

Interview with Janet Ann Kehoe

Interview # EA-A-L-2016-038

August 2, 2016

Interviewer: Philip Pogue

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

Pogue: My name is Phil Pogue. This is part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Project, *Education is Key*. It is August 2, 2016, and we're in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield. I'm going to be talking to Janet Kehoe on the topic of homeschooling. Welcome to this project, Janet, and thank you for being a participant. To begin with, could you give me some background about yourself?

Kehoe: Sure. Thank you, Phil, for inviting me to come here. I was born in 1963. I was the third of four children and was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. When I was about nine years old, we moved to Rockford, Illinois.

I went to Catholic grade school from first grade all the way through twelfth grade. The high school I went to is Boylan Central Catholic in Rockford. In 1982 I graduated from there, and I went to two years of junior college at Rock Valley College [Rockford, Illinois] and got my associate's degree. From there I transferred to the University of Iowa and got a Bachelor of Science in dental hygiene and graduated in 1987.

In 1988 I married Steve Kehoe who is the love of my life, my absolute best friend. We've been married for twenty-eight years and have seven children.

Pogue: What do you remember about going to school in Rockford?

Kehoe: Oh, I remember my parents being very involved with the school. I think my dad was on the school board. I have good memories of Catholic education. I thought that our high school was really good. They really had a wonderful education there. I look back on it very fondly.

Pogue: How big was Rockford Boylan?

Kehoe: Well, I know there were over 400 in my graduating class. But at the time we had probably the biggest graduating class that had been through there in quite some time. There's probably 1,200 students or more—it had to have been more, yeah—but in that vicinity anyway.

Pogue: Why did you have interest in homeschooling?

Kehoe: When my oldest son, David, was about two to two-and-a-half, we would be driving around in the car, and he would say, "Mom, what does that sign say?" I just thought it was curiosity, so I would tell him. Then about two-and-a-half to three years old, I realized that he was putting all these things together and teaching himself how to read. By three years old he was completely and totally reading. As a new mom with two children at that time (laughs), he really scared me. I thought, what am I going to do with this kid?

I started hearing people talking about homeschooling. My biggest concern was that I didn't want him to be bored in school, and I didn't want him to be so distracted that his learning would be hindered. I started looking into homeschooling and really liked what I was seeing and reading. When he started kindergarten in 1994, I started homeschooling him and really loved it and, of course, then started homeschooling my oldest daughter two years later. I just kind of felt like it was a vocation for me, that it was something I was being called to do for my children.

Pogue: You said you looked up the information on homeschooling; where did you get that information?

Kehoe: At that time there really wasn't the Internet. If there was, it was so new, I didn't really experience it. I had been in a moms' group, and I had run into some other moms who knew of moms that homeschooled. She connected me with this gal, and I got together with her and started talking with her. Then I met other homeschooling moms through that process. There was a really big homeschooling group at that time in Springfield. I actually even went to the meetings. I just really loved what I was hearing and dove in.

Pogue: You have been homeschooling for twenty-some years?

Kehoe: Yeah, twenty-two years and still in the process of... I have two at home that I'm homeschooling. This fall I'll have a twelfth grader and a seventh grader.

Pogue: And you have taken them up from virtually kindergarten through twelfth grade?

Kehoe: Yes. My first two... When my son was about seventh and eighth grade, he asked if he could go to high school. At the time, I had never homeschooled high school, so I have to admit I was pretty nervous about it. I thought, well, okay, if he's really asking me to go to high school, let's go there. So, we put him in Ursuline [Academy, Springfield, Illinois], I kind of went with each child as to what would fulfill their needs the best. And my second child, Erin, she went to SHG [Sacred Heart-Griffin, Springfield, Illinois].

Then when I got to the third child going into high school, she actually asked me, "Mom, will you homeschool me?" And I said, "Yes." I really found that all that prep I did, from kindergarten through eighth grade, was kind of just the prep for the high school years, where you just get to see this beautiful person emerge from all of that effort. I just loved it. I loved getting to see the character and the thought processes in my children just all become synthesized and come into this wonderful high schooler. So, I've been homeschooling them through high school since.

If one of them ever asked me, "Mom, can I go to a public or private school?" I would definitely consider that, but none of them... Every one of them has been happy with being homeschooled through high school, so that's the route we've gone so far.

Pogue: SHG stands for Sacred Heart-Griffin?

Kehoe: Yes.

Pogue: How many homeschooled students have you had in the family in one year? What's the maximum that you had?

Kehoe: The maximum I've ever had in a year is five. I think that happened four times. It was kind of split. When my oldest son was in eighth grade, I had one in first. Then when my daughter was in eighth grade; my fifth child was in second. Then it went down to the... My third time was in the twelfth and eleventh grades. Then my very youngest was in second and first grades. I believe there were just four years where I was doing five at one time.

Pogue: In some of our Illinois agriculture interviews, we talked about the one room school, with teachers working or one teacher working with multi-grades. Was this the same kind of format, or were they taken at various times and then they were doing independent things?

Kehoe: Yeah, some of both (laughs). We actually have what we call a classroom, up in our second story. We have some desks in there. Usually when they're in the elementary grades, I keep them in there with me. The older ones that were in

high school would have a desk somewhere else in the house that they would go to or even the kitchen table.

When I was in there doing lessons with the younger kids, like I would bring one of them up to my desk and go through the lesson with them and get them started on anything that they needed to do. Then I would rotate through them like that. Usually I worked with them in the morning because that's when they were the freshest.

Then in the afternoon the discussions that could would take place with the high schoolers, any math or foreign language or anything like that that needed to be tended to, usually would happen in the afternoon. Of course, they could come any time and ask me questions. That always happened.

