

Homeschool Super Heroes

Speakers:

Gentry Beck

Tiany Davis

Gentry: Hi, I'm Gentry Beck with HomeschoolSuperHeroes.com. And today for our Homeschool Super Hero, we have Tiany Davis.

Tiany wears many hats and juggles many jobs as a wife, homeschool mom to four boys, mom-preneur and social media engager. She met her husband, a professional jazz drummer, in 1993 at the airport in Paris, France. They've been married 17 years and live in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with their four sons ages 5, 7, 9, and 11. She's been blogging since 2001 and founded the Homeschool Lodge in 2008. The Homeschool Lodge is the largest community of its kind, with over 18,500 homeschool moms as members. She considers herself a social good advocate. She's been blessed with amazing opportunities to serve and increase awareness of global, maternal health issues, and child malnutrition as a community leader for the ABC News campaign, *Million Moms Challenge*, and as a mom blogger for Save The Children.

Thank you so much for joining us today, Tiany, how are you?

Tiany: Doing good, thank you, thanks for having me.

Gentry: Good. Well, can you just kind of start with telling us a little bit more about your family?

Tiany: Well, like you mentioned, we live in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and I did meet my husband in Paris, France, definitely a union that God put together because there's no way else that we would've come together, if it wasn't for the Lord.

We have four boys, Micah's 11, we have Dominick, who's 9, Ashton is 7, and Noah is 5. And I actually just rushed them all out the door to Taekwondo. My husband is actually a second degree black belt and my oldest two sons are also black belts going to get their second degrees, and then the little ones are on their way to get their black belts, so we're very, very big and busy with Taekwondo, which has been a wonderful blessing for our family.

We do a lot of music. My husband is actually a jazz musician, like you mentioned, as well, so the boys all play musical instruments.

And we're just real comfortable here in Baton Rouge, we're close to family and friends and that's about it.

Gentry: Sounds good. Sounds like ya'll stay pretty busy.

Tiany: Thank you. We have a full, full schedule. Well, you know, with your busy and full schedule, there's no such thing as just a typical day of homeschooling. But if you could kind of describe to us that a typical day you try to look like for ya'll.

Gentry: Yeah, as busy as we are, our days are actually pretty relaxed. We do get a lot in our days, but we have a pretty relaxed homeschool day and like you said, no one day is alike. But we do have a comfortable routine, and the boys are pretty structured and scheduled and they're very accustomed to our routines. So the house and the home runs pretty smoothly throughout the day.

Everybody's up by 8:00, which is kind of late, I know, but we're night owls around here, since my husband is a jazz musician and he does work late. There are times when the boys stay up late with us as well. So everybody has to be up by 8:00 and we do chores first thing in the morning and we have breakfast by 9:00. And after breakfast we have our bible study together. We all sit in the living room, comfortable couches, have our bible study first thing in the morning. And then we jump right into our lessons. And our lessons take us just a couple of hours, sometimes three hours. We'll have lunch, do some more chores, do whatever homeschool work we haven't finished, and then have free time for the rest of the day or three days a week we'll have Taekwondo, so they'll, at 3:00 have to start getting ready for Taekwondo or music lessons.

Gentry: Great.

Tiany: And that's pretty much our day. It's pretty simple, relaxed. We're not punching a clock through the day, so it's a comfortable day. Try to get a lot done but we're never really punching a clock to get it done.

Gentry: You mentioned getting the homeschool work and the lessons done. How have you kind of taken, what is your approach to homeschooling and how have you integrated that into the lessons that the boys do?

Tiany: As far as our approach, you know, I try not to label what we do as our homeschooling and our curriculum. I would say that we're pretty eclectic. We take from a lot of different forms of homeschooling.

If I had to describe us in one word, it would be organic. I like to say that we're organic homeschoolers and I found this definition of organic homeschooling a few years back and I read it and it just sounded like exactly what we wanted to do, where discipleship is really the heart of our homeschooling, it's the reason why we're homeschooling now, to disciple our children, to be with our children, for our children to grow strong, bonds and relationships with each other, not only with their parents, but with each other as well.

So in organic homeschooling, we don't send kids off to different rooms throughout the house. We all homeschool in one room, and it's not even necessarily have a schoolroom. We do have a schoolroom that we put together and built just for homeschooling, our first year of homeschooling, and we honestly never used the room. So I'll end up in the kitchen, I have two boys at the kitchen table, two boys at the island, and I'm right there in the middle, able to help everybody, or we'll move to the living room, sit on the couches and read, do our read-alouds or our reading, our history and our geography is usually done in the living room as well, so we're always together throughout the day.

