

Cultivating Gratitude

Erin Scherger, Herndon

My daughter is in her final year of our family's homeschooling journey, and these days there is a great deal of emphasis on future planning. "Tomorrow, be sure to ask Dr. D about whether he would rather submit a recommendation via the Common App or through the regular mail."

"Next week, I *promise* I will finalize your transcript and our school profile."

"In November, we will schedule a 'Yay! Applications are all completed!' family celebration."

"By April, we will know what our options are for next year!"

There is a Chinese proverb that states, "People in the West are always getting ready to live." When we are children, we can't wait to be one of the big kids. When we're teens, we can't wait to be adults. When we're adults, we can't wait until retirement. We are always preparing for the next step, the next milestone, the next achievement.

Along with always preparing for what's next, we tend to look at other people's lives and find something lacking in our own. Some of that is exacerbated by social media, where we can easily get caught in the trap of comparing someone else's amazing photo with our everyday messiness. But playing the "always planning" or "constantly comparing" games can lead to unhappiness. Whether it manifests as Imposter Syndrome or leads to anxiety or envy while trying to create the perfect schooling experience for our children, it's ultimately unhealthy to our sense of well-being.

One remedy? Cultivate gratitude within each day.

Each November, my Facebook newsfeed is filled with "30 days of thankfulness" posts. But rather than only being thankful in the month of November, consider William Arthur Ward's words: "Gratitude can turn common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings."

This issue contains a treasure trove of these small, ordinary pleasures. Two writers share how they celebrate the routines of a typical day. Melissa Wiley, author of more than a dozen books for kids and teens, shares her thoughtful perspective on appreciating the ebb and flow of homeschooling. Another contributor writes about day-to-day connections through small groups and social media, while a home-schooled teen shares practical everyday advice for succeeding in college.

As for me, there's nothing like the process of encapsulating my daughter's homeschooling experience into a few short admissions documents to really call attention to the extraordinary benefits of eclectic homeschooling for her and for our family.

Fred Rogers is known for saying (in the face of adversity), "Always look for the helpers." But I think it is important to be aware of and to appreciate our casual, everyday influences even more. I would be remiss if I weren't grateful to all who have helped us along the way: friends, colleagues, teachers, and more experienced homeschoolers—all have smoothed our path. And now I'm grateful to be part of that chain of support for other Virginia homeschoolers through VaHomeschoolers.

So, even as I look ahead to what the future will bring for our family, I want to thank all who are vital to my present and all who contribute to this publication. The copy, the photos, the editing, the inspiration, the advice, and the support are all thanks to homeschoolers who willingly share their experiences and expertise. It's a pure pleasure to work with all of them throughout the production process.

And last but not least, thank you, dear readers. The most recent VaHomeschoolers member survey indicated that many of you read *Voice* cover to cover; I am grateful for your readership and your support. I am grateful for you.

Erin Scherger is thankful for the friends and experiences she has encountered over 15 years of homeschooling. She lives in Herndon with her homeschooled high school aged daughter, her husband, and her hamster.

Voice

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ON THE COVER

Ethan having fun dropping balls into a whirlpool (also known as learning about the physical properties of liquids).

Photo by Keely Noffsinger Massie

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