

Guest Blogger Janis: From Village School To Harvard-Westlake To Harvard University

Description



On my last birthday, my son sent me a letter that began, “I’m sitting in my dorm room overlooking Harvard Yard. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for all you did.”

It’s not true, of course. He did it himself. But I will admit, there was a little guidance from his mom.

Someplace along the toddler way I realized that I was going to do my darndest to make sure he had a good education. A teacher by training, work, and temperament, I was surprised to find that I was drawn to the pricey world of private education. There are excellent public schools for sure, but money would have to be spent one way or the other for a first class education. We bit the bullet and tuition rose to the top of our monthly budget.

When my son turned 4, he announced he would not be returning to nursery school. He wanted to go to a real school. Okay. And what real school takes a child at 4? There are several, it seems. And I chose one. Village School in the Palisades.

Needless to say, we chose them before they chose us. They were perfect. They were nurturing and playful and encouraging and yes, academic. I hadn’t heard of the concept of educating the whole child then, but I understand it now. And they had it. I mean, he was only 4.

Of course, it did occur to me he might not get in. In fact, I probably fretted obsessively over it. There are just so many spaces. We did everything imaginable. I brought cupcakes. We had a friend of a friend who knew one of the administrators write a letter. I don’t know if it helped, but at least somebody who knew somebody knew us so we couldn’t be all bad.

The interview with the children consisted of playing games and then sitting in a circle with a sweet, pretty teacher who asked questions like, “What is your favorite movie?”

I heard my son had answered, “The Buddy Holly Story.” Oh, I thought, we’re finished. But they must have enjoyed it.

The parents were interviewed separately and we were professional and enthusiastic and yes, we certainly would volunteer. I suggested my husband could play banjo at the annual Hootenanny, and I would be delighted to help out in the library. *We were wait-listed.*

Eventually, the call came and Village turned out to be an excellent choice for us. Excellent! The administrators were hands on and knew and cared about each child and family. My son was blossoming. We couldn’t have been happier with the teachers and the other families.

And then in 3rd grade, there was a kid who was being a jerk to my child. Not in front of the teacher, of course, but a jerk nonetheless. This was not acceptable. We met with the teacher and the principal and suggested that perhaps this wasn’t the best fit, after all. Perhaps we needed a different school.

We began once again to look at the local private schools. One in particular caught our attention. It was well known for its high academics. Our son had to take a test to even be considered. We spent a day there and he sat in on classes. It’s a wonderful school, very exciting scholastically, but quite different from little Village School.

However, when the questions were put to him: Was he unhappy at Village? Were the kids more like him at this new school? Was this something he’d like to explore? He thought long and hard and decided no, he liked it just where he was. He said there would always be mean kids and he might as well learn to deal with them now.

By then, however, Village School informed us that the child in question would not be returning in the fall. In our haste to try to control things, we had forgotten we were not alone. A good school will always have your back. A child, if you listen to him or her, will tell you what they need.

The teachers continued to keep the curriculum varied, fun, and interesting. I found the CTY program through the Johns Hopkins School for summer enrichment. And my son joined the school basketball team. Everything went swimmingly.

When the big change came to go from 6th grade to 7th, we interviewed all the usual suspects of private high schools. They each had very different personalities, but early on my son decided on Harvard-Westlake. In my heart I believe an especially good letter of recommendation was sent from Village School and with his test scores and grades, the acceptance letter came from Harvard-Westlake and the next 6 years began.

I am a teacher and a mom. And like every other parent I want what's best for my child. I may have chosen the basic path, but it really was my child who called the shots. Maybe we can help, maybe we can nudge, but we can't control. Things tend to work out the way they are supposed to. Trust your instincts. Trust your child.

Janis Adams has raised and educated 3 children who have attended some of the top schools in the country, including [Village School](#), Harvard-Westlake, Loyola High School, Harvard University, UCLA, UC Berkeley, Harvard Kennedy School and University San Diego Law School. She is on the docent council at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the owner of Academic-Achievers Tutoring, www.academic-achievers.com. You can contact her with questions at Janis@academic-achievers.com

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