It's a very relaxed and natural approach to homeschooling in that no two children will learn the same, one might start reading at five, where another son has started reading at seven, and that's okay. They're great readers, they not all started at the same age, but they're avid readers, they're bookworms, they love to read. So we don't really have a cookie cutter approach to teaching or learning. It's really natural learning for each individual boy. We do a lot of read-alouds and a lot of living books. So our goal is really just to pass on, you know, a love of reading and learning to our boys. So however we can do that, that's what we do. We incorporate a lot of music, art, nature studies, we're outside a lot when it's cool and we can expand our nature studies and do our science and our geography and our math and we'd love to do that.

And then we have heavy academic days and we have light academic days because we don't want the boys to get bogged down or mom to get bogged down in the rut of, you know, heavy academics. So we try and keep the homeschool lively and we have a variety of lessons that we do to keep things interesting for the boys, and that's worked out great for us, so that's basically what we do. Very organic type homeschooling, not meaning that we have like organic chickens in the backyard or that we have an organic vegetable garden, but it's a very natural approach to learning.

Gentry: Well, that's great. I know that you kind of mentioned, you know, all the boys learning at different levels, different ages. What is it really like, homeschooling all boys?

Tiany: I get asked that question all the time and, you know, I don't even know that I'm a really good example of a mom with all boys because, you know, we do have rambunctious, rowdy boys but they're much like their father and their father is very disciplined and organized. He's like the born organized type of person, where I'm kind of really not. And thankfully they've taken after him. So they're naturally structured and disciplined to a certain extent, but as far as homeschooling is concerned, I don't make them sit and do bookwork for hours on end. We take lots of breaks throughout our day. We try to go outside often. We'll even just take our school work outside. And that's how they like it, you know, and they're used to having breaks throughout the day, we talk a lot, we

discuss a lot, a lot of our learning is done through discussion and questions. There's endless amounts of questions throughout the day and we encourage that and we learn through that. So that's basically how we do it, it's keeping them busy. Taekwondo, I have to say, has really helped as far as discipline and self-control. If we have to make them go and practice their form a few times or let them spar to get some energy out, we can do that, too. So that's been a huge blessing for the boys, and just teaching discipline and self-control. And they're teaching Taekwondo actually now, three of them are actually—one's a training instructor so he actually teaches Taekwondo and the other two are learning as training instructors, so it's really been a huge blessing as far as discipline and just growing as boys and learning how to be leaders.

Gentry: How important do you think it is to get your kids, and especially your boys, involved in activities? Whether it's Taekwondo or baseball or things like that. How important do you value that?

Tiany: For us it's a been a huge, huge blessing, like I said before. I don't think it's a necessity by any means, but because opportunity arose with, my husband's been in Taekwondo since he was a little boy. So it was naturally something that he wanted the boys to try and take part in because he knew the benefits of doing some kind of martial art. But I think it's great, I mean, it teaches them teamwork, it lets them have that opportunity to play and work with other children, where we might not normally have that at home, if we have a small family and we don't have our own baseball team.

So I think that as far as that's concerned, it's a great way for our homeschool children to socialize, if you're not in a homeschool group or you're not able to have park days, putting them in activities lets them get exercise, lets them socialize, and then of course, just learning lots of wonderful traits, as far as learning how to work with children and be a part of a team.

Gentry: What are some just kind of hands-on activities around the house that you do with your boys just to, like you said, I mean, with the energy and things like that, what are just some hands-on activities that moms can do with their boys?

Tiany: Hands-on activities that we do with our boys. Well, I have to say, as far as hands-on activities, we love doing crafts, and I do all the crafts and I do all of the science, but if it comes to anything that's real strenuous or athletic or takes a lot of energy, that's where Dad comes in. And we're really, really lucky to have him home a lot of the time. He works as a teacher during the day, so he comes home early and then he does some late-night jazz gigs on the weekends, but he takes the boys to Taekwondo and then he's usually home with them in the evenings. So he's definitely the one that exerts the energy out of our boys.

Gentry: That's great. I know developing character in your boys, or even just in kids in general, is just so important. Do you have suggestions for moms how they can develop that character in just ways, especially with boys?

Tiany: This will probably work for boys or girls, I don't have anything specific to boys, other than the fact that, of course, daily we're teaching our boys how to become men, and how to eventually become good husbands and leaders for their families.

But as far as character, we created a character journal for our family. And so we teach one character each week. And I don't have the exact URL, but it's actually something we found out through the Duggers, on the Duggers' show.

Gentry: Perfect.