I was always amazed that, even though they're working on their own individual things, sometimes when you're having a discussion, the one who's sitting over at the desk might chime in with the one that you're with and how interested they were, even in someone else's lesson and how their input was really sometimes very insightful, even more than the student I was working with. So, it tended to be some of both of that going on, when they were still doing their lessons but had half an ear sometimes to what we were doing if it was interesting to them.

Pogue: When you had five that you were teaching at one time, what would be the range of grade levels?

Kehoe: Yeah. I think eighth grade down to first at one point and then eleventh-twelfth grade down to first and second grade with my youngest. That was actually quite easy because by the time they get to the eleventh and twelfth grade, they're pretty autonomous. That's kind of the goal, to get them on their own and to be doing those kinds of things on their own. Of course, you still have the really awesome discussions with them and help them in areas where they're having troubles. So that left me plenty of time to work with the younger ones.

Pogue: Did you do this five days a week or...?

Kehoe: Yes. Well, I'm a really organized person (laughs), so I have to have structure in my day. Ideally, we usually start up like at 8:00 in the morning and do a lot of our core work from 8:00 to noon. Then we'd take an hour off for lunch and go outside and run off your energy. Then, in the afternoon, anybody that didn't have things done would work to finish it on their own. That's usually when I would apply most of my time to high school discussion and work.

Depending on the attention span of the student and their ability, the younger ones could be done at noon, at 1:00, at 2:00, however they happen to work on their assignments. I tried to do like a Monday [through] Thursday, so that Fridays could be for like any catch-up work or field trips or labs that

might need to be done. That happened sometimes, and it didn't happen other times. You just kind of go with the flow there. I'm not so scheduled that it absolutely has to be that way, but that was the ideal.

Pogue: What were the challenges of keeping that type of schedule?

Kehoe: (laughs) Well, daily life probably played the most challenge because you're wearing all these different hats, and things come up, and you just have to juggle all of that. Then, of course, just like any other student, their ability to focus on something. They may not have things done in a four-day time span, so you just say, "All right, if you can't get it done on Friday, then you have homework Saturday and Sunday." It's kind of funny to use the word homework because it's all homework, (laughs) but you're home.

Pogue: Did your schedule kind of tie to what the public schools were doing with their scheduling, or were you just doing it straight through, without worrying about vacations and all of that?

Kehoe: Yeah. I never did year-round school. We always took a summer break. I don't know if it was because they needed it, or I needed it (laughs). We always have a Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter break. I like to give them their birthdays off too. So instead of taking, say, like Martin Luther King Day or President's Day, I usually schedule in a birthday break for them. But we try to get in about 180 days of school.

Pogue: Was there any documentation you had to provide the State of Illinois for homeschooling?

Kehoe: If we talk about documentation, you can kind of look at the legal responsibilities as well. Just to do a little bit of history of how that fits into the State of Illinois, in 1950 the Illinois Supreme Court ruled in a case called *People v. Levisen* that homeschool was considered private schooling. Therefore, in the Illinois School Code law, we fall under a private school.

According to that, we have to teach the core subjects that are taught in the public schools. We have to teach our students an education level at least of what's equal to a public-school education, and all the core courses have to be taught in the English language between the ages of six and seventeen. That's our legal responsibility in Illinois. All private schools fall under that responsibility. That gives us the freedom to decide the time, the manner, and the materials that best suit the learning needs of our kids.

Pogue: Was there any documentation that you had to provide about yourself as a teacher?

Kehoe: No. As far as documentation goes for me, I go through a homeschool entity that's outside of the State of Illinois. I send records to them. At the same time, I duplicate everything, and I keep my own records. This is what I do. It's not

required, but it's what I do. Then when it gets to high school, they have all of the records that I've sent them. Then they can send transcripts to the colleges when we request them.

Pogue: Another thing public schools and private schools have would be the documentation on immunizations and all of that. Did you have to deal with that?

Kehoe: No, because there's no reporting it to the State or anything, but I keep on top of that with my kids. I have that with our doctor, and I always kept in my file cabinet a sheet of each one of the children's immunizations in a folder.

Pogue: The public schools and the parochial schools have various reports that they have to send into the regional office or to the State. Is there anything that a homeschooling person has to send in?

Kehoe: No, not to the State, no. Just like the records I've done, I've kept on my own. Do the private schools have to do that by law, or is that just a decision that they've made to do?

Pogue: In some cases, if they belong to the Illinois High School Association, they fall under certain guidelines and requirements that they have to meet.

Kehoe: Um-hmm, um-hmm. No, I've never done that.

Pogue: You mentioned that your first two children attended Catholic high schools. Was that an adjustment for them?

Kehoe: No, not really. My son was ready to go. He was happy to be there. My daughter, I felt like there was maybe more of like a cliquy kind of situation, where she hadn't known the people in grade school. She had to get to know people, and they had to get to know her before she was accepted or brought into their group. But there was always somebody that she could find to be friends with. There is that age group in high school, cliques that form, and that can make things a little bit more difficult.

Ursuline was such a small school. I think David had like twenty-three kids or something like that in his class. By the time they graduated, I forget, I think there were thirteen or fourteen kids that actually graduated.

Pogue: How did you meet issues like driver education?

Kehoe: Oh, yeah. For some of them, they went to driver's ed [education] through public school. Some of them went through private school, the ones that I homeschooled through high school.

There were other various things that my kids did, like one of my sons helped with a stage crew for a middle school play. We've had swimming

lessons through the park district. We've done fine arts classes through the [Springfield] Art Association. This year I'm going to be sending my oldest at home to Lincoln Land for a foreign language requirement.

I know other moms have utilized both public and private schools, probably more so than I have. I guess the interest and opportunity never came up for the kids because of where their interests lay, that I didn't need to access that.

Pogue: When the two went to Ursuline and to Sacred Heart, what kind of reports did those high schools request from you?

