

**Submission
No 276**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. I am a postgraduate student at Sydney Conservatorium of Music. I am currently in the final stages of my doctorate in music education, researching musical participation in the lives of home schooling families. My research was conducted in New South Wales and New Zealand, and thirty-eight home schooling families participated in the project. My research examines the views of home schooling families regarding the place of music in education, motivations to participate in various musical activities and how the home schooling context influences musical opportunities and experiences.

My own background, as a home-schooled child in a musical family, fuelled my interest in my field of research. The writing below describes my own experiences as a home-schooled child. I believe it is appropriate for submission to this inquiry because it tells how home schooling shaped both my musical and family life in many positive ways.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Rutherford

Music has been a constant presence through my life. My earliest memories are of having my bottle on my father's knee as he sang songs with his students, of dancing exuberantly with my brother to pop music, and of teaching myself to whistle. At age 3 or 4, before learning any instrument, my dearest goal was to whistle. I practised every day until I could warble a tune using two separate techniques. Whistling, humming, percussion on lips and tongue are the first and never-to-be-repeated connection music makes with us. The might of a full orchestra is but a pale simulation of music's original intimacy with lips and tongue. Whistling gave me my lifelong friendship with music.

Apart from a brief period attending school in Year 1, I was home schooled until I began university. My older brother attended school for one year, but my three younger siblings have

never been to school. My father worked from home, teaching music and freelance. My mother, an artist, also worked from home, though caring for five children took up much of her time. She played the piano as a hobby, and played accompaniments for my father.

At age 7, I began taking piano lessons with my grandmother, whose professional working life had been spent as a pianist, music lecturer and AMEB examiner. I was eager to start the piano. My brother had begun lessons three years earlier, and I wanted to follow suit. But my grandmother felt I should wait until my hands and fingers were sufficiently developed.

When I finally began my lessons, my grandmother was living about an hour's drive away. We visited her once a week, getting, in addition to piano, lessons in French and German, since my grandmother was well-versed in these languages. When I was 9, she happily moved closer by, to a house a short walk away, so we visited her as often as we liked.

For ten years, I continued weekly piano and French lessons with my grandmother. I vividly remember the walk up the track to her house, the pungent smell of lantana in my nostrils and, trotting by my side, Genevieve, my golden retriever, who always went with me. I felt special during our lesson times, having my grandmother's sole attention, and happy to impress her with my playing—not always an easy task.

Only in hindsight do I appreciate how privileged such tuition was. With five children to support on a modest income, my parents found my grandmother's assistance with lessons invaluable. Sadly she is no longer with us, but now when I play the piano I often think of her and feel connected to her. I believe our relationship across the generations was strengthened and made special through our mutual love of music. My grandmother gave me a great gift that I will carry with me throughout my life.

When I was 11 my parents suggested I take up a second instrument. We owned a flute and violin (besides cello, which my brother played and which my hands were too small to effectively manage). I chose the flute, which later became my first instrument at university.

In addition to cello, my father is proficient on a variety of string instruments and piano. Wind instruments are not his forte. Nevertheless, with him beside me at the piano, and guided by *A Tune a Day* and some innate musical resourcefulness, I began my flute adventure. In those days, the Internet was not yet the resource it has become. My enthusiasm to learn the flute

was dizzying. But as the dizziness increased, I quickly realised its cause was more than enthusiasm, and that my blowing technique was in need of professional advice.

Progress was slow, and my parents soon decided that if I were to reach an advanced level of flute playing, the engagement of a professional teacher was essential. They found a local person who came to the house for half an hour each week. Because home schooling families learn to become self-sufficient, sometimes it is difficult for them to know when to seek help from other sources.

With professional guidance, my flute playing progressed rapidly. At age 16, I completed my Grade 7 AMEB, and at 17, I began lessons at the nearest regional Conservatorium of Music and became a member of their ensembles. Two years later I commenced study at University of Sydney for a Bachelor degree in Music.

