I do own the Sonlight guide for it and the Bookshark guide—

Courtney: [00:25:50] Ooh.

Jen: [00:25:53] And you might say that those are the same thing, but I haven't really found myself pulling out the guide for it really at all, except for at the beginning when I was scheduling the reading. I have some Memoria Press lit guides that I already own schedule for this year.

Courtney: [00:26:07] I really like their lit guides.

Jen: [00:26:09] I do, too.

Courtney: [00:26:09] Do you have—have you ever used any of those, AJ?

AJ: [00:26:12] I have not used them. I'm a literature person, that's what my degree is in. I've never really felt a need to use things like that.

Courtney: [00:26:20] Must be nice.

AJ: [00:26:22] Oh, you know, but don't ask me to teach science.

Courtney:

[00:26:25] Make sure to join our Facebook group, Secular Inclusive Classical Teachers if you haven't already, where we talk about homeschooling all the time with many veteran homeschoolers. And a special shout out to all of you veteran homeschoolers who have joined and make that group the wonderful safe place that it is.

[00:26:41] Thanks for listening to Good Enough Homeschool. Before we go, show some love for your favorite podcast by leaving us a review, and then stay tuned for next week where we will show some love and hate for another curriculum.