Kehoe: Oh, gosh, that's a good question. I think I had to send them their eighth-grade transcripts. It's been quite a while now. I believe I sent them their eighth-grade transcripts, and I told them that I homeschooled them.

Pogue: Then, for the driver education, was there anything that you had to submit?

Kehoe: No, I went in and registered them. Yeah, I just went in and registered them.

Pogue: Did they only go in for the driver ed at the time when the driver ed class was scheduled?

Kehoe: Yes, yes. They would go in for the class time and then the behind-the-wheel time, yes.

Pogue: You mentioned the stage crew. Was that part of the school play?

Kehoe: Yes. It was a middle school play. One of our neighbors was working on the stage crew, and my son expressed an interest. She said, "Do you want me to ask if you can come in?" He was like, "Yeah." So the teacher said, "Sure, we could use the help,"

Then the next year, when they were doing their play, the teacher actually asked the neighbor girl, "Hey, does the neighbor boy want to come in and help?" The teacher remembered, so my son went in and helped the second year too.

Pogue: What kind of courses were you actually having to teach as a homeschool person?

Kehoe: Obviously, anything that was in the core curriculum for the public schools. That would be like language arts, math, biological and physical sciences, social sciences, fine arts, physical development, and health and then, of course, anything beyond that scope, like... Since I'm a Catholic homeschooler, I taught religion and theology. I've always taught at least the rudimentary level of economics because I think they should know how to balance a checkbook (laughs) and buy a car or a house. And then other things

like philosophy, but that would kind of fall under language arts or fine arts, I suppose.

Pogue: When you taught the social sciences, what subjects beside American history and American government and world history were they receiving?

Kehoe: I guess that was probably the bulk of it. I'm trying to think. Yeah. I believe I... Constitution, American history. We've done the ancients, like ancient Greek and ancient Roman history. There's even some, a little bit of Egyptian history, thrown in there, and then, of course, U. S. history, world history.

Pogue: How did you handle the math and the science?

Kehoe: As far as teaching it or...?

Pogue: Yes.

Kehoe: Yes. Math, that often required one-on-one involvement with me, until they got a little more proficient in it. I often had to utilize different curriculum, depending on the child and their ability, like my youngest daughter just really struggles with it, so I got a different approach to it, and that really helped. Things started clicking for her.

And sciences, well, we've done the natural sciences, like earth science, astronomy also, or the physical sciences, chemistry, and biology. My background is Bachelor of Science in dental hygiene, so the biology kind of thing really rings true with me. I find that very fascinating and interesting, to teach that to them. There's some labs, too. We've done that with co-op groups in the homeschool group as well, where a mom has had labs at her house, where they've dissected a cow's eye or other things like that. That's really fun.

Pogue: Some areas of math, like calculus, statistics, did you get into those?

Kehoe: We didn't. If we had, my husband is a civil engineer, and he's about one math class away from a minor in math. When they were getting into like some of the harder geometry and algebra II if I... I'm not horrible at math, so I usually held up pretty good. But if we were struggling with something, we would often turn to him.

There's also some math curriculum out there, where you can actually—and this is true of some of the science curriculum as well, like chemistry—that you have a phone number that you can call to actually talk to the people who put the curriculum out. They'll help your student go through things step-by-step if needed.

If I ever would've felt like I was really over my head in that, I would've either gotten a tutor, which I have for foreign language before, or in high school, sent them out to Lincoln Land [Community College].¹

Pogue: You mentioned that one went to Lincoln Land for foreign language. What did Lincoln Land require you to provide?

Kehoe: Yeah, he is just in the process of doing that for the fall. You have to register with them. I haven't stepped through this whole process with him, so I'm not going to be very articulate at giving you the right information there. I believe that he has to register with them, and I believe he tells them that he's homeschooled. I'm not sure about any transcripts, as far as that goes yet, so excuse me, Lincoln Land, for not knowing your process (laughs). If he were here, he could probably tell you better than I could, actually.

Pogue: How many of your seven children have gone on to college?

Kehoe: So far, all of them. My oldest is twenty-seven. He went from Ursuline to... He enrolled with the army for four years. He served a year over in Iraq. Then when he got out of the army, he got married, and he went to Robert Morris College, here in Springfield.² Now he's living in Ohio. He got a Bachelor of Science in computer sciences, and he's working as an IT individual and supporting his wife and soon-to-be four kids, very, very soon (laughs).

My second oldest is a girl. She, from SHG, went to Millikin University over in Decatur. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. Then she got married and moved out to the Boston area and got her master's at Longy School of Music in vocal performance.³ She's currently teaching and singing in the Boston area.

Then, of course, my third is Anne. She went to Lincoln Land for two years and got her associate's. She's down in Nashville, [Tennessee], going to Aquinas College.⁴ This will be her final year down there this fall. She's working on a bachelor's in history, and she's got an internship here at the library [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois].

¹ Lincoln Land Community College is a public community college in Springfield, Illinois. It has extended branches in different locations. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_Land_Community_College)

² In April of 2019, Robert Morris University Illinois announced plans to close its Springfield campus, a move that affected about 20 undergraduate students. (<https://www.sj-r.com/news/20190514/robert-morris-to-close-springfield-campus>)

³ Longy School of Music of Bard College is a private music school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Founded in 1915, it was one of the four independent degree-granting music schools in the Boston region. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longy_School_of_Music_of_Bard_College)

⁴ Aquinas College is a private Roman Catholic college in Nashville, Tennessee. It was founded in 1961 and named in honor of St. Thomas Aquinas. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquinas_College_\(Tennessee\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquinas_College_(Tennessee)))

Then our fourth and fifth are two boys. They're both at Lincoln Land currently. Ryan is hoping to get into the physical therapy field. Kevin is working towards a mechanical engineering degree.

Then I have a twelfth grader who is very interested in banking and financing, so he's got big hopes to do something in that area. Then I have a seventh grader too, who's... She just likes to bake right now (laughs). So, yes, they've been very successful in the things that they've chosen to do.

