

Don't Move Out On Your Own Until You Hear Her Dad's Advice | Pop Wisdom | Dad Saves America

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SUMMARY

Laura Sandefer discusses her innovative educational approach at Acton Academy, emphasizing a student-directed learning model. She reflects on her upbringing, competitive family dynamics, and the importance of curiosity, presence, and growth mindset in parenting.

- Acton Academy promotes a radical, student-directed approach to education.
- Laura's competitive upbringing shaped her strategic thinking and approach to games.
- She highlights the balance between being warmhearted and tough-minded as a parent.
- Masculinity is defined as protective and proactive, while femininity is associated with creativity and nurturing.
- Laura's father taught her the value of curiosity, encouraging her to question everything.
- She emphasizes the importance of being present with children, especially during family meals.
- Complaining and negativity challenge her patience, leading her to avoid such environments.
- Cooking is a way for Laura to create a sense of home and gather her family through aromas.

- She started one of the most radical, innovative, and fastest growing school systems in the country; it's called Acton Academy. Laura recounts Acton's origin story, and the school's radically student-directed approach in her book, "Courage to Grow". - We knew they were going to have to be problem-solvers and doers, and that's what we just set out to create - [John] Laura Sandefer, welcome to "Pop Wisdom". (upbeat music) All right, what's your favorite video or board game? - Scrabble.

- I hear you're legendarily competitive. - Yes. - So what is it about Scrabble that makes it your favorite? - I love letters, I love words, so that's a huge part of it for me. But it's also not about being the smartest one in the room. It's about being the most strategic, and using the littlest things to have the most impact. So like a J on a triple, oh, it's so fun to do, just use a J and an O, and you can go far.

So to me, it's not a battle of smarts, it's just a battle of strategy, and I think it's really fun. - [John] When you competed against your dad, did he let you win, or

did you have to earn it? - Oh, no, we were a very competitive family, and with four girls, and my dad, who probably wanted some boys, and so he did all the very competitive stuff with us. It was crazy things, like, on a typewriter, see who can type the fastest with one letter, just to see how fast.

So, you know, he would set a timer, and then we count how many J's we could type. I mean, that's pretty minor, but very competitive. And he and I would play tennis together, and he never let me win. He just battered me with tennis balls, but I'm really glad he did. And we also would play really rough in the house, things like tennis ball fights in the house, my mother hated it, but we would just throw tennis balls at each other, and whoever was the least hurt by the end, won. (laughs) But we were a competitive family, and that was hard for me, when I was playing games as a mom, with my sons, I actually let them win a lot, because it really upset them to lose.

And I was- - Really?

- surprised at myself. There's a spectrum between being warmhearted and tough minded. Everyone falls somewhere along those, you need to be both warmhearted and tough minded. Something about becoming a mom made my tough-mindedness go away, and I became overly empathetic and warmhearted with my sons. And realized pretty early on that it was better for me to build in my tough-minded muscles. And so I practiced doing that, and they would be horrified today if they knew I'd let them win at anything.

- [John] What does

masculinity mean to you? And define it, like, what is masculinity? - It's not necessarily a physical thing, like strength and athleticism. I think that that can be, that has a masculine and feminine overlay, but in terms of an ethos of masculinity, to me, it's the protector, it's the warrior. It's the brave side of me, even. I think we have both, you know, masculine, feminine, in each of us. It's the one who wants to go solve problems, be proactive in protecting, and building, and growing.

- Same question, femininity. - Creative, open, warmth, and comfort, mainly for others, so bringing others in. And to me, it's the creative aspect of ourselves that is a feminine, inviting, and warmth. But also a procreator, more of the part of procreation that's a nurturing, rather than building. So it's encompassing something in order for it to grow.

- [John] What did your dad teach you about God? - My father was a Presbyterian minister, also a Renaissance man, in the sense that he was a learner, knew everything, was artistic, musical, a rebel, very masculine, very human man. Not the typical guy you would think would become a pastor. One of my favorite stories about my father was right before I was leaving for college . And I had my little silver Chevette, all packed up, and I was driving from Oklahoma City to Nashville.

