



ERIN
HARREL

of Cape Coral has a PhD
in education and is the
mother of three children.

Academic road trip

The route differs every time

At this time last year, my husband, Greg, and I were worrying about how much academic pressure to place on our 11-year-old son as he entered fifth grade. Jude is a typical boy and would much rather be playing outside than studying.

Finding the balance between playtime and healthy study habits didn't come easy at our house. I wanted to adhere to a strict no-television-during-the-week policy, while my husband is a little more lax about things. In the end, all three of our children did well in school last year.

This year, I am a little more at ease as the kids start a new year. I have learned a few more tricks of the trade when it comes to academia and a balance of personal time. I have also learned that each of my children are very different and require unique attention. They need to be inspired in different ways.

Each of our three kids, Jude, Riley and Maggie, learn differently. Even with a Ph.D. in education, I have had to seek different strategies to work with each one of my children. Most of all, I have had to learn what works for one doesn't always work for the next.

Let me share my academic road trip. Jude, currently entering sixth grade, started pre-kindergarten rather hesitantly. He would have rather stayed at home with mom and played all day. He moved to kindergarten and into first grade before he even piqued an interest in academia. I worried that he was never going to read. "How could this be," I ques-



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tioned myself. I am an educator, and my son is barely reading in first grade. "Oh no, I've done something wrong, why can't he read?" The thoughts of negativity consumed me.

However, I quickly learned that by letting Jude be a kid and reading to him instead of pushing him to read, he would become a great reader. By third grade, Jude was reading books in the Harry Potter series. Since then, Jude reads nightly with minimal encouragement. He loves to read, and we couldn't be more proud.

When Riley, now 10, started pre-k she bounced out of the car, and was in her new classroom before I could even get out my door. There were no tears or fears as she began school. She couldn't wait to make new friends and play. Riley is artistically driven and extraordinarily social.

This, too, brings its challenges.

Riley, although very bright according to standardized testing, needs more direction when it comes to studying. She needs to know exactly what needs to be studied and more importantly, WHY it needs to be studied. Riley looks at the global picture of how things fit into her life, and when she doesn't see its purpose, there is no reason to study or learn it.

Luckily, I have some great resources. For example, getting Riley to meet her Accelerated Reader goal has always been a challenge. She reads well, but doesn't enjoy doing it. We have had to be very creative with finding ways to entice her into the pages of a book. Peggy Van Voorhis, reading professor extraordinaire, has given us some outstanding tools to use at home, i.e. family book club, literature circles, reading to Riley or just sharing the same book and being able to talk about it. ➔