Pogue: When you started, homeschooling was still unique. Are there fewer challenges now that there more homeschooling is going on in Illinois and the colleges and other higher level institutions are more familiar with the concept?

Kehoe: Yes, I really think so. When we first started homeschooling, I would hear stories of people who had started homeschooling way before me, and they were like carving out a new road. Whereas when I started, there was curriculum out there. I didn't have to hunt down curriculum.

Now you've got schools all over that offer homeschooling help. You've got conferences you can go to. You've got podcasts you can listen to. You've got so much curriculum it's almost overwhelming. And, of course, the Internet gives you access to all those things, whereas when I first started, I didn't have the Internet. I was doing a lot of talking with people and a lot of sending away for information.

Even the acceptance of it, I can see, is much more open now. When I first started homeschooling, I was almost afraid to tell anybody that I homeschooled because you would get these crazy looks and crazy questions (laughs). Now you tell people you homeschool, and they're like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, I know so-and-so homeschools." The atmosphere just seems so much more open and friendly and accessible.

Pogue: How did you determine the subjects that were being taught? In the public or private schools, usually there's a counselor, and they work with the students, and the parents are involved.

Kehoe: Right. The place I go through, out of California, they have a whole setup and catalogue of a course of study that you can follow. There's like different degrees. You could get just a standard degree. You could get like a middle-of-the-road degree and like an honors degree. You choose which one of those you think that your student is capable of doing, and you look at the prospectus for what is expected for each year.

Your freshman year is pretty much cut out for you. Then as you get more of the requirements under their belt, then you have more freedom to choose electives. There's a whole course of study that... I found that so helpful because it wasn't like so much guesswork for me. It was kind of a classical-type curriculum, towards so that orients itself towards building your

child to be able to learn how to think for themselves and reason for themselves. That's kind of the idea of a classical curriculum. It's based in the ancient Greek and Roman thought. It's to build character in your child, to build them towards thinking what is true, good, and beautiful and looking at everything that they study through that lens.

Pogue: Did you yearly have to order curriculum material to prepare for the next year?

Kehoe: Yes, yes. A lot of times, it was the same, so I could reuse it. But I still see that each child's needs and learning abilities are different too. I just ordered a new science curriculum for my seventh grader this year because I know how she studies and looks at things, and I know that this is going to be better for her understanding.

That's the one beautiful thing about homeschooling is that I have this one-on-one with them. I know who they are, and they probably really know who I am (laughs). I know their strengths, and I know their weaknesses. Then I can move things, so it makes their learning easier or at least... I don't know if you want to use the word easier, but it makes it more understandable for them to synthesize all that.

Pogue: Roughly how many field trips would you do in a year?

Kehoe: Oh gosh, that varied with whatever year it was (laughs) and how involved some of the moms were with the support group. There were several years where we were very organized, and at least once a month, we would go on a field trip. I don't do that as much anymore because I see when I get into the high school years that I just don't really have the time for that.

We spend a lot of time in the summers. We usually take a good vacation in the summer too. We've been all over the U. S. and kind of make that a field trip, if you want to call it that.

Pogue: You've worked with other homeschoolers for this. Are there other things that you do on an organized basis with other homeschool families?

Kehoe: Yes. When I first started, I belonged to a really big homeschool group. I met all kinds of women, and I found out that there were a lot of Catholic women that were homeschooling. We decided to make our own Catholic homeschool group. We started.

We get together once a month. That has evolved into, like now, we communicate with each other through a Yahoo group.⁵ We also meet too. From there, they've planned various functions. They've planned field trips.

⁵ Yahoo! Groups was a free-to-use system of electronic mailing lists offered by Yahoo!. Prior to February 2020, Yahoo! Groups was one of the world's largest collections of online discussion boards. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo!_Groups)

They've planned co-op classes. The kids even have a weekly, ultimate Frisbee that they meet in the park during the nice part of the year.⁶

Then when it's around the school year, they've actually gotten together once a week for a discussion group on various things. Like the last discussion group we had, one of the moms was a moderator, and they read *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis and discussed that. That changes. They've had history discussions. They've had theology and philosophy discussions.

Pogue: Some homeschool groups even formed athletic teams that competed, and some homeschool parents have asked to join the athletic or academic teams at the various high schools. Has that been a part of your activities?

Kehoe: No, it hasn't been a part of my experience, but I know that the kids have gotten together for football. Actually... Oh, I forgot; way back when, we had a PE [Physical Education] class that several of the moms, in not just the Catholic homeschool but in other groups, got together and formed a really big PE class through the Y [YMCA]. They had all the different grade levels, and that was really fun. My kids really enjoyed that.

Then things change over time, and that doesn't exist anymore. My kids have gotten together with the other kids for swimming. The swimming instructor that we had had a homeschool swim. She was just tremendous; she was through the park district. I think she could've probably put them in a competitive level, if we'd had enough interest, but... She was just an excellent teacher.

Yeah, it's just really come and go in various aspects. But we've never had like a homeschool organized team, where they've competed with other teams. We just haven't had enough students to be able to do that.

Pogue: What are the challenges in homeschooling, especially as the students move into the middle and high school grades?

Kehoe: One of the things I dealt with for a long time was making them autonomous, so they don't have to have everything done with me. That has gotten better over the years, just because it had to (laughs). I think finding time to do the really awesome discussions with my older kids was probably one of the harder things, because you really get in a discussion with them, and you don't want to cut them off because you're getting to really know what they're thinking inside, and it's such a beautiful thing.

⁶ Ultimate, originally known as ultimate Frisbee, is a non-contact team game played by players with a flying disc, flung by a human. Ultimate was developed in 1968 by a group of students at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultimeate_\(sport\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultimeate_(sport)))

I think probably the biggest challenge with high schoolers is trying to find scholarships for college. There really isn't a roadmap on how to do that. That's still some murky water for me.