Tiany: And I know it's on their website. And I know if you just Google, I think character traits, you'll probably be able to find the site, but if gives you, I think, 50 different character traits with scriptures to follow up with and we usually do, much like I guess they would do in Sunday School, we'll do a bible activity and we'll do a craft with the little ones. I'll usually pull up videos through YouTube or some other place online that might describe or talk about that trait. There's a lot of Sunday School videos that can be used for each one of those traits, and that's what we try and build on.

But so we have a character journal and I put together all of our scriptures and activities for that one character and we'll go through it throughout the week and we'll keep adding to that character journal with each new character that we add to our study for the boys.

Gentry: That sounds like it works very well.

Tiany: Right, it's really neat.

Gentry: That's awesome. Well, I know with a lot of people who take off the summer, they have first day of school right around the corner, so what is your advice to homeschoolers to making sure they get a good start and just kind of what have you personally done to get ready for this school year?

Tiany: To get ready for this school year, well, right after we finish our homeschool year, I do a purge and I basically go through all of our homeschool curriculum and we give away everything that we haven't used and everything that we're not going to use, just to bring down a lot of the clutter, because I know I personally tend to get a little overwhelmed when things start getting cluttered and I have just so much staring at me that I don't know what to do with it all.

So we purge a lot of our homeschool curriculum at the end of the year. And then throughout the summer, we keep up with our math and we keep up with our

reading. So the only thing we have to incorporate when we start back to school is just all those other subjects, and it's not too difficult.

And I have to say, when we do go back in, it's a real smooth transition. I don't expect, you know, day one to be that, "We're hitting every subject and everything's going as planned and we're hitting the clock." So we try to slide back into our regular home schedule, pretty naturally, and I try not to stress if it doesn't go as planned, because more than likely it's not going to. So I guess that first month is like that trial and error of just trying to get back into the swing of things. And by two weeks, we pretty much have it done, but I don't have any high expectations for, you know, getting us back on that routine and schedule like we did when we were in the swing of things in our homeschool year.

Gentry: I know that you started the Homeschool Lodge a few years ago. Could you tell all the listeners why you started this?

Tiany: I started the Homeschool Lodge 2008, I had been blogging and I met so many wonderful mothers online through blogging. And I came to realize that a lot of the homeschool moms were blogging really as a form of connecting and having some kind of fellowship and outreach with other homeschool mothers. Here in Baton Rouge, I'm very blessed that we have a huge homeschool community, and so we have numerous homeschool groups. And so there's always a group to do something with, we have monthly field trips, we have outings just for the moms, so we have wonderful local support here.

But I was seeing that not all moms have that. You know, there's places where there might be one family in a small town homeschooling and there's really no outlet for that family to connect with other homeschool families. And at that point it was really just through blogging.

So we prayed about it and I shared, you know, my vision of what this site would be with my husband and I really just wanted a hub where moms specifically could connect in a forum or in groups relating to their curriculum, you know, much like we do in our regular homeschool groups. And that's how the Homeschool Lodge came about. I researched and looked into ways to build an online community and we quickly got the site up and it's just been a blessing ever since it's been running, and word of mouth has just grown the community to this large, wonderful community of moms.

Gentry: I know you talked about it being a hub for moms to connect, but how does it specifically help moms, if they get on there, just kind of give us some specific things of how it helps homeschool moms.

Tiany: Sure. Well, the main, I would say, part of the Homeschool Lounge is our homeschool forum, which is just like any other forum, but we have different topics in the homeschool forum. We have a section for **** class and we have

curriculum section, we have family living, recipes, but then we also have individual groups on the site and we have over 100 topic groups on the site, and each group relates to a different curriculum, hobby, interests, and then we have local groups for each state across the country. So we just give moms another option as far as connecting in a more intimate location within the site, and that's what those groups are for. They're smaller, they are more intimate, and they just allow the moms to get to know each other on a different level.

We also have a live chat on the site, which I love, because it gives moms an opportunity to just jump on any time of the day, no matter where they are in the country. We have moms in Australia, we have moms in Germany, South America. And so any time of the day, 24/7, you can jump on our live chat, ask for prayer, ask homeschooling questions, get some tips on a recipe. We always have somebody in there chatting throughout the day.

And we have giveaways, we have a section for moms to post their own giveaways, if they have a blog and they have a giveaway coming up on their blog, or any type of homeschooling event, they can list that on the Homeschool Lounge.

We have a section for resources, we have profile pages, where each mom, much like Facebook, has their own profile page and their own wall. And then so they can connect that way as well and they can friend each other on the site. And it's just a great way for them to form relationships. We've had some wonderful, wonderful long-standing relationships come from the Homeschool Lounge.

Gentry: Did you ever imagine that it would be this big of a thing, even worldwide?

