

Living the Single-Income Lifestyle

by Chris Sims

My husband and I exchanged a look as the form for renewing my nursing license arrived in the mail. We'd known it was coming, had talked about it and prayed. The decision was made, yet my hands trembled as I slowly, triumphantly tore the form in half. Gone were my well-paid nursing days. I was now a full-time homeschooling mom.

Thus began my career of creatively not spending money. It was a scary, but very welcome, change. Except for math, we made up our own curriculum. Meanwhile, the barter economy that underlies most homeschooling groups became our financial safety net. On homeschool sports days, clothing, books, helpful hints and entire curriculum packages passed from hand to hand on the sidelines. Field trips became networking sessions. Six haircuts for four knitting lessons? Done! Three hours of child care for a grocery sack of home-grown apples? Sold! One year of piano lessons for a year of access to your horse? It's a deal!

In addition, our whole family became avid do-it-yourselfers. My husband wore out his Chilton's Manual. When a hailstorm hit the house and broke several windows, the first words out of our four-year-old's mouth were, "Don't worry! I'll go get a screwdriver!" Another time, when the refrigerator quit working, my five-year-old son and I sat down on the floor with a flashlight and the Reader's Digest Complete Fix It Yourself Guide. Together, we determined that the condenser fan was stuck, and figured out how to unstick it and get the 'fridge running again. Now, six years later, all four of us are more confident and more competent than if we'd had scads of money to spend on hiring people to do our work for us. To me, that's worth a whole lot more than a second salary!