Pogue: How difficult is it to complete scholarship forms and things like that?

Kehoe: My daughter who was at SHG, she had an instructor tell her she should do something with music, and so she did. She brought us to an entity in town, and you know, I just can't even remember the name of it. They really helped walk us through how to fill out all those forms and how to find them.

Other than that, I've just really not been very successful at it. My daughter, Anne, when she went down to Aquinas, we talked to the school about it. They helped us find some very easy ones that were mainly through the school. But other than that, I'm just really not very good at that.

Pogue: Did the students take the ACT [American College Testing] or SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test]?^{7, 8}

Kehoe: Yes, the ACT, they did. It's kind of required. I don't think you could really not take it. When I first was homeschooling, I had them take more assessment tests, like in the younger grades, but I found it was kind of a waste of my money because it wasn't telling me anything I didn't already know. You're working one-on-one with your child. You really know what they're good at and what they're not so good at. Every time I would get a thing back telling me how they did, I was like, "Oh, okay, I knew that. Yeah, I knew that too" (laughs), so I just stopped. I stopped giving them assessments.

When they take their ACT, and they come back, and we look at it together, I'm like, "Okay, so are we surprised that this is what this is?" No, we're not because we discuss their weaknesses and their strengths, and we know where they're at.

Pogue: Where did they go to take these tests?

Kehoe: I think SHG. They've gone there. They've gone to Benedictine [University, Springfield, Illinois]. I think those are the two places. Usually when you sign up for the SAT, they give you a choice of where you can go take it.

Pogue: This year Illinois is going to the SAT.

⁷ The ACT is a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACT_\(test\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACT_(test)))

⁸ The SAT is a standardized test used for college admission in the United States ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAT_\(test\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAT_(test)))

Kehoe: (laughs) I suppose we're going to... Oh, is that across the board that they're requiring...?

Pogue: Last year was a little confusing. The State wasn't providing monies for the schools to do that—it had been in the junior year—but now the SAT is the one that got the contract.

Kehoe: Okay. Does that mean that more and more colleges are going to be requiring the SAT, do you suppose?

Pogue: I assume that'll be an issue that the state universities in Illinois will have to be dealing with, as more students in Illinois get the SAT. Up to now, the SAT was a very small part of the Illinois testing requirement.

Kehoe: Um-hmm, yeah. That's good to know; thank you.

Pogue: Did you give grades?

Kehoe: I did. Anytime they're in grade school and they hand in some sort of a paper, I would give a grade. I usually had a weekly grade and a grade book for myself. It was really more for myself to assess if they were starting to... I could see on their daily work too if they weren't understanding something. We would always go back through it if they really did terrible. I usually would give some sort of a quarter test and a report card.

I know that not all homeschoolers do that, but I thought, This is really a reality of what they're going to have to face when they get to college too. I think they need to know what that's like, what it tells you. It's kind of a college prep thing as well.

Pogue: In the primary grades in the public schools, they're doing more with rather than letter grades, checking off mastery of certain things. Is that what you were doing, or were you less detailed on that?

Kehoe: Yeah, I was less detailed on that. I pretty much gave a grade for the coursework. Then I also gave like a one, two, three kind of thing for—if you want to call it—department, like their cooperation or their neatness, kind of a character assessment as well.

Pogue: We've talked about the challenges of homeschooled students going to colleges. You've talked about providing a transcript or grades and about the difficulty of finding scholarships for particular schools, also that the students would take the ACT to have for the university or college. Was there anything else that you had to deal with, to add to this discussion?

Kehoe: Not really. I think that the one thing that we have tended to do—I don't know; it's probably more for my financial perspective than anything—is we've had them go out to Lincoln Land because of the cost of things. My husband and I

both went to community college. I think it's a great place to start, but I also feel like it's almost a testing ground for them too, to see the adjustment between homeschool and if you want to call it institutional school, for lack of a better word, just to see how they swing that. I think it's a good thing for them to experience that and maybe still be at home and have some help if they need it.

I really try to let them run that show by themselves because they have to be able to get themselves through this world, and that's a good place to start. The ones that have gone straight to a particular college were both educated at a Catholic high school. I'd have to say that the other ones have gone to community college first, and that's been a really good experience actually, all the way around.

Pogue: Have they also had work experiences as part of either the homeschooling or just education in general?

Kehoe: You mean like getting a job while they're going to school? Yeah. We need them to (laughs) from a financial perspective of them going to college. Every one of them, around age seventeen at least, some of them sixteen, have gotten part-time jobs. Two of them right now work at Memorial Hospital, one of them with food service and one with patient transport. Let's see. Yeah. Anne had a job with Hanson Engineering, as a secretary.⁹ My oldest daughter, when she was at SHG, she also worked at the hospital. My oldest son worked various [jobs], like Culver's and Subway and that kind of thing.

They all get some sort of work experience. My husband always tells them that's so that they know they really do want to go to college (laughs) and pursue something bigger and better.

Pogue: You talked about how you sometimes did some cooperation on labs and PE and discussion groups. Did you deal with any training as a group, or was this individualized?

Kehoe: As far as the co-op goes?

Pogue: For your own training, professional growth.

Kehoe: Sure, yeah. I'll just go to the co-op thing for just a second because I know that there's a lot of moms that had... Like one of the moms is an artist, so she taught an art class. Another mom is actually a teacher, so she taught some science classes, math classes. She also taught Latin. We had a mother that was... One of her things that she taught at a college level was speech, so she

⁹ Hanson Professional Services, Inc. is a national consulting firm providing engineering, planning and allied services <https://www.hanson-inc.com>

had a speech class for our kids. So we've utilized the moms with the capabilities that they have.