I began teaching practical music to students of my own when I was 14, and have been teaching ever since. My first one or two students were other home schooling friends. I believe teaching at such an early age provided me insights into my own learning. At 14 I was by no means accomplished or experienced as a musician. Still a student myself, I well understood my own students' struggles. Teaching others helps us better understand our own relationship with music. It helped me become more aware of my own learning process.

Music in our household was neither timetabled nor regimented. It formed a natural part of daily life. Music of all different kinds filled the air from morning till night. With five children in our family—all of whom played piano and at least one other instrument—a lot of time was devoted to music practice. We practised in the mornings, but were free to play music any time throughout the day and evening and even at night, much to the exasperation of the neighbours. Sometimes I would take my flute outside and play under a tree. We regularly played instruments if they happened to be at hand, particularly the piano, and would either make up tunes, play pieces we enjoyed, or duets. My brother and I often experimented at the piano or Yamaha keyboard composing tunes, which we would record, or make into backing tracks for plays and home movies. By age 16 I had learnt piano accompaniments to the standard cello repertoire, and I began accompanying my father, playing in local concerts, restaurants, weddings and social events.

Singing and playing music together as a family has always been part of our lives. I remember singing rounds and four part harmonies with my older brother and parents and later with my two younger sisters and brother when they were old enough to join in. On Saturday mornings we had ‘orchestra’ practice. Our ‘orchestra’ consisted of family members: my older brother on double bass, my younger brother on cello, one sister on piano, my youngest sister and mother both playing violin, myself playing flute and my father swapping between instruments as needed. Other members of the ensemble were home schooling friends who played music instruments. My father made countless arrangements of pieces to suit the abilities and instruments in our ensemble, ranging from the theme from the 1960s *Batman* TV series to excerpts from Beethoven’s 9th Symphony. Members of the orchestra often requested arrangements of songs they liked and this resulted in our repertoire being very eclectic.

Being the ‘musical family’ we were often asked to play for parties and celebrations for extended family and friends. We always had a wide repertoire, with spontaneous possibilities for instrument substitution or singing. My older brother, a friend and I formed a piano, flute and cello trio, playing every Saturday afternoon for many years. Occasionally we performed publicly, but the trio was mostly for our own enjoyment.

Growing up, music formed part my life: practising Bach at the piano on a winter morning, with Genevieve warming my feet; singing the ‘Times Tables Song’, which my father wrote to help me and my younger siblings memorise our arithmetic tables; dancing around the living room to the ‘Hippy Hippy Shake’. I was never conscious of any hierarchy amongst music genres. All music was valued simply for what it was. There has always been a broad taste in music in my family. My older brother prefers electronic music. My youngest sister is devoted to classical music.

My own experience of music and home schooling prompted me to consider the experiences of other home educated families. I was curious whether other home schooling families had similar or different experiences, and how parents with little or no music background provide music for their children. Learning a musical instrument is not all easy and fun—it takes hard work and discipline. My parents were always supportive of our creative and musical pursuits. When we lacked motivation to practice, our parents offered patient encouragement. We were never told to be quiet when we practised, and were allowed the opportunity to play music no

matter what the hour. Although our family means were modest, we were well supplied with instruments, tuition and opportunities to further our music education.

I believe music in the family provides a way of connecting past to present. Songs come down through the generations like favourite recipes or stories: a grandmother's recipe for Christmas pudding, the songs she sang to a baby who will one day become a mother, and the stories she told of her own childhood in an age gone by. An instrument handed down from grandparent to parent, that once gave them equal measures of joy and frustration, now provides the same for another generation. As a rose is fragrant, music is redolent with the past. When music plays, the past lives. Throughout my childhood I would hear the intricate melodies of Bach's Solo Cello Suites, which my father frequently played. Hearing the Suites now evokes for me images and emotions of the past, the way a scent brings forth memories. Is it not music's ability to do this that fascinates and intrigues us? Music brings people together in celebration and commemoration. From when our mother sings us our first lullaby as a baby to when people sing at our funeral to say goodbye, music is a fundamental part of human life.