

There's No Place Like Home

by Steve Madden

According to the Florida Department of Education, 1,375 children in Lee County were registered as being home schooled during the 2003-2004 school year. Opting for educating their children at home has been a growing trend for Florida parents, with nearly 10,000 more students listed as home schooled last year than there were five years ago.

In order to better understand the home school phenomenon, I spent some time with 14-year-old Mark Harrison, an eighth grader who has been home schooled since the first grade. The following is an excerpt from our conversation. (For confidentiality reasons, the family asked that real names not be used, so Mark Harrison will be called Bryan Harrison.)

So, Bryan, what have you found to be the most difficult thing about home schooling?

Who's Bryan? Oh, yeah, I get it. Well, I'd have to say one of the toughest things has been basketball.

You mean not being on a school basketball team?

No, I mean being the school basketball team. Try in-bounding a ball when you're the only one on the team...it's not very easy.

I would think not. What are the chances of you getting some teammates?

Pretty slim now that coach...er, dad has had his vasectomy.

I see. Well, under the circumstances, why don't you just stop playing?

Yeah, well, dad...er, coach told me that



I could quit playing when I win my next game. Of course, I was in fifth grade then and I haven't won a game yet. Man, am I going to hate high school!

Let's move on to something else. Tell me what your typical school day is like. When does school start? How many hours a day do you study?

Actually, my school day is about the same as the kids who go to public school. I get up early, grab my books, and go wait at the end of the driveway until the school bus goes by. Then mom rings the bell, and I go back in the house.

Your mother makes you wait outside for a bus you're not going to take?

Oh, I don't mind. She used to make me walk a mile down the road and back just so I could tell my grandkids someday how far I walked to school. Anyhow, then I come back in the house, go through the metal detector, and sit down at the kitchen table where mom makes the daily announcements over the karaoke machine and gives me my schoolwork.

Announcements?

Yeah, you know...what's on the lunch menu, a reminder to turn in field trip permission slips, the other team's score from

the previous night's basketball game...the regular stuff.

You mean both teams' scores, don't you?

Well, actually my opponents are the only ones who have ever scored so it's simpler just to say that the score in last night's game was, like, 82. Anyhow, I usually spend the rest of the morning working on my assignments, break for lunch, and study again until three o'clock. Then it's time for either basketball practice or extracurricular activities.

That sounds like a lot of effort for one person.

You're telling me. What with all the costume changes, the play didn't end until mid-January. I'll never do that again. This year I'm the 400-meter relay swim team and, of course, I'm also the Prom Committee.

Well, I'm impressed. Home schooling certainly seems to have worked out just fine for you. Thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with me, Bryan.

No problem. At least it got me out of basketball practice. Jeez, I'm gonna hate high school!