As far as our own training, I would say that we have homeschool conferences that we go to. I listen to podcasts quite a bit that are very helpful. We also get together as moms and have discussion with one another. We see what is working for them, what isn't.

I think that my training started when I went to school (laughs) and the moment I started having children as well, because in the Catholic Church, we believe that us as parents are the first and primary teachers of our children. The minute they're born, we're teaching them things. Good or bad, we're teaching them things.

I also think that how much I truly love my kids probably qualifies me the most because I would never ever choose anything that was bad for them. If I thought for a minute that I couldn't do it, I would find a way that made it possible for them to... I want the best for them. I think any teacher out there that loves their children in their classroom is the best possible teacher they can have.

Pogue: You mentioned podcasts. What types of subjects are in those podcasts?

Kehoe: The one that I like to listen to the most is... There's an entity called Circe, C-i-r-c-e, that is for classical education.¹⁰ It just really helps you to see the goals that you want for your children and how to instill those goals, how to bring it through the lens of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Then they also have... If you're reading, say *The Odyssey* by Homer, they'll actually have a podcast that you can listen to for some of the discussion that you might want to have with your child. Of course, that's not the only discussion you can have, but they might have an aspect of it. I just find that very helpful, particularly with classically educating.

Pogue: When you talk about classically educating, could you be a little more detailed on what that means?

Kehoe: Well, the real goal there is to see everything through the lens of what is true, good, and beautiful. Whatever path they're going to go down, whatever subject that you're studying, you would look at it through that lens. Then, even like math, you're looking for the truth of the problem. There's basically five principles that you follow, five categories of questions that you would follow.

¹⁰ Circe Institute is a non-profit 501 c3 organization that exists to promote and support classical education in the school and in the home. (<https://www.circeinstitute.org/>)

First of all, you would define what it is that you're looking at, whether it's math or science or history. Then you would compare. Say if it's math, you can compare two sides of the equation. If it's Homer, you compare two characters in a story. Even history, you can compare two people in history. You can look at their relationship with each other and their relationship to the world around them and the circumstances that caused them to move or act in a certain situation, like the cause and effect of things. Then the authority of it, what do people of that time say is true, or in theology, what does the church say?

You base all of your discussions around those types of categories of questions, including math. It works for math as well, as long as you're looking through the lens of virtue and truth and goodness and beauty. The truth of a math problem is... When you run into a wall and you don't know what you're doing, the beauty of it is to try and find another way to look at it, so that you can solve that problem and to come to the right and true answer.

- Pogue: Has homeschooling changed over the years? You've talked about how it has, perhaps, been more accepted because it's more common, and people are more aware of it. You've talked about how the curriculum maybe has changed and about the existence of more support. Have changes in other areas also taken place over the twenty years you've been homeschooling?
- Kehoe: Hmm. Well, I'm sure there are (laughs). I just think things are so much more accessible. I think you just have an openness to it now that wasn't there before. I certainly feel much more comfortable about discussing it with people than I did when I first started homeschooling.
- Pogue: How do you deal with the question of socialization, because you've got just your family, and in other settings you could have all sort of different types of individuals in a class? How do you deal with that question?
- Kehoe: By socialization, do you mean how they fit in with other people in different situations or...?
- Pogue: In being around different types of people.
- Kehoe: Yeah. I just have seen over the years so many different homeschooled kids, and I've found that they really fit in well with just about any age group. They'll go up to a baby and play with a baby all the way through to talking to a grandparent, and they seem to be pretty comfortable. Of course, there's a difference of an outgoing person versus a more introverted person, which I think you're going to find that in any school, private, public, or homeschool.

I think having them at home in the family, that is one of the challenges is that you have to be able to wear all these different hats and do all these different things, not just schooling, which is a full-time job, but you have to be a mom, a wife; you have to cook dinner and do the laundry and all the

household chores. I think that when they see us struggle through that, that that's one of the biggest pluses too because they see how we, as an adult, interact with all of that, with the relationships around us, the cause and effect of things. You know, "When Mom does that, it doesn't turn out so great, and maybe I don't want to do such and so." I think that's a really good learning experience for them to see daily life play out. I think it makes them very grounded, socially wise, and I think that helps them to know that...

Like in literature, when you're comparing two different characters in a story, you ask them, "What are their differences? Why do you think they are so different? Why don't they get along? Why do they get along?" I think then you can extrapolate that out to, "What would happen or what happened when so-and-so that you knew did this? That made you feel really upset. Why?" I think you can take what you're doing in your schooling situation, and you can bring that into [an] everyday life situation and bring those examples in when you're having these discussions. "You saw what happened when you got upset with them. How could you do that differently?" I actually think there's that whole education of relationships and how to interact with people in society and get them to think about the cause and effect of that. I don't know if they have those kind of discussions in school.

Even when my third oldest wanted to be homeschooled, she would hear my second daughter come home and talk about the cliques in high school and everything, and that bothered her. We would have discussions about that. "How do you deal with that? How do you treat people, even if they're not treating you nice?" Those are really good discussions to have with them. I think that that helps them to see that the world is a good place, and the world can be a rough place to be too, and how do you deal with that? We have lots of discussions like that, and I think that's good for them.

Pogue: You indicated that part of your homeschooling is to include theology and the Catholic beliefs. Did they participate in the local parish activities too?

Kehoe: Yes, yes.

Pogue: And that was a form of socialization?

Kehoe: Sure, yeah. They have... They're called CCDs [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine] up north.¹¹ I can't even think what they're called (laughs). My mind blanked out. But they're like religion classes that you go to prepare for the sacraments. They participated in those. It was after-school hours, classrooms that they would go with other kids who were from public or private schools

¹¹ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is an association established in Rome in 1562 for the purpose of giving religious education. Its modern usage is a religious education program of the Catholic Church, normally designed for children. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confraternity_of_Christian_Doctrine)

and non-Catholic. Even though I'm a Catholic school, I still put them in those classes.

