

# My Mom, My Teacher

Being a single mother is a challenge. Being a single mother and a teacher at the same time to your own children poses an even greater challenge. But for the past five years, Esther Noel has been balancing her two lives and obligations – as a mother and teacher to her three young children.

“As a mom, I just naturally thought of myself as a teacher,” the 44-year-old resident of Stirling says.

“Motherhood never stops and yet I feel like teacher a hundred percent time too,” she adds.

Noel has sole custody of her children – Sophie, 10, William, nine and Eva, seven. The children see their father only a couple of hours a week. The decision to homeschool started five years ago. At first, Noel was hesitant.

“I thought the task was far too daunting to take on,” she says.

After doing her research and sending her own children to regular school, she was finally convinced and decided that homeschooling is the best way for her children to learn.

“I put them into a public school system for six months in Grade 2, Grade 1 and JK. They found it fine, like they were pretty well-adjusted. I found it difficult because I didn’t find time to teach them anything that I found valuable in any of the leftover moments,” she says.

After doing it for five years, Noel debunks the stereotypes associated with homeschooling.

“Many people think that homeschooled kids just sit and watch TV all day,” she says laughing.

“If you can potty train, you can homeschool,” she adds.

She also realized the moral aspect of homeschooling for her decision to go this educational route.

“These children are given to us. They’re not actually given to a system,” she says specifically referring to the educational system, she is not against in any way.

“Motherhood, in general, is a teaching position and that is a natural teaching position,” she adds.

Going full-time to homeschool means having no regular job for Noel, a degree holder from Queen’s University. When financial needs arise, Noel finds ways to generate income.

“We just really need to be creative,” she says citing ways to generate income if needed. Noel mentions selling her stained glass works and

bartering eggs from her own raised chickens with neighbours. She also takes a seasonal part-time job as an enumerator for Statistics Canada.

Noel begins her day at 6 a.m. where she has an hour for herself. She settles in a small corner of her kitchen which she calls her “happy place.” As a devout Christian, this is also the time and place for Noel to read the scripture.

Two hours later, the lessons on the 3 Rs – reading, writing, arithmetic start. It lasts for two hours, just before lunch.

“My teacher instincts really kick in at 9:30,” Noel says.

Homeschooling doesn’t end after its two hours. Every day, the children engage in activities outside the home – all part of the homeschooling process. These activities also enable Noel’s children to interact with other children of their age.

“When the kids are at play, their various activities will show you what they are most interested in,” she says.

All of the children have regular extra-curricular classes outside the home. Sophie has horseriding classes while William and Eva have regular gymnastics class. In the summer, all of them play soccer.

Noel acknowledges that homeschooling doesn’t only enable her children to learn but she also learns.

“In teaching, I’m not the only one imparting. As a teacher, I’m learning a lot and I have to remain teachable myself.”

At certain times, Noel admits that she mulls over sending her kids to regular school and having a regular job. But she says this issue is immediately put to rest when people compliment her about doing a good job teaching her children.

“The issue ‘to school or to homeschool’ often comes up but it is squashed within 24 hours – something will happen, someone will call and that just totally quelled that debate,” Noel says referring to the people who have complimented her.

In the end, she says her decision to homeschool is the right thing to do. “I get incredible joy out of homeschooling,” she says.

According to an article by the *Canadian Journal of Education*, there has been an explosion in the numbers of children in the last 30 years not attending school because their parents have decided that it is better for their children to learn at home. Close to 20,000 families in Canada were schooling at home in 1997.



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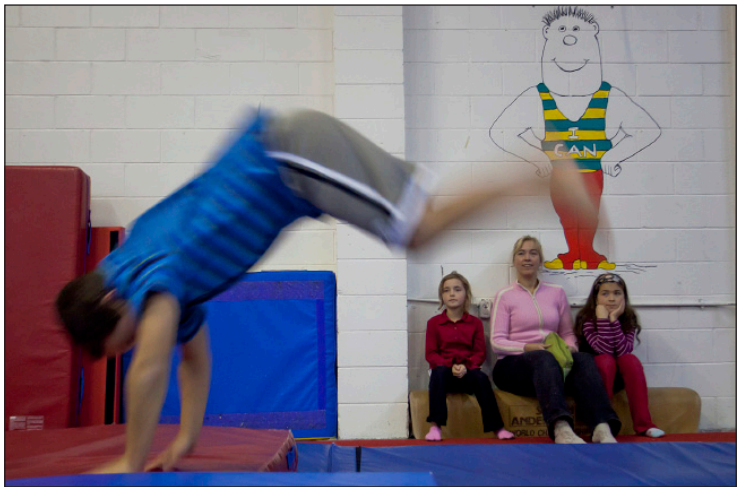
Esther Noel has sole custody of her three children since separating from her husband five years ago. Being a full-time mother and homeschool teacher for her children, she barely has time for herself. She considers an hour each morning shortly after getting out of her bed and before her children wake up as her down time.

Sophie Noel posts one of her art creations on the wall.

Esther Noel’s family gathers around a lamp shortly after daybreak to do some artwork. This activity is a warm-up leading to the classes which will start after breakfast.

Sophie (left) does her activity in the kitchen while the rest decide to do it in the living room. Esther Noel’s homeschooling lasts the whole day including two hours straight for more rigorous subjects such as mathematics.

Photos and story by: Melchizedek Maquiso



Counterclockwise from top to bottom (righthand side of page):

Esther Noel (left), 44, has been homeschooling her three children for the past five years - (front left) Eva, seven, Sophie, 10, and William, nine. The family’s kitchen serves as the classroom for two hours every day for five days.

Noel fulfills her duties as a mother during bedtime when she gathers all her children for a bedtime story.

William Noel does a tumble while his mother and sisters watch as part of his gymnastics class at the Belleville Gymnastics Club. Extra-curricular activities are part of Esther Noel’s homeschooling. This is also an opportunity for her children to socialize with children of their same age.

Esther Noel’s family enjoys a leisurely stroll in Stirling’s downtown. Noel, who has sole custody of her children, divides her time between being a full-time mother and teacher.

Noel reprimands her son, William, for not completing his task. As a mother and teacher of her children, Noel juggles both responsibilities.