

## The Task Force:

In 1985, the Compulsory Attendance Law was struck down as unconstitutionally vague because the word “equivalent” was open to various interpretations. In 1986, I called the Commissioner of Education, Ruth Randall to come to our home and visit our home school so she could see how we were educating our children. She accepted the invitation and she and Barry Sullivan, the assistant to the Commissioner of Education, came to our home to visit. They watched Bethany and I work with our children on your Montessori materials and afterward the children served them lunch. Just before they were about to leave, I gave Commissioner Randall a copy of Character Sketches and our children all sat around her on the sofa and she read a story to them.

They must have made an impression on her because a few weeks later, Barry called me and asked, “Would you be interested in being on the Governor’s Task Force to rewrite the Compulsory Education Law?” I said, “I don’t know what I’d have to offer, but I’m willing if you’d like me to be.” He said, “Well, the problem is that we have a quota of minorities and women that have to be on the task force, so would it be possible that your wife, Bethany, be on the task force?” I said, “I’m sure she’d do a good job but she has five little children to take care of and she wouldn’t be able to make many of the meetings.” He said, “In those cases you could be her substitute and she could take care of the children. And that’s what we did, we tag teamed.

Little did I know, when this task force started, nobody in the legislature thought it would work. People in the legislature were saying, “You’re going to have six private school representatives and six public school representatives, and you’re expecting them to come to a consensus of what should be in this education law? It’ll NEVER happen!”

The task force members representing the private schools and homeschools included, Roger Schurke (from MACHE), Brother William Rhody (from the Catholic Archdiocese), Dr. Ed Johnson (from Rosemount Baptist), and a few others including your mother and I. They were all strong personalities and we debated, disagreed, and argued about what should be in our agenda, and finally we came to an agreement. I remember Dr. Ed Johnson saying, “All I want is a statement that says in essence that “children are an heritage of the Lord”. That’s the one thing that MUST be in the new statute.”

The people representing the public school side were quite different. There were six public school representatives, and they spoke with one voice and were very united, but it was like they were always waiting for one particular person to voice his opinion before they’d speak on their own. That person who had the most influence was Dr. Lew Finch, the superintendent of Anoka school district, the largest school district in Minnesota at the time.

Before the task force started, Dr. Finch (who also had a strong personality) went on radio, TV, and newspapers making comments like, “Anyone who home educates their children is guilty of educational child abuse.” He definitely had his mind made up concerning this new homeschooling phenomenon.

I remember once Commissioner Randall asked a representative from the public sector, their opinion on a certain item on our agenda. Their response was, "Well, I'm not sure. I will have to ponder that." The next person said, "I'm not sure either. Let me think about that." Everyone procrastinated in giving their opinion until Dr. Finch spoke his mind and immediately they would each say in turn, "Yes, that's what I think."

This happened over and over again, and Commissioner Randall even called them out on it once saying, "Is anyone of you able to think for yourselves? Must you all have to wait for Dr. Finch to tell you what to think?"

The bottom line is that we were getting nowhere. The months passed, and we weren't any closer to getting a consensus than when we started. We were getting desperate.

During the break in one of our final sessions, I saw a homeschooling father speaking with Dr. Finch. I overheard Dr. Finch ask him, "If you're such a concerned parent, what are you doing here?" Why aren't you home, teaching your children?" This man responded back in like manner by saying, "Well, if you're such a good superintendent, what are you doing here? Why aren't you back in your district superintending your schools?" This gave Dr. Finch the opening to shout back, "Oh, the arrogance of you homeschoolers!" and he walked away.

I caught up to him and said, "Dr. Finch what happened back there?" He looked at me, pointed his finger at my nose and said, "Newhouse, I'm just sick and tired of being seen as an evil person by you homeschoolers." And he walked away.

The meeting ended, with still not the slightest bit of consensus between the two groups. We had two meetings left where after, Dr Randall was to report to the legislature her recommendations for the bill.. At this point, Commissioner Randall's reputation was at stake. She had to have a consensus to bring before the legislature and we had nothing to offer.

