



*"Love always requires courage and involves risk."*

*-M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled*

I've thought about courage and "The Road Less Traveled" quite a bit in the past year. I suspect that as prospective parents considering a new school for your daughter, you might also be thinking about love, courage, and risk.

My wife and I are active in the business community in Albany, NY not far from Emma Willard. Until last spring, both of our daughters had been happily attending excellent public schools and appeared to be on track to head to some of the best colleges in the country.

Denise and I were both products of public schools. Neither of Denise's parents had a college education, yet they had the vision to know that for their three children there were options that stretched past their own personal experiences. Their act of courage was to save their money and encourage their children to attend college. In fact, Denise was the first in her family to attend college and once again the first in her family to get an advanced degree when she graduated from Albany Law School. Being successful products of public school education ourselves, we never considered a private school education as an option.

Why should we? Our children were achievers and we had our perception that private school education was an option to be reserved for pampered, troubled or spoiled children of wealthy families. This was our world view until, for business reasons, Denise had occasion to visit the Emma Willard campus last spring. We began to question whether there was a better opportunity for our girls.

Why did we ultimately disrupt Kathryn's path to introduce the unknown factor of a new environment? Because going to a good college does not necessarily mean a child will become the best person they can be! Emma Willard has given Kathryn the gift to explore the person she aspires to be without the peer pressure constraints that might limit girls in the public school setting. Kathryn will still be able to choose from some of the best colleges in the country. But what she is learning at Emma will last throughout college and beyond.

Learning in the single sex environment has proven to be an even better alternative for our daughter given that every leadership role within Emma Willard must be filled by a female. This dynamic cannot be replicated in the public school and most private school environments. Given our society's natural tendency to push our sons in leadership roles and our daughters toward more supportive functions, the advantage of a single- sex learning environment seems clear, especially for females.

The most striking benefit of an education at Emma Willard comes from the learning that takes place in a truly multi-cultural environment. This year, Emma Willard enrolls students from 35 nations and 25 states across America. We are placing the greatest challenges of our society into our children's hands to be dealt with once we are no longer able. Many of these challenges stem from situations outside the borders of the United States and it is equally likely that solutions might be found through brain power or resources outside of our country. Emma Willard School brings a global viewpoint to my daughter's learning environment in a way that is just not possible via the public schools or other private schools that focus their recruitment efforts locally or where girls' voices are stifled under social pressures.

This global community, coupled with Emma Willard's alumnae and parent network, has given Emma Willard the strength to sustain their social compact for generations to come and provide my daughter with an uncommon network of supporters that will serve her well in whatever field she chooses to pursue.

Denise and I recently had the pleasure of joining our first Parent Days in the first semester. Emma Willard does this exercise a little differently than the public school Kathryn previously attended. We each took the day off from our jobs and followed Kathryn around from class to class. We watched as the girls heartily attacked a real world problem using pre-calculus skills. We witnessed advanced chemistry experiments and a 30-minute round table discussion about a novel that was conducted entirely in Spanish.

But the highlight for us was observing an unusually enthusiastic discussion that 8 to 10 girls were having with their English teacher about a passage in The Scarlett Letter. Here I witnessed all the girls, both forceful extroverts and thoughtful introverts, respectfully state their point of view in what was reminiscent of a boardroom type setting. It was at a certain point during this discussion that I glanced over to my wife. 19 years of marriage told me by the expression on her face that we were on the same page. Wow!

Kudos to Kathryn for courageously leading us down her road less traveled and making the most of her opportunities. And kudos to us for making the best investment of our lives!

Onward,

Steve Gonick P'16