

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black short-sleeved top and a necklace with a small globe pendant, is holding a book titled "The Life of... Chayton Philip" which features a parrot on the cover. She is standing outdoors at dusk, with a wooden display board to her right. The board has a poster that reads "THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH" and other smaller items. In the foreground, there is a potted plant with pink and green leaves and a bowl of brown food. The background shows a blurred view of trees and a sunset sky.

# HOMESCHOOLING THROUGH A DIFFICULT SEASON

BY RENEE HUSTON  
PHOTOS BY ANA OHLANDT





The day before Father's Day 2014, I held the positive pregnancy test in my hand while I looked into my husband's eyes with a shocked grin on my face. We already had three children, and this fourth pregnancy came as a surprise. With excitement and anticipation, I completed the rest of the summer with bouts of morning sickness and refrained from entering my kitchen when at all possible.

By the end of August the sickness disappeared, so I plunged full-speed ahead and began gearing up for another home-school year. The next week, though, I was hit with extreme abdominal pains. I was early in my second trimester, so I made my way to the ER with trepidation. The diagnosis: I needed an emergency appendectomy. The surgery went perfectly, my baby was untouched, and I went home from the hospital very shaken but ready to recover.



Less than two weeks later my husband was putting our three kids to bed while I laid on the couch with severe back pain. Some momentary relief came, but then I was hit full-force with crippling pain that didn't let up. I communicated to my husband that we needed to head back to the ER. He called for babysitting help while I packed a bag and made my way down to the car. After descending down one flight of stairs, my water suddenly broke. My crippling back pain had been back labor.

Soon after arriving at the hospital, my son was placed into my arms. He never took a breath of stale air on earth but was safely delivered into the Lord's care.







The next week was a blur while we hastily prepared a small funeral for our son and began hard conversations with our three children, ages six and under. After the funeral ended and the busyness of out-of-town guests dissipated, I was left wondering how I would press on caring for three young children, let alone homeschool them. I was still in a lot of pain from the appendectomy and complications from my delivery. How could I homeschool through this difficult season?

I'm only a few weeks away from the sixth anniversary of the birth and death of my dear Chayton Philip. Over the past few years I have had the privilege of sharing my story with other women who had gone through similar circumstances. Seasons of trials come and go. If you homeschool for any length of time, you will probably experience your own difficult season during your homeschooling. Here are a few things that may make this challenging experience a little easier.



## EMBRACE YOUR COMMUNITY

Having a Type A personality, I like to do things on my own and in my own way. I don't often ask others for help, but I will be the first person to offer help to others when they go through a hard season. I will insist on organizing meals for them, taking their kids off their hands so they can rest, and sending a card of encouragement.

It's second nature for me to help others, but it's hard for me to ask for that same assistance. But during my trial it was necessary. I needed to embrace my community of friends who were more than willing to serve me. They dropped off dinners, canceled appointments for me, loved on my kids, included them in homeschool outings, and made it possible for me to rest and recover. It was such a blessing to my whole family when I accepted help from our friends who loved us so much.







## ALTER YOUR PLANS

While going through this difficult season, our family calendar and our homeschool calendar looked a lot different than a normal fall season for us. Homeschooling was taken at a slower pace, with many days even skipped so I could make recovering a priority. This is the joy of homeschooling! We could cancel school altogether for days or weeks at a time so that we had time to wade through the waves that were being tossed our way.

How grateful I was that we didn't have to immediately jump into full days of lessons, school projects, and field trips. We were given the freedom to take it as slow or fast as my health allowed. Don't be afraid to cross things off your school to-do list, back out of commitments, or alter your learning plans for a season. Your family will thank you when you give them (and yourself!) the space they need to breathe during a difficult time. Math can wait for another day.



## INCLUDE YOUR KIDS

We didn't shy away from talking with our kids about the trial that we were going through. There were of course details that they didn't need to know, but we shared our sadness and our sorrow with them. We grieved together and allowed room for spontaneous cuddling and conversations. A family who homeschools together does *all* of life together, the good and the messy. Use this time as a teaching opportunity for them. Teach them that grieving is ok, that rest and recovery is important, and that family comes first above all else.







## SHARE YOUR STORY

I am always grateful when I have the opportunity to share my story with other women who have also lost a child. Many women have been placed in my path who have walked the same road as I have. Healing and comfort comes from sharing the struggles and the sadness. Knowing that you aren't in this alone is so comforting. My friend organized an evening on her back porch with a small group of women who were eager to share their stories. It was a beautiful evening of listening, grieving, empathizing, and encouraging.

We each brought mementoes that we had of our babies who had passed away. We passed around special Christmas ornaments and other items that were dear to us. You may not feel comfortable sharing your story at first, but when you're able, I encourage you to reach out to others. Your story may be just the thing to bring healing to another's heart.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Renee is a mother, teacher, and a chai tea latte drinker. She recently moved from the suburbs of D.C. to an 1800's farmhouse with her husband and three kids. She loves being surrounded by nature and her neighbor's 50-acre sheep farm! Being a former public school teacher, Renee enjoys using her love for teaching to homeschool her own kids. In her free time, she enjoys hiding away in her hammock swing to read, playing cards with her son, or writing new blog posts for her website at [reenehuston.com](http://reenehuston.com)

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## ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

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When I meet new friends I'm typically met with the, "you're so friendly!" type of response. Which I truly appreciate since I have a tendency to give into The Office like humor more times than I admit. I'm thankful for the opportunities I've had in life being an immigrant, military spouse and travel addict to shape me into the photographer and human I am today. My kids will forever be my muse, but also my guides to keep pushing me forward in challenges. Thankful for all the opportunities thrown my way.

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