



Freedom Mountain Academy

Work • Study • Adventure

Greetings from the Appalachians,

Choosing a school for your son or daughter is a challenging responsibility, and we understand that. In our communication with you, we seek to provide all the information necessary to make this decision, and along the way reassure you that a year at Freedom Mountain Academy will be an unforgettable experience for your child.

Nothing we can tell you is as important as what other parents and former students can tell you. As you consider Freedom Mountain Academy for the fall, take a moment to read the words of parents who have sent their children to our school. Take a moment to read the words of graduates who left behind a letter for the student who will move into the room they have called their own for the year. Their experiences are the ones that matter most to us and to you.

Of course you have questions. We have answers. We can tell you about the academics. We can tell you about the culture, and the structure. We can tell you about the farm, and the mountaineering. We can answer any and all logistical questions. We can explain how each student progresses through our various levels, achieving success through behavioral change.

What we can't