Pogue: We talked about the subjects that you were teaching. How did you keep up with all the changes in science, all the explorations and all of the new information that we're getting yearly on science?

Kehoe: Usually I listen to the radio in the morning, or we'll be on in the Internet. The great thing is that you have discussions all throughout the day about things.

Sometimes in the morning when we're having breakfast together, I'll say, "Hey, I was listening to the radio this morning, and I heard they found a new planet or something," whatever happens to be on the radio. Then we have these awesome discussions about it. If we want to know more, we have computer right there. We turn on the Internet and read about it together and talk about it. You know, "What do you think about that? What do you think is going to happen with that?" Especially like medical things, "Do you think that's ethical? Do you think that's moral?" Those kinds of things. We have some really awesome discussions.

I don't have a formal class that I would call, like news around the world today or whatever, current events. We really do that all through the day when we hear something. Sometimes at lunch, my one son will turn the radio on. He's like, "Hey, Mom, they just said blah-blah-blah," so we'll have a discussion about that.

Pogue: We talked a little bit about foreign language, that they would go to Lincoln Land for foreign language. You've also talked about maybe Latin being taught by another person.

Kehoe: Um-hmm.

Pogue: So, was the foreign language component kind of outside?

Kehoe: I had three years of Spanish in high school, and I had two years of French in college, so I have taught like a beginning Spanish to my kids. I don't go much beyond beginning Spanish because I don't think I would do it justice.

I've had them get that Duolingo app and put it on their phone and work with that.¹² Since we don't use Spanish on a regular basis, I don't feel I know it well enough to be teaching beyond the beginning. My French is really rusty, so I've never taught them any French (laughs).

Pogue: Could you describe to us...? Take a day from the past school year and kind of walk us through what a day might have been like in a certain month. Could

¹² Duolingo is an American language learning website and mobile app launched in 2011. (<https://www.duolingo.com>)

you describe that for us so we can, through your telling it, kind of visualize how this all functioned on a typical day.

Kehoe: Do you want me to do like currently?

Pogue: Sure.

Kehoe: Okay. This last year, I just had two. I had an eleventh grader and a sixth grader, eleventh-grade boy, sixth-grade girl. Typically, like on a Monday morning, we would get up and have breakfast. If there was anything interesting in the news that I'd heard on the radio, I would usually bring that up as we were having breakfast, and we might have a discussion. If not, if they were too tired to discuss it (laughs), then we wouldn't. If it was of interest to my son, that usually would spark some kind of discussion. He's a pretty deep thinker, so we have some really good thoughts that go around our house, with him.

From there we would usually go up to the schoolroom and usually start our day with prayer, and we usually start it with the Pledge of Allegiance. There are some days that we read Scripture, and we do... It's called Lectio [Lectio Divina Bible Study series], which you study what the words of Scripture are and take some time for prayer and talking about that with each other.¹³ That's to kind of cultivate a prayer life. We usually do that like once a week.

A typical Monday would be... After we've started the day, I would get my daughter started on something in sixth grade, usually some sort of reading. Then I would go through the workweek for my son. I would sit down with him and look at history, theology, literature, science, what he needed to do. I'd kind of go through it, "This is what you need to do this week. I want to see you Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday for some discussion on this, this and this." Of course, that's what I would say, but it didn't necessarily roll out that way during the week because things can change as you go. Then he would go to wherever he was going to go and start doing his reading and studying.

Then I would start working with my sixth grader. Usually, I like to do reading first, so we can have some nice discussion. Then I like to do some math with her, so she's more fresh during the beginning of the day. Then I would get her to work on some of the other things, like if she had some history reading to do. If I had time, I like to do it with her, so then we can have discussion at the same time. If I don't, if something comes up, then I

¹³ Lectio Divina is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's word. In the view of one commentator, it does not treat scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina)

have her go on her own, and then we discuss it later. I try to be really interactive with that.

Then, often in the afternoon, I'll have my son bring like his lit, and we'll read lit together. We had Shakespeare this year, and we would read the Shakespeare plays together. We would take the parts and actually read them out loud. Then afterwards or even in the middle of stuff, sometimes we would stop it and have a discussion about what was said. He would even put on a robe as Hamlet and really (laughs) be a character. It's a lot of fun, a lot of fun.

Then we would break for lunch. If there's more work to do, usually anything that I had to settle with my daughter, I would do it right after lunch. If she was okay to finish anything on her own, I would let her go. Then I would get together with my son and see if there was any discussion that we needed to do, any reading we needed to do together and usually finish up about maybe 2:30, 3:00-ish and then get working on dinner or something like that (laughs).

Pogue: Have you participated in what they call the Dual Credit Programs?¹⁴

Kehoe: I haven't, but I know that that exists. I have tossed it around, back and forth several times, whether that was the route that I wanted to go or not. I just felt with my boys that... Because the boys tend to mature later, I feel like they really just needed to have more time to think through what they wanted to do with their life. I just feel like there's such pressure to know what you want to do. I felt just giving them that extra two years at a community college to think things through and mature a little bit more might help them.

I still... I wonder sometimes if I should have done that. So, yeah, I do know about it. I think that's really an awesome thing. I just don't really know how that plays out in our life yet, but I do keep an open mind about it, that's for sure.

Pogue: When you look back over the twenty years, do you feel that the curriculum that you're doing is more challenging than when you started with the first group?

Kehoe: (laughs) Yes. Yes, I feel like I have... Boy, I look back at what I used to do, and I just think, Why did I worry about the small stuff? I feel like I have a lot more information at hand. But then sometimes, I feel like I know nothing. It's like the more you know, sometimes you feel like the less it is (laughs).