One night during that next week, I woke up from sleep having had a very vivid dream, which was unusual because I rarely dream at all. But in this dream, I was at a task force meeting, and Dr. Finch asked me, "Newhouse, when is the last time you've been in a public school?"

"Probably when I graduated from high school."

He said, "Well, they've changed a lot. You need to come and visit one and see what they are like now."

"Okay, I'll plan on doing that sometime."

He said, "Let's go, now."

I said, "Dr. Finch, it's midnight."

"That's okay. You said you'd be willing to go, so let's go!"

So, in the dream, we got in his car and drove to the Anoka High School in the middle of the night. As we walked in the front door, I saw students playing basketball and sitting in the halls talking. The moment Dr. Finch entered the school all of the students stopped what they were doing and came to greet him. They were all gathered around him, talking to him. I got the impression they were like children greeting their father who had home from work. They loved and respected this man, and I could see that he loved them.

We went to his office and he began to tell me how much he loved these kids, and then suddenly, I woke up and the dream was over.

It seemed so real and I had the distinct impression as I lay there thinking about it, that I should personally call Dr. Finch and tell him this dream. I said to myself, "That's a crazy idea! I am not going to call Dr. Finch and tell him I had a dream about him. He'd only think I was more crazy than he already thinks I am" So I resisted that impulse all morning. You know how it is when God is prompting you to do something and you don't want to do it and it bugs you and bugs you? Well finally at about eleven o'clock, I said, "Okay, I'll call him already!"

I quickly picked up the phone and dialed the number. As it rang, I said, "I hope he's not there." The secretary answered, and I said, "May I speak with Dr. Finch?" She said, "No, he's not here right now. Can I get your name and have him call you back?" I said, "Oh no. It's not that important. I was just wondering if he was in, that's all. Thank you! Bye!" I was in the process of hanging up, and she says, "Oh, wait, he just walked in the door." I thought, "Oh, nuts! If only I had called a little earlier

Dr. Finch picked up the phone, "Hello, who is this?" I said, "Dr. Finch this is Bob Newhouse."

"Newhouse, from the task force?"

"Yes sir."

He said, "Newhouse, what do you want?" (He obviously had a "Type A" personality – very direct! and he got things done)

I thought, "How am I going to say this? "Ahhh, Dr. Finch?"

He said, "Yes?"

I said, "Dr. Finch, umm..."

He said, "Newhouse, I'm a busy man. Quickly, tell me what it is you want to say to me."

I blurted out, "Okay then... Dr. Finch, I had a dream about you last night ... and I feel God wants me to tell it to you!"

Before he got a chance to say anything, I told him the entire dream and he didn't interrupt me. After telling him the dream, I said, "Dr. Finch, I think God gave me that dream to show me your heart. He told me that you are not an evil person, but that you love the children in your schools, and I want

to apologize on behalf of the homeschoolers in the state and myself for seeing you that way. Will you please forgive us?"

A long silence ensued. Finally, I said, "Dr. Finch? Are you still there?" He said, "I'm here, I'm here. I heard you and I was thinking; I suppose if there were concerned parents, who really were willing to take the time and make the effort, they could probably do a pretty good job educating and tutoring their children at home. But I rarely see parents like that though."

My jaw dropped to the desk. "Dr. Finch, on this task force, sometimes I feel like the two sides are incapable of communicating with one another. It's almost like we speak different languages." Then I said, "Dr. Finch, would you be willing to talk to somebody who could perhaps explain this concept of home education better than I?" He said, "Who do you want me to talk to?" I said, "I'd like to see if I could get you to speak to Mr. Bill Gothard."

He said, "Bill Gothard? Is that the guy that gives out those red notebooks at seminars?"

I said, "Yes! Have you been to his seminar?"

He said "No, but my wife has."

I said "Well, would you be willing to talk to him if I can arrange it?"

He said, "Sure! I'd be willing to talk to him."

I immediately called Bill's secretary, his sister Laura, and asked, "Would Bill be willing to talk to this guy?" She said, "Yes, but have Dr. Finch call Bill at his personal number." So I called back Dr. Finch's secretary and gave her Mr. Gothard's number for Dr. Finch to call and left it in God's hands.