And I knew that he would be the man, if I could say, "Give me one piece of advice that will last me the rest of my life," he's the one who will know the answers that I'll just carry with me. I really expected a 20-minute sermon, 'cause that's just kind of how those ministers speak. And he said, "Laura, that's easy, it's two words: be curious." And with that, he just sent me out into the world, and that's what he taught me God wants me to be, is curious about God, curious about people, curious about myself.

He did not force religion down our throat, but he taught me just to be curious and and to question everything. And I think that that's pretty powerful, I'm grateful for that lesson from him. - Yeah, that's a real blessing. If you could relive one memory with your dad, which day would it be, like, what would be the memory? - If I could relive one day with my dad, it would be the day that he took us all out in a ski boat to teach us how to water ski.

I was in charge of bringing the boat keys. So we drove four hours pulling a boat behind the car, and we got there, and I had forgotten the boat keys. And he was wonderful enough, and smart enough, and cool enough to hot-wire the boat. But we had to keep pliers on it the whole day, and no one could turn the engine off the whole day. And I just wish I would've brought those keys, it would've been so much easier for my dad, he was so wonderful.

I did see him crush his soda can when it was full of soda, (laughs) 'cause he was so frustrated with me. And he went forward with the day, and we learned how to water ski, and it turned out great, but it was just one of those things. Life was hard enough, and if I had just brought the boat keys, it would've been great for him. I just wish I could give him that gift. (chuckles) - But did you learn how to hot-wire a boat?

- See, I should have learned that, that would've been a valuable skill. - [John] What's the most dangerous thing you ever did as a child? - As a child? - Yeah. - I think it was the overnight camping trips without adults. So that, to me, we did that on our own, at sleepovers where our parents didn't know that's what we were doing. (laughs) And we didn't live in the greatest place to be doing that. But we found a place in the woods that we could make a tent, and just go and camp.

And looking back, that probably was more dangerous than anything I did, because now I know, geographically, where we were, and that's the only time I can picture doing something, looking back, was pretty stupid; sneaking out and sleeping outside in the woods by ourselves. - Now was this in Jersey? - Yes. - [John] Where in Jersey was this? - We were in Cresskill, New Jersey, Bergen County. My dad was working in Manhattan. - Yes, yeah, North Jersey.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. - It was a great place, almost idyllic childhood, but we felt so free that that felt comfortable, in looking back, that feels dangerous to me now. - [John] What's the most dangerous thing you've ever let any of your kids do? - Drive. - A statistically accurate answer. (both laugh) - I mean, they've done a lot of dangerous things, paragliding, flying airplanes, but driving scares me to death. - I think we all do feel the fear of them driving, as parents, but then we're paralyzed by all these other fears that are not as dangerous as driving.

- Yes, so true. And I don't know what that is, but you have to let them go at some point. - [John] How have you most damaged your kids, either physically or mentally? - Well, the thing that pops into my mind immediately is whenever I used any form of praise that, and this sounds cheesy, because it's such, in the Acton Academy world, it's growth, mindset, praise. If I wasn't using growth, mindset, praise, I feel like I damaged them mentally, because they would actually say it back to me.

And it here's an example. If I would say, "You're so smart," or "That's awesome!" Charlie, my older son, would always say, "Mom, please stop saying that, please don't do that, because it's a lie." (John laughs) And I would walk away going, "Wow." And so it was whenever they, and they pointed out all my mistakes to me. And I think it's really damaging, when you start doing that to a child, and I did that. - Did Charlie get that, because it was part of the mindset of school, and other conversations- - No. - you were having?

Why would he say, "Don't tell me I'm smart, you're lying to me." - It sounds trite and un-thoughtful to just say, "You're awesome." Can you get a little bit more creative and more specific? And I think he was sick of that word, it meant nothing to him. I don't think it meant he didn't think he was fine, or great, or knew what he was doing, but it just seemed shallow and unimportant, for me to say, "You're awesome."

