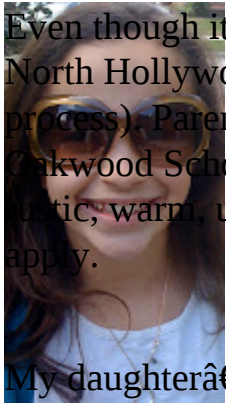


My Daughter's Visiting Day at Oakwood School

Description



Even though it was about five years ago, my daughter's visiting day at Oakwood School in North Hollywood is etched in my memory (just like all other aspects of the admissions process). Parents at our preschool, Montessori Shir-Hashirim in Hollywood, were abuzz about Oakwood School. They loved it. I toured the school and was completely captivated by its rustic, warm, unconventional feeling and its strong academics. We were definitely going to apply.

My daughter's visiting day was scheduled for 8 a.m. My husband had to work, so I had to take her by myself. We arrived at the campus with about 15 minutes to spare. Except that we went to the wrong campus (I went to the secondary school, located at a different campus). Back in the car, headed to the lower school. Totally stressed. Whew! Arrived just in time.

We were greeted by the head of the lower school and the director of admissions. They were very friendly and gracious. We were shown into a large, bright kindergarten classroom where prospective parents and their kids were milling about. Everyone, including me, was nervous. Enormous donuts and coffee were served.

My daughter, who at that point, generally needed time to warm up to new situations, immediately and unexpectedly, struck up a conversation with the kindergarten teacher. Suddenly, my daughter became "Chatty Cathy." She told the kindergarten teacher, "I love to read," and "I like your books." Then, my daughter picked up a book and began reading out loud. Other parents and kids stopped to look at her. She kept reading. And reading. And reading. It wasn't surprising that she could read since she was already five years old (she has a late July birthday). "Mom, look at this book." The teacher and admissions director both noticed. I could see they were impressed. But, this was just the beginning of an hour-long session without me in the room. It was far too early to be overly confident. I was standing in the corner, watching, but didn't say anything. Suddenly, it was time for the kids to leave the room and go to another room for activities, sans parents.

The parents were invited to join the head of the lower school for coffee as we waited for our kids. As I recall, this served as the parent interview. There wasn't a one-on-one parent interview at Oakwood. The head of the lower school talked a bit about Oakwood and its programs and answered questions. It was all very "casual." The head of the lower school is warm and friendly, an "earth mother" type. There were moms and dads there, many of whom, it seemed, already had older children at the school. A lot of the dads were in suits. My

outfit? Jeans, a blazer and a cute top with sandalsâ€¦not too trendy, but not sloppy either. Definitely not sloppy!

I couldnâ€™t get a read on any of the parents in the room. Entertainment industry? Corporate executives? Crunchy-granola? Rich hippie? Valley-types? Definitely not blue collar. I just wasnâ€™t sure about the parents. The parents there with older siblings were, not surprisingly, at ease with the head of school. They seemed very confident and kind of smug, like they had an advantage (which they did!). Everyone seemed like they were trying to impress the head of school. I felt obligated to ask a question. I asked how the school transitions kids to kindergarten. The head of school explained that most kids donâ€™t have problems starting kindergarten, its usually the parents. But, the school does have a summer picnic for new families, she told us. A few of the dads were obnoxious, but I knew they were prospective parents, not necessarily parents Iâ€™d have to deal with. Their questions were prefaced with phrases like, â€œI run a multi-million dollar companyâ€. Some of the moms seemed very stiff and aloof. But, what did I seem like to them? Probably the same.

I was just wondering how things were going in the other room where the kids were being observed doing activities. A few parents told everyone this was their second time applying after being wait-listed the previous year. Yikes!! No wonder everyone was nervous about getting in.

Finally, after about an hour, the kids were back and ready to go home. Off we went back home to wait for our letters and get ready for the next visiting day.

We didnâ€™t get any letters of recommendation for Oakwood because we didnâ€™t know anyone who could write one for us.

A few days later, our preschool director, Elena, pulled me aside during pick up to say, â€œOakwood likes your daughter.â€ I sent the requisite thank you notes and the â€œWe love your school letterâ€ to the admissions director. Fast-foward to March. My daughter was accepted to Oakwood. We declined the offer. Several families at our preschool were wait-listed. Oakwood is a wonderful, amazing school, but the distance from our house was a big drawback and we just felt The Willows was calling our name.

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