

## **What has AHEA Become?** **By Léo Gaumont**

Late last year (Dec. 2016), I was inspired to write an article outlining what I thought had led to the government “crackdown” on Trinity Christian School and Wisdom Home Schooling. Actually, more than being inspired, I was compelled to get those thoughts and concerns off my chest and onto paper to liberate myself from constantly ruminating over things I could do little about.

Today, I continue to be troubled by things I see as threatening Christian home education and once again, I believe that my writing them down will free me from my burden of concern. At issue is what has become of the Alberta Home Education Association (AHEA).

We were there shortly after AHEA had been created in 1986. My wife, Faye and I attended our first AHEA Convention in 1988 when we started home educating. There were precious few people there, yet the crowd likely represented a significant proportion of the rather small home education community of that time.

It was exciting times for us all. Not only were we embarking on our new home education journey which, as a public high school teacher, was no small thing, but I was renewed in my passion for education. For the first time, I saw a group of people who genuinely put the best interests of the children as their top priority, unlike the education industry with which I was employed. (See [Article](#))

I sensed a deep commitment to family, a sincere desire to please the Lord, and a real camaraderie among the people in attendance, which I observed to have a unified vision along with a common faith, a common purpose, a common goal and a common enemy. In fact, the best way to describe AHEA at this time, was as an organization of home educating families, focussed on advancing, defending and protecting their God-given authority from schools, systems and programs. By and large, it was becoming obvious to them that the anti-Christian, secular humanistic programming, found not only within the public and separate systems, but what was also rapidly creeping into nearly every private school, was increasingly limiting parental influence over their children. Such was the original DNA of the Alberta Home Education Association. It represented parents, families, students and as such it got the respect of the government of the day as the “voice” of those who had determined to teach their own children.

As can only be expected, years went by, home education grew in popularity, things happened, and changes affected by both government and the home education community altered the original home education environment. AHEA adapted in kind, slowly mutating to accommodate these changes. Unfortunately, mutations are seldom, if ever, positive and so the AHEA of today has evolved into something which can be accused of having lost its original focus, purpose and directives. Let me attempt to quickly summarize what occurred and what is happening, as best as I understand.

Up until 1988, all home educators were simply part of the local school system. Even though the new provincial School Act made it possible for home educators to register their students with non-resident boards, most of the school boards were loathe to “steal” another jurisdiction’s students. However because of the amalgamating of school boards during that time, a few smaller ones saw that borderless home educated students could be part of their “survival strategy”. *AHEA continued to defend home educators against those who were not supportive.*

Private schools receiving permission to register non-resident home educated students in 1994 was a big game changer. Parents could now register with schools that not only supported their right to home educate, but also, ostensibly, shared their faith. *AHEA adapted.*

There is hardly an occasion that resourceful individuals will miss and the creation of funded, borderless home education students provided a truly unique opportunity within the Province of Alberta. Out of nowhere, third party agencies that were not school boards, not schools or even truly recognized as having any educational mandate, began to connect with school authorities, mostly private, as specialists with which home educators could register their students. *AHEA accepted and advanced these agencies as home education friendly, which they were.*

As the competition for home educated students heated up, increasingly more novel things were being used to attract clientele and the associated money, including a wholesale return to the very things from which the initial home education community was trying to escape, as “home education providers” realized that public programming and accreditation not only attracted more uninformed parents, but paid better. *AHEA turned a blind eye to this compromise.*

This is not to say that every agency providing home education services was motivated exclusively by money, but to make the point that when funded borderless students were created, the home education environment started changing. As the movement grew, public, separate, and private schools got into the provision of home education services and programming. However, by now the home education businesses working through the private schools had become the most popular choice for home educating parents. *AHEA began advancing these third party agencies as fully legitimate “boards” without even mentioning the school authority through which they operated.*

The individual patriotic defence and advancement of these various authorities and pseudo-authorities had the unfortunate consequence of dividing the originally cohesive home education community into sectarian factions based upon which agency one was registered with. This had a profound impact on *AHEA which adopted this transition under the banner of being inclusive.*

The public acceptance and funding of home education eventually led to the creation of an entire new industry. By the beginning of the new millennium, curriculum and book sellers, along with other profiteers, including a host of home education providers, competed for a place in the exhibitors’ hall, of what was now the biggest home education convention in the country. *AHEA accepted, adapted and enabled this new reality as it morphed into a business of its own.*

The increasing advancement of public programming within the home education movement forced AHEA, which was now more focussed on being inclusive for the sake of growing the convention than on the plight of those for whom it was created to serve, to face the challenge of which home education providers they should allow in the exhibit hall. *AHEA eventually banned organizations that advanced public programming and accreditation in favour of those offering a “traditional” home education, most of whom were third party entities.*

Alas, money can and often does trump principle and nearly every provider of traditional home education also eventually came to offer public programming and/or accreditation, yet they were not discouraged from being a part of the provincial home education conference as had been done with previous public program providers. *AHEA not only embraced them as fully traditional when few of them remained exclusively so, but started to represent their interests.*

By now, the Alberta Home Education Association had abandoned its original mandate of protecting home educating families from government intrusion and became the main mechanism for the justification of third party private contractors posing as authorities under the banner of “Independent Contracted Home Education Specialists” or ICHESs for short. *AHEA had mutated from being the representative of parents and students to being the legitimizers of ICHESs.*

Today, there are many things that cause me to question what our provincial organization is becoming, but three recent events particularly exacerbated my concerns.