Can you just tell me something more specific about me? And I think all children want, really all humans, is to be seen and to be known. It was more when I missed opportunities to tell them how I really felt about what they were doing. - [John] What's the most valuable thing you've learned from your children? - Maybe the most valuable thing is to be present. It's so easy as a parent, especially when they're young, to multitask and to feel like you have to do all these things, when truly, truly, all your child wants and needs, is for you to be present with them often.

Even if it's just 15 minutes a day, but you're fully present, that's really important. - With all these devices and things, and distractions, it's, like, harder than ever to do that, really. - Yeah. We did have one thing that was a... I'm so glad we did this, that we've never had phones at the dinner table. Oh my gosh, biggest no-no to have a phone, ever at our dinner table. And because family dinners were so important, that's one thing I took from my mom is, you know, "I'll ring a bell wherever you are, even if it's texting you, but dinner's at 6:00."

But once we hit the dinner table, everything goes away. And we really do, we play games like, two truths and a lie, you know, we would go around the table. But every dinner involved some sort of question and answering, so some sort of conversation. And there were times, like I've said, where dinner's maybe 10 or 15 minutes, but that's okay. It was a touchstone, and we were present together, and then everybody runs off and does their thing.

We just, even with our spouses, with our friends, we really need to put the phones away often. - It's one of these

things we just have to do consciously now. - Yes, and it's hard.

- Yeah, it is hard. What challenges your patience the most, and how do you overcome it? - Negativity and complaining

really challenges my patience. When the people around me are grumbling, and complaining about something, I get really impatient. Then I start to grumble and complain, so it's this vicious cycle.

So the way that I combat that

is not trying to change them, but changing my own

inner experience with it. So I just don't hang around

complainers or grumblers, is kind of how I deal with that. I get really impatient, and to me, that's just one of my least favorite feelings. I'm not naturally a patient

person, and I like to, in terms of wanting to get things done, and wanting things to move quickly, it's hard for me to be

patient with a project that you just want to get to the end result.

But in general, like, in

terms of being around people, that irritability, that

impatient feeling, to me, is triggered by complainers. (John laughs) - You could feel the principles of Acton, they're right below the surface, in so many of the things

we've talked about here. What do you wanna have

written on your tombstone? - Oh, um... - It's an upsetting question. - I know, I was very visual.

I'm a very visual person. So I actually pictured it, and people coming.

I just would love to say, "Go live, don't hang around

my tombstone, go live." - "Get out here." - "Get out of here," yeah,

"Go live, life is short, I loved it, I had a great

life," something like that. - [John] What's your

favorite dish to cook? Do you cook? - I love to cook.

- Yeah. - The main reason I love to cook is because it fills the house with smell, and I think that's the most important part of cooking.

It just creates an aura, you know, the garlic, and then

you layer on the onions, and then all these smells

just start developing. And you just have this one

pot of just deliciousness. But I think, really, it's

because the smell of that, it just brings back a

feeling of home to me. Children just start coming

out of the woodwork, and everybody just gathers around the pot. So for me, that's really fun. We're empty nesting now,

and so it's hard for me to love cooking, because for me, it was all about attracting people to the kitchen through smells.

And so sometimes, just as they were coming home from school, I would just cook onions and garlic, just so it would smell good. Even if I wasn't cooking that for dinner. Yeah, it's just about the aroma for me. - Yeah, that's great. What sound, noise, or smell do you love? - Chocolate chip cookies, the smell of those. - Good choice - For sure. I love the sound of laughing. I mean, when I hear someone laughing, that makes me so happy, especially if it's my children.

True laughter, not just giggling, but true laughter from the gut. I don't think there's anything better in the world. - Thank you for being part of "Pop Wisdom". You've brought a lot of wisdom to the table. - That was fun, thank you. - Thanks for watching. If you enjoyed this clip, be sure to check out the full conversation with Laura Sandefer. And please be sure to like this video, subscribe to our channel, and hit the notification bell for more videos dedicated to celebrating the heroic spirit of dad.