

...like  
Which as they kiss consume: the  
Is loathsome in his own delicious  
And in the taste confounds the  
Therefore, love moderately; long  
Too swift arrives as tardy as too

*Enter Juliet.*

Here comes the lady. O, so light  
Will ne'er wear out the everlasting  
A lover may bestride the gossamer  
That idles in the wanton summer air  
And yet not fall; so light is vanity.  
Good even to my ghostly confessor,  
Romeo shall thank thee, daughter,  
both  
much to him, else is his thanks too  
Juliet, if the measure of it  
'd like mine, and it

## Wherefore art thou, Genevieve? (She's directing the Homeschool Shakespeare Club)

Roger Mooney

**D**rywall is piled three feet high in the attic of Emily and Alan Lemmon's home in Tallahassee. It was placed there a few years ago, intended for walls as the couple finished the top floor.

But these days the stack serves a different purpose. Surrounded by white sheets

used as backdrops and placed directly under nine flood lights attached to the rafters, it's the stage used by the Tallahassee Homeschool Shakespeare Club, founded by the Lemmons' oldest child, Genevieve.

"I have a house full of kids, about 25 of them, practicing their Shakespeare lines,"

Emily said.

Four of those kids live there – Genevieve, 14, and her siblings Chiara, 12, Dominic, 10, and Declan, 5. The middle two have roles in the yearly Shakespeare plays directed by Genevieve. Declan works as a stagehand, though he might soon earn a part on stage, possibly as the mischievous imp Puck from “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” which according to his oldest sister is a role he was born to play.

Genevieve began the club when she was 11 after watching Tallahassee’s Southern Shakespeare Company perform “Twelfth Night.”

“That kind of lit a fuse,” Genevieve said.

She recruited 10 of her homeschooled friends to act out three scenes from “Twelfth Night,” and soon her home was Tallahassee-upon-Avon. Alan was building sets, Genevieve was sewing costumes with her grandmother, and everyone was reciting William Shakespeare.

How do you get an 11-year-old hooked on the works of The Bard?

“We don’t own a TV,” Emily said.

And every room in the house is lined with bookcases stuffed with books.

The backyard leads to wetlands explored by the children as they satisfy their curiosity about anything that grows, crawls, swims, and flies.

Emily and Alan are both professors at nearby Florida State University, and this is what they envisioned when they decided to homeschool their children. Emily was homeschooled and thrived in that education setting. She wanted the same for her children because she liked the freedom of customizing the curriculum to each child’s



*Genevieve Lemmon is the founder and director of the Tallahassee Homeschool Shakespeare Club.*

needs and interests.

“I like the way that homeschooling gives you more family time,” Emily said. “It helps build a really close-knit family, and parents can have more influence on the formation of their kids. I also thought my husband and I could do a better job educating them than a lot of schools because we can give them one-on-one attention.”

Last school year, the Lemmons qualified for the Personal Education Program (PEP) that comes with the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship (FTC), managed by Step Up For Students.

That was the first school year homeschooled families were eligible for PEP. The scholarship is an Education Savings Account (ESA) for students who are not



*From top to bottom: Genevieve, Chiara, Dominic and Declan.*

enrolled full-time in a public or private school. This allows parents to tailor their children's education by allowing them to spend their scholarship funds on various approved, education-related expenses.

For the Lemmon kids, that's a heavy dose of music lessons. They are all taking lessons in piano and a string instrument. All are members of the Tallahassee Home-school String Orchestra, while Genevieve and Chiara are also members of the Tallahassee Youth Orchestra.

All PEP students are required to take a yearly, state-approved, norm-referenced test. The Lemmons take the Classic Learning Test.

PEP helps pay for curriculum, school supplies, books, summer camps, and music

lessons.

"We're trying to expose them to lots of different fields because they're trying to figure out what they're most interested in," Emily said.

Chiara's interests lean toward the sciences. She's also developing an interest in farming and is now raising 17 young chickens in hopes of beginning her neighborhood egg business. She'll call it Chiara's Cheeky Chicks or Chiara's Cluckers.

Chiara is also scheduled to take a farming internship this year.

Genevieve is mechanically inclined. She can take apart and reassemble a bicycle. She once disassembled a door in the family's van and fixed what was rattling.

"She might have the makings of an architect or an engineer," Emily said.

Or a Shakespearean scholar.

Genevieve took an online course this summer on "The Merchant of Venice," taught by a Shakespearean author.

Her favorite plays are "Twelfth Night" and "King Lear." When asked for her favorite Shakespearean line, she answered with the back-and-forth between Beatrice and Benedick in "Much Ado About Nothing."

The Lemmons don't own a TV and the kids don't have iPhones, because Emily and Alan don't want their children spending time staring at screens. They'd rather their children read books and explore the outdoors to stimulate their minds.

"So, you asked why an 11-year-old got interested in Shakespeare, it's because her brain wasn't supersaturated with flashing lights and exciting noises and materialistic commercials. And she was quiet enough to be able to focus on what Shakespeare

meant,” Emily said.

Directing has been a learning process for Genevieve. Mostly, she’s learned how to lead a cast. Along the way, she learned she could help shy or introverted cast members develop confidence by giving them bigger parts.

“I give them harder parts and they rise to the occasion each time,” she said.

Genevieve said it was hard at first getting other homeschool students interested in Shakespeare. She fixed that with post-rehearsal pizza and ice cream parties. The afterparties are now called Sugar Shakes.

For Christmas last year, Genevieve received a director’s chair and a megaphone.

“It was pretty cheesy in the beginning,” she said, “but now they know if they sit on my chair they’re going to get in big trouble.”

In four years, the Tallahassee Homeschool Shakespeare Club grew from the original 10 members to its current 25. All are homeschooled and all received PEP scholarships.

Genevieve said being homeschooled is the catalyst behind her love of Shakespeare.

“I just like how it gives me more flexibility and it gives me more time to pursue my interests,” she said. “I think if I’d been in a (district) school system up to this point, I wouldn’t have probably been exposed to Shakespeare and I wouldn’t be directing plays now.”

*Roger Mooney is the manager of communications for Next Steps, the online blog of Step Up for Students, where this article first ran.*