Tiany: Never. Never. I remember the week that we launched the Homeschool Lounge, which was Valentine's Day 2008, my husband asked, "Well, how many moms do you think might sign up when, you know, the Homeschool Lounge gets going?" And my number was 1,000. That was basically the number that I was praying for. You know, 1,000 moms would give us a nice group of moms to connect, fellowship, have resources to share, ideas to share.

And I remember talking to, or emailing with Gina Suarez from the *Old School House* magazine, and she had seen the site and she joined the site right away when it opened, and she shot back a number of 10,000. You know, she emailed back, "No, it won't be 1,000, it'll be more like 10, you'll get 10,000 or more moms on that site easily."

I never imagined it, but here we are at almost 19,000 moms and it's just been, it's been wonderful. It's been a huge blessing for me, it's been a wonderful ministry to be a part of, and it's just amazing to see it grow and to see how many moms have been able to use the Homeschool Lounge that might not have had that encouragement on their homeschool journey, because it can be isolating and it can

be frustrating and lonely at times. So to have a place to go to, to ask for prayer and just find other moms going through the same exact thing that you're going through, it's so important.

Gentry: One thing we always like to ask our Super Heroes is, if you could do one thing, or multiple things differently, what would you do? Within raising your boys, within maybe the Homeschool Lounge, or just within your homeschooling in general?

Tiany: One thing that I would do differently. Pertaining to our homeschool, I would say that when we first started homeschooling our boys, I would say kindergarten for my oldest, first grade, second grade, even into third grade, I really was trying to replicate the school setting in our home. And by doing that, you know, trying to make sure our lessons started right at 9:00 and by, you know, I had split up our day into these 30-minute increments, or an hour, and every 30 minutes, every hour, I had to make sure that we were on to that next lesson and that we were on to that next—we were literally punching a clock all day long, and it was so stressful. And trying to give them so much bookwork and trying to give them so many, so much paperwork to do, whether it be math or spelling or writing. We were just inundated with all of this paperwork, not realizing the more that I researched that there were so many ways to learning and that we didn't have to punch a clock, and that it really did defeat the purpose of why we were homeschooling and keeping our boys home, which again, was to disciple them, to grasp their hearts, toward each other, toward Christ, and then all of that just seemed to water down all the reasons why had decided to keep them home.

So I think that, which I quickly, thankfully, I learned throughout the few years into our homeschooling that I had to just pull back, relax, not try and emulate the public school setting in our home and, you know, work through each child's education differently, much more relaxed, not punch a clock, stay on routine, not that we're so lax that we don't get anything done throughout the day. But I know that if we need to spend an extra 30 minutes on a math lesson and skip science that day, that's okay. We'll catch science the next day and maybe lesson, you know, not do as much math the next day.

It's learning how to make our homeschooling work for us in a relaxed way that we were comfortable, not stressed, and everybody was learning in a peaceful environment, that wasn't rushed, and that would probably be the one thing that I would do differently, if I could, from the very beginning, our poor guinea pig, the oldest, he's always the guinea pig, you learn everything with the oldest, I think, for all moms, but he's turning out okay, so it's okay.

Gentry: Good.

Tiany: That would definitely be it for us, though.

Gentry: That's great. Is there any other piece of advice that you want to share with our listeners today?

Tiany: I think just, going back on what I was saying before, just to try to not overwhelm yourself with so much and get bogged down in the daily rut of a really over-scheduled routine, not trying to emulate that public school setting. I know it's very difficult for mothers that are probably coming out of public school or private school into homeschooling, and then they think that they have to be that teacher and have the same lessons and structure and quizzes and tests. And all that is okay, as long as it doesn't become so stressful that you're no longer enjoying homeschooling your children, and then you're thinking about putting them back in school because it's so difficult to keep up with that same schedule and that same type of homeschooling. But our homes are so different than a public school and that's really, depending on your reasons for homeschooling, not the reason why you bring your children home.

That would probably be the biggest tip that I would have for any homeschooling mom.

Gentry: Well, that's great. If our listeners want to contact you, how can they get in contact you and also in contact with your Homeschool Lounge?

Tiany: They can get to the Homeschool Lounge by going to TheHomeschoolLounge.com, and I can be contacted via my email Tiany@TheHomeschoolLounge.com.

Gentry: Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time today, Tiany. We have all, I know, learned a lot from your experience with your boys and then also with what you've done with the Homeschool Lounge.

Tiany: Thank you. It was fun talking to you.

Gentry: And for our listeners, make sure to go visit TheHomeschoolLounge.com and learn more about what Tiany's lounge is all about and be able to connect with some other homeschool moms and dads.

So thank you so much for your time today, Tiany.

Tiany: Thank you.