

John Adams Academy Senior 2024

An Academic and Philosophical Revival in Today's Youth

Attending public high school in my freshman and sophomore year taught me four key truths: (well, I take that back, as one truth I was taught is that there is no truth, and five "truths" can be called four "truths" because "truth" is merely a matter of how you look at things: everyone is correct!) in order to have an opinion on any matter you must be a minority; familial values mean nothing; classical literature is outdated and irrelevant; and most importantly: history is upsetting and controversial, and so we do not talk about the parts that we do not like, or the parts that offend people. With these things in mind, I left public high school after a fierce battle with mental health and spiritual decay, ready to fight any grain of "old-school" thinking that I found.

Now, I was enrolled on an online schooling curriculum in my junior year, and the sheer bigotry was appalling! Students who didn't belong to minorities were voicing their opinions, if you can believe it, and were allowed to debate (a fancy word for argue) with one another! We read classics that talked about upsetting themes and were taught that there is actual Truth; that we can be wrong about our ideas of the world.

I remember one of the first few weeks of class, when I was still unused to this whole idea of "classical study", when one of the most controversial (to my way of thinking) and outspoken students in the class, Elina Bergstrom, asked me a simple question about what I thought regarding a controversial matter. I don't recall what that question was, or what the discussion was about, but I distinctly remember my reaction: a sense of unease, of being watched. I hunched in on myself, and a goofy smile spread over my face as I remembered the correct things to say: "Oh, um, you know I don't really have an opinion, y'know? It's not my place to say, right?" I don't *really* have an opinion, question mark. It's not my place to say, question mark. Miss Bergstrom looked at me, half-frowned, half-smiled, and said, "Tabitha, it's okay to have an opinion." The next few minutes involved a struggle to come up with an idea that was my own, not one that was taught *at* me by the media. Now, I don't recall succeeding in coming up with an original argument that day, but this was the pivotal point in my academic revival.

I knew nothing of American History, it must be noted, save for the California Gold Rush and the Revolutionary War (thanks to school plays in my fourth and fifth grades). I especially knew nothing of the American Civil War, only that it was "offensive" and shouldn't be talked about. Well, in 11th Humanities we were assigned the historical novel, *The Killer Angels*, by Michael Shaara. At first, I regarded everything in the novel as good and bad, black and white, offensive and correct, but as we read on, I began to see something else: complication. Was I, a politically correct young person, starting to grow something akin to respect for my own country? I could never have believed it!

With each new fact, with each new piece to the puzzle of our history, I was beginning to thirst for more. I began to enjoy thinking about these complicated, diverse characters in our

nation's history, from Colonel Chamberlain to General Longstreet. In my sophomore year, I couldn't have told you the names of the two leading generals in the Civil War, nor could I have even said the names of the two armies themselves. I hadn't known the real cause for what had started the war, and I couldn't have known how our country is still impacted by its outcome.

Not only did the Humanities courses begin to chip away at my sheltered exterior, but Political Philosophy especially was about to shine light into my cave of shadows. For the first time in my life, I began to read Plato and Aristotle, and I was shown, through reason and open conversation, *how we can know* that there is truth. Truth with a capital "T" as I was told, and even in Physics I was shown the differences between the laws of reality and things we can only assume are so.

Now, I had grown up a Christian, and certainly was a Christian when I first started John Adams, but now I saw clearly how logic and reason weren't a denial of God's Goodness, but in fact are the tools we have been given to grow closer to Him. So, I can say with certainty (which goes to show how far I have come in just two years) that John Adams Academy has been an integral part of my walk with Christ, and though it isn't a religious school, it has taught logic and reason that I was able to utilize to be certain of His awesome power and love.

At John Adams, I have learned how to have a conversation with someone that holds different views than mine, and that the purpose of debate isn't to prove that you yourself are right, but to prove what *Is* right.

At John Adams, I have developed a deep appreciation for my country, and for all I have taken for granted. No longer do I find our country's history limited to its faults, but now I see the beauty of its ideals, and how our country is one not founded on national identity nor heritage, but the natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Perhaps Colonel Chamberlain in *The Killer Angels* can put it better than I: *"If you look at history, you'll see men fight for pay, or women, or some other kind of loot. They fight for land, or because a king makes them, or just because they like killing. But we're here for something new. I don't... this hasn't happened much in the history of the world. We're an army going to set other men free. [...] This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man must bow. No man born to royalty. Here we judge by what you do, not by what your father was. Here you can be something. Here's a place to build a home. It isn't the land — there's always more land. It's the idea that we all have value, you and me, we're worth something more than the dirt. I never saw dirt I'd die for, but I'm not asking you to come join us and fight for dirt. What we're all fighting for, in the end, is each other."*

At John Adams Academy, I was able to blossom into a person quite different than my former self. Through rigorous work and academic challenges, I have gained the concepts of critical thinking, utilized the ability to have insightful conversation, seen the beauty of a country formed on the ideas of the Enlightenment Era, and been given the tools to find Truth in this relativistic, propagandized, post-modern world that we walk on.

As I venture into college to study science in a very progressive, nihilist section of the Bay Area, it is my hope that this Truly incredible education I have received at John Adams Academy

will help others like me come to find appreciation for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, and to understand humanity's reliance on these ideas. I know too, for a fact, that I will never forget what I have learned here, and it is the Absolute Truth that my life philosophy has been changed for the better because of this school.

I only hope that more and more young people like I will be able to learn all of what I have these mere two years at John Adams, and I have all these wonderful mentors and role models that have helped me in my academic revival to thank for it.

Thank you, John Adams Academy, for teaching me why I should have appreciation for my national heritage, how to strive for public and private virtue, to foster a passion for mentors and classics, and how to have an abundance mentality. Thank you, John Adams Academy, and all my mentors, for modeling what you teach, and for giving me the resources to hone in my creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. Thank you also for showing me how to practice self-governance, personal responsibility, and accountability. All these core values have made me a better person, and thanks to them I know that I will always be striving for excellence.