The first was that AHEA seems to be increasingly controlled by one main ICHES, which despite not being a traditional board due to its offering of public accreditation, not only continues to occupy a place in the exhibit hall, but is suspected by some of unduly influencing the AHEA leadership.

The second thing was when AHEA, claiming to be speaking on behalf of all home educators of the province, offered the government an opportunity to “evaluate” the results of home education by offering the same main ICHES’ solution and participation in something not a single family was consulted about. I interpreted this as advancing the survival of this ICHES as taking precedence over the authority of parents. (See Campaign).

Please note that ICHESs have no real defenders other than the people who support them through their registrations. Neither the government, nor the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges of Alberta (AISCA) consider them legitimate educational entities, outside of the schools that sponsor them. *Hence the need to control the provincial association is critical to their survival.*

The most recent thing that really got me thinking, not only about our provincial organization, but about home education in general, was what transpired after the government shut down Trinity Christian School and its associated ICHES. I watched in dismay as emails, statements and all manner of communication suggested that the home education community and its provincial association were now charged with the new objective of defending the home education industry and its associated businesses. Outside agencies descended upon the province to take advantage of the opportunity to increase their clientele; competing third party agencies were obligated to defend the ICHES in question and by extension, themselves; parents were called upon to fight for the ICHES’ survival; all the while paying little respect to this being about home educating families and students. Even more disheartening was the fact that if there was even a mention of God in all of this, it was as an afterthought informing us that God’s position was definitely in support of the industry, even if compromising, as if this was of greater importance than the ministry of families teaching children!

Talk about deja vu! Like the public school industry where students are used in keeping the industry going, home educating parents and students are now being used to defend the right of survival of the ICHESs involved. What was most discouraging is that most, if not all, parents did not appear to understand that they were being used and excited as loyal fans defending the alma mater.

Now, when I was recently informed of who was running for election to the AHEA Board this year, I completely lost hope for the future of home education. Not only does the present board include some people with serious conflicts of interest, those now wanting to join the board bring this concern to a whole new level. As if having a facilitator and three advisory board members is not enough, an ICHES owner’s son (and his wife), who is also a facilitator are vying for a position on the AHEA board already stacked with people from this ICHES.

Even more perplexing is that the owner of another ICHES, the one involved in the transfer of thousands of home educated students involving several schools and communities in 2015-16, is also vying for a position on the AHEA board. One would have to wonder why a businessman, completely dependent on keeping the status quo home education industry intact, would want to be on the board of the provincial association? For that matter, how can anybody run for office when failing AHEA's volunteer test for qualification!

Seriously? Why is the industry now in charge of home education? In the beginning of my association with AHEA, I remember that we collectively saw the government education industry as the biggest obstacle to parental freedom and authority. Today, the vast majority of home educating parents are unaware of what is going on, as a whole new industry takes over the leadership of the organization originally created to protect them. As AHEA grows it becomes more and more disconnected from the parents who are home educating their children, and more representative of the businesses who supply the services (and make the profits). Let the ICHESs create their own business association and leave AHEA to the families.

Throughout the past nearly thirty years, I have been actively involved in warning AHEA and the home education community about the dangers of compromising what matters in exchange for temporal peace and comfort. I have been a part of this ministry long enough to have been vindicated on several issues, but this one is different. We never imagined, needed or desired a home education industry that, while posturing and sloganeering about these important principles, manipulates them to their own benefit and we most certainly do not need or want our home education association to be perniciously drawn into its self-serving web.

AHEA seems to have had an inversion of purpose. While perhaps still expressing support for the welfare of students, parents and faith, rather than protecting and directing parents from an industry they should be escaping, it is now part of and representing the industry that has grown around the home education movement.

Unfortunately, like the mutating of DNA, there is no going back and there is no chance of reforming AHEA, whose leadership is being increasingly populated by industry insiders. I am no longer willing to be a part of an agency of change leading us away from faith, family and freedom, to protect what is becoming an illegitimate industry.

Last year, when given the opportunity to be included in the exhibit hall of the convention, I determined to lead by example and not participate in the compromise being offered. For years I have faithfully attended this convention, hoping to shine a light of scrutiny over the workings of the association, but I must admit that one voice crying in a wilderness of compromise has not been very effective and I believe that my continued presence confers legitimacy on an organization that needs to be truly reformed.

AHEA's compromising has not won the hearts of those who do not share our faith. In fact, they have gone on to create their own forum. Could it be that the time has come for Christian parents to create another forum, perhaps a coalition of dedicated Christian believers wanting to address real home education concerns and where members of the profiteering industry are not welcomed?

If you think so, lets talk.