The next day was the second to the last task force meeting. Earlier that morning, for family devotions we read from, *The Light and the Glory*, by Peter Marshall, about the Constitutional Convention, which happened two hundred years earlier exactly to the month. When the framers of the Constitution could not come to agreement on what should be in the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin stood up and said, "*We need to open in prayer. If God knows when a sparrow falls, how can we expect to raise up a nation without His assistance.*" They opened in prayer, and shortly thereafter came to a consensus as to what should be in the Constitution of the United States.

Then I went to the Dept of Ed building and just before the task force meeting, I met with Ruth Randall in the hallway. I read to her that section in the book and said, "Two hundred years ago Benjamin Franklin compelled the Constitutional Convention to open in prayer. With that being our precedent, would you be willing to open this task force meeting in prayer? We definitely need God's help."

She said, "I don't know Bob. Let me think about it."

I went to my seat at this big mahogany table and waited for the meeting to start. Dr. Randall came in and immediately said, "The Constitutional Convention was held two hundred years ago this

month. When they couldn't agree as to what should be in it, Benjamin Franklin suggested that they open in prayer and asked for Divine intervention. We find ourselves in a similar predicament and I suggest that we do the same thing as they did. Let's everybody bow our heads and ask for God's intervention", and she prayed. When she finished her prayer, the guy sitting next to me said under his breath, "Boy, wait until the American Civil Liberty Union gets a hold of this one."

With that, Commissioner Randall said, "We have a lot of work to get done today because we have to present something to the state legislature and we're running out of time." Immediately Dr. Finch stood up and said, "I have something to say." Commissioner Randall said, "Lew, will you please sit down. Every time you speak there's an argument, and we don't have time for that now.." He said, "Just give me five minutes." She said, "OK, Lew, you have five minutes, but that's all!"

Dr. Finch said, "I talked to a very interesting man yesterday who gave me a perspective I had never seen before. After much consideration, this is what I think should be in the new law." He started listing his points that he wanted in the statute and everything he said was exactly what was on the agenda for the private sector!

Commissioner Randall was shocked, and said, "Lew, that's amazing! You've made some very good points that I think we can work with! She looked at the rest of the public school representatives. And said, "What do you think of Dr. Finch's suggestions?" And one by one they fell in line and said, "I think it's a great idea. Another said, "Excellent ideas!" In short, every one of representatives agreed with Dr. Finch, and within five minutes of the start of the meeting we had come to a consensus. It was nothing short of miraculous!

When we crafted the bill and presented it before the state legislature, I remember one Democrat senator stood up and said, "Statutes do not have preambles in them. I suggest we remove this part about parents determining the means and methods by which their children should be educated." That was the part that Dr Ed Johnson wanted in the statute and he was going to speak up and defend it. But instead Dr. Finch, got to the microphone first and said, "Either take this statute in its entirety or you will have to go back and do it all over again with a different task force because we are all in agreement on this. Take it as it is." And they eventually did, with much thanks to senators Gen Olson and Ralph Kiffmeyer for their support.

We also put in that bill that if a school was accredited, they wouldn't have to also be responsible directly to their superintendent. If an accrediting agency's standards covered the specific requirements found in the state statute, that school would not have to be accountable to their local superintendent also.

Barry Sullivan called me up after the legislation passed and said, "Bob, why doesn't TEACH become an accrediting association? You're already doing what an accrediting association does." I said, "Barry, we're not going to change our program. We believe that God has given us our concept of working with families in academics and character and we won't change it just to gain state recognition." He said, "You wouldn't have to change anything. Just articulate how you hold your families accountable. Then, if you become a recognized accrediting agency, it would mean your

families would not have to be accountable to both TEACH and their local superintendent. They'd just be accountable to TEACH and they could focus their time on educating their children rather than have to convince their superintendent that they are doing a good job." I said, "Barry, we require our people to be Christians to be part of our program because we encourage them to hear directly from God. It's an integral part of our program." He said, "That would not be a problem." I said, "Okay, then we will apply for the state to recognize TEACH as an accrediting agency."

We applied, and they accepted us. And that is the story behind how our compulsory Education was crafted in 1987.