

## INTO WHAT KIND OF PERSON CAN YOU EXPECT A HOMESCHOOLER TO DEVELOP?

Mr. Pointy Nose by Tammy D. Drennan

Once upon a time, there lived a happy family in a great wood: Mother and Father, Brother, Sister and Baby. Father went off to work each day, and Mother planted seeds and tended her garden and loved her children and taught them to read and write. At night, when Father came home, the family sang songs and laughed and played together.

One day while Father was away at work, a knock came at the door of the family's home. Mother opened the door and found a stern man with sharp teeth and a very pointy nose standing on the doorstep.

"May I help you?" Mother asked.

"I am here," snarled the man, "to inspect your home and your children."

Mother was surprised. "Whatever for?" she asked.

"It has been reported," snapped Mr. Pointy Nose, "that you do not institutionalize your children, as is the norm. It has been reported that you spend an abnormal amount of time with your children, and you have been seen laughing with them, and they with you. It has been reported that your teen child is not embarrassed to be seen with you and that she smiles while working in your garden and hanging laundry. I will have to inspect your house and ask you some questions."

Mother invited Mr. Pointy Nose in and offered him a cup of tea. Mr. Pointy Nose pulled a great pile of papers from his briefcase and began asking important questions: "How many television sets do you own, how often do you dine out, why do you have so many books, what do you have against institutions, why do you grow your own food, do your children know who Madonna is, how about Beavis and Butthead?"

Mother was very kind and reassuring: "We have one television set in the closet," she told Mr. Pointy Nose, "and we dine outside several times a week in nice weather. We have so many books because we love to read. We have no personal grudge against institutions -- we simply choose not to institutionalize. We grow food to eat, and of course my children know who the Madonna is. I'm not sure what a "beavis" is, and while butthead is a rather crude term, I have known a few."

Mr. Pointy Nose seemed insulted by this last statement and jumped up in a huff. "I must speak with your children," he announced.

Mother called Brother and Sister. Baby was too young to speak. Brother was six years old and Sister was 13. Mr. Pointy Nose asked Brother, "Have you ever heard of Beavis and Butthead?"

"Yes," said Brother. "We have beavers in the creek, and Butthead is my uncle's boss." Sister giggled, but Mr. Pointy Nose was not amused. He addressed Brother again. "Do your parents ever yell at you?" "You better believe it!" said Brother. "One time I climbed clear to the top of a 30 foot tree, and Dad yelled and yelled at me to stay up there till he could climb up, too. He doesn't get much time to climb trees, and I think he yelled so much 'cause he was excited at the chance."

Mr. Pointy Nose turned in disgust and asked Sister, "Wouldn't you like to be institutionalized with other children your age?"

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"Well, most of my friends are institutionalized," Sister told him. "And I haven't been too impressed with it. They can hardly read anything -- they don't even like Charles Dickens. And they all hate history and math. I like playing jump rope with them in the evening, but they talk about the most boring things, like clothes and make-up and what's on TV, and... oh -- I know who Beavis and Butthead are. Do you know who Mr. Pickwick is?"

"No," said Mr. Pointy Nose curtly. "What sort of music do you listen to?"

"Oh, Beethoven is my favorite. Did you know he went deaf and just kept on writing music?"

"No," said Mr. Pointy Nose impatiently. "Why don't you listen to popular teenage music?"

Sister was surprised that a grown-up would ask such a question, but she answered as politely as possible, "Because it sounds simply wretched."

"Wretched! Wretched!?" screeched Mr. Pointy Nose. "That is not a seventh grade word! Where did you learn it?"

Mother had been in the kitchen preparing a snack of homemade bread and strawberry preserves. When she heard Mr. Pointy Nose screech, she rushed to the living room. "What's wretched?" she asked, a little alarmed.

"This child," Mr. Pointy Nose said indignantly, "correctly used the word wretched."

"Oh, I'm sure she wasn't referring to you," Mother said gently. "Here, have some fresh bread and jam."

Mr. Pointy Nose looked at the tray in Mother's hands suspiciously, then cautiously took her offering. As he ate he began to relax a little. "You made this yourself?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Mother.

"And I helped," chimed in Sister. Then she added, "I'm sorry for upsetting you. I didn't know you had an aversion to that word, or I would never have said it."

"Aversion?" Mr. Pointy Nose sighed. He slumped in his chair and looked at Mother. "How do you ever expect your children to fit into the world if you don't institutionalize them, and you encourage them to develop advanced vocabularies and you teach them self-sufficiency. This does not coincide with the new way -- they must follow the new standards."

Mother looked at Mr. Pointy Nose thoughtfully. "I appreciate your apparent concern, kind sir," she said, "but you see, I am not raising children to follow standards -- I am raising them to set standards."

Mr. Pointy Nose looked around in a musing way and murmured, "Yes, yes. I can see that." He left with a bread recipe and an invitation to visit again some time.