

Guest Blogger Jenny: Interviews and Student Visits: A Wealth of Opportunities to Make a Bad Impression

Description



It Rained On Anna's Visiting Day At Mirman

I don't need to tell you that private school interview and student visit season is upon us. If you're reading this blog, you're either about to go through it, have started to go through it, or went through it already and are grateful to have it over with.

Between the interviews and your child's visiting day or morning, there are countless ways you and yours could mess it up. These are tense, fidgety times, bringing to the forefront all your anxieties and insecurities. And your kid can sense it, too. He or she is being questioned and tested and judged, and every kid recognizes it.

But, does all this self-scrutiny really do you any good? I'm not sure, since, in my experience, the writing is often on the wall from moment one of the interview. For two years running, my ex and I tried to get Anna into St. James. Our reasons were mostly practical: she was at Third St., she'd have to switch before 6th grade to a private school, and St. James was close, good, and convenient. I know many families there, and one of my best friends put in a glowing recommendation. Yet, during both interviews, I felt that it was a perfunctory exercise. There was no enthusiasm reserved for us or Anna. We felt like numbers. And when she was denied acceptance twice, I really wasn't surprised.

Then there was John Thomas Dye. We really liked the school. Anna loved the school, idyllic country club that it is. The Admissions Director said outright that she really liked Anna, and told us up front that she would be a shoe in for Archer (not JTD) for 6th grade. This was polite code for "we have no room for her, and it was nice meeting you." While I have previously mentioned our being a divorced family as perhaps being part of the reason why Anna might have been a less desirable prospect, I have no way of proving such a claim. All I know is that it was a done deal from before we ever walked through the door for the interview. She was waitlisted, and we decided after review that entrance wasn't a possibility.

There was actually less chance of actively blowing it during the Mirman interview, mostly because the parents are only interviewed with the child present. Thus, it was up to Anna to make a good impression. Since she's a

pretty friendly, articulate child, it was easy for her to be charming and answer the ADâ€™s questions in an engaging fashion. That part went really well.

What didnâ€™t go as well was the morning Anna spent at Mirman. Annaâ€™s father dropped her off at 8:00, and by all reports the visit itself went well. Anna took a test and then spent time with a Room 3 class. I was the designated pick up parent. It was a severely stormy day. I mean, like sheets of rain and major gusts of wind. Streets were flooding. Iâ€™d only been up Mirman a couple of times at that point, and had only driven there once. The school is up Mulholland on the west side of the 405 freeway. I took Sunset to Sepulveda and headed up, managed to miss the turnoff at the Skirball Center to go over the 405, and ended up driving over the hill and into the Valley.

There was patchy cell service (iPhone, of course), and I kept trying to call the school, since it was clear I was going to be late. I could just picture Anna, abandoned in the front office, wilted and forgotten, with the staff thinking, â€œBad Mommy. Sheâ€™s a terrible flake who will not be an asset to the school.â€• I would ruin her chances of getting into private school, just because I didnâ€™t own a GPS and was an idiot.

I managed to call the school, sounding just as harassed and moronic as I was feeling. Mulholland literally looked like it was washing away as I drove up it. I found my way, finally, to the gates, parking in the wrong place and dashing through torrential rain. Anna looked relieved. I was overly apologetic. And the staff simply waved us out of there, probably thinking: â€œSometimes dumb parents have smart kids.â€•

I worried about this bad impression. When Anna was wait-listed, I wasnâ€™t surprised. What did surprise me is when she actually got into Mirman, despite my navigational challenges. She was off the wait-list and in from a fortuitous call in late June.

Since dealing with the school, I now know that it didnâ€™t care what I did. The school really only looks at the kid. Itâ€™s one place where they really donâ€™t care who your parents are. All that self-consciousness and scrutiny made no difference in the end, although it definitely raised my blood pressure.

My advice? Relax and do try to be yourselves. There are so many factors beyond your control. Thereâ€™s no point in freaking out and second guessing yourself, or making your kid crazy. Trust your instincts. These schools will send you signals if you choose to recognize them. And the only way to recognize them is to get out of your own head and pay attention.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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Date Created

January 10, 2011

Author

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