¹⁴ Dual credit courses allow students to enroll in both high school and college courses at the same time. There are opportunities to enroll in two types of courses: college transfer and career courses. Upon successful completion of those courses, students will receive grades and credit at their high school and at the college. (<https://www.rlc.edu/academics/dual-credit#:~:text=Dual%20credit%20courses%20allow%20students,high%20school%20and%20at%20RLC>)

Yeah. It's just like any teacher in any school situation. You live and you grow and you're ongoing, finding more and more out. I look back, and I think, gee, I wish I had known this then. I also know that there's different seasons to life as well. Things have been apparent to me, I think, when I could work it all through.

When I was homeschooling five, it was just so much different than homeschooling two. I'm not sure that, if I had known the things that I know now, that I would've maybe done them as well as I could have (laughs). You always think you can do things better, I guess.

Pogue: When you look back, what have been two or three of the things that you've added to the homeschool teaching process that you didn't have when you started?

Kehoe: I think one of the biggest things is much more discussion with them at a deeper level and reading with them, especially when they get in the older grades. I used to just kind of cut them loose and have a teacher's manual and do the discussion with them as I was going because I can't read everything. There's no way I could stay on top of everything that they were reading. But I found that taking the time to read parts of it with them and have really in-depth discussions outside of even the teacher's manual is just... It really is a beautiful thing, and I love it. I wish I had thought to... I just didn't even think to do that because there was just so much to encompass. So, I love doing that.

Pogue: When you assess or give tests or whatever, what type of testing are you doing?

Kehoe: Yeah, a lot of it is written, like a short answer or essay questions. An essay question requires a lot more depthful thinking than a true or false. I might have some true or false but mostly just like a short answer or usually a pretty good-sized essay on a test as well.

Pogue: As we close our discussion here today, what would be some of the advantages of homeschooling?

Kehoe: I definitely think that homeschooling isn't for everybody (laughs). I think if you're not capable of doing it to the best of your ability... I really think it's a vocation. I think you have to feel called to it. You want to do it justice. You want to do it true. As long as your goal is to keep it to be as positive and true as it can be, I think you'd be a good teacher. I think that's true in anything you do.

I want my daughter, who's a teacher and a singer, to be the best possible teacher and singer she can be. I want my son, who works with IT [Information Technology] in the IT field, I want him to be the best possible IT person he can be. I think, as long as you keep that in mind as your goal, that

that's true. That's the truth of it, and it's a beautiful thing. I kind of went off. What was your question (laughs)?

Pogue: Advantages of...

Kehoe: Oh, like I said before, I think the number one advantage that I have found is that I really truly know my kids, and I think they really truly know me. We all love our kids, but I find that I know what they're really thinking. I know their reasons why they do things. We know each other that well, and it's continued on into adulthood.

My daughter who is out in Boston, when we get together, we have really good discussions. When we call each other on the phone, there's not surface there. It's just a really beautiful relationship. Same with my son, and I love that. I love that that has continued on through their adult years too.

Pogue: What then would you say would be the greatest challenges for anyone considering becoming a homeschool parent?

Kehoe: I would say that, in my humble opinion, you need to pray. You need to make sure that that's really what God is asking you to do and then just start doing some homework. You really have to look into things. You have to know what your goal is. You have to know what it is that you're hoping to achieve and always work toward that end.

Start educating yourself on homeschooling and the different philosophies that are out there, and know what you're looking for; know what you're wanting. There are so many things out there; there's so much curriculum out there, you can just get so bogged down in it. So, you really need to know what you are wanting to achieve with your school, with your learning, with your education.

Pogue: We're in the month of August, and school is about ready to begin again. What does that mean for you?

Kehoe: Yeah. I've already got the ones registered that I wanted to have registered in the homeschooling entity that I go to. Steven needs to get himself registered with Lincoln Land. He's getting through the process of it, which reminds me, I forgot to do something for him this morning (laughs). I have all the books ordered and actually got them in the mail yesterday and today.

I've worked through, obviously, what their course of study is for the year. Then it'll just be getting the new curriculum and making sure that I know what I'm going to do with it this year. I try to prep myself, like in August. I take time out. Sometimes I try to set aside kind of like a whole week to really go through things and get my school year set up. Then I try to analyze that again halfway through the year. "Where am I at? Am I

accomplishing the goals I wanted to accomplish? Are we staying on track with such and so?"

Pogue: Does this mean then it's twelfth and seventh grade?

Kehoe: Yes.

Pogue: What are the subjects that you will be dealing with in August?

Kehoe: For Steven, he is taking a theology, a lit [class]. His history and math requirements are good. He also has a chemistry class. He needs to take foreign language. Then he has some fine arts, as well, that he's going to be taking. Oh gosh, I don't have that right in front of my face. I know there's another one. Of course, PE, he has to take PE.

Then my daughter, Rose, she has religion and history and English. Oh, yeah, they're both taking a writing class as well. Science, she's taking a life science class this year. I think there's one or two missing there for her, but that's going to be our year this year.

Pogue: It sounds like you're getting busy (Kehoe laughs) ready to go. Janet, is there anything else that you would like to bring up at the end of this interview?

Kehoe: I encourage anybody who is thinking about homeschooling, and they're really feeling a call to it, to dive in. It's a beautiful and wonderful experience. Of course, it has its challenges, just like anything else. I just think that, if we can keep in mind what our goal is, that we can build these beautiful and positive people that can influence their families. You know, the family is just the microcosm of society. If we can build big, good, strong families, we're going to be contributing such an awesome thing to society. I think that I would like to encourage anybody who's thinking about doing it to dive in. It's a wonderful experience.

Pogue: In closing, Janet, I want to thank you very much for sharing with us your experience over twenty years of homeschooling your children and giving us a better idea of how that is structured.

Kehoe: Thank you, Phil. I hope I did some justice to it, but thank you for inviting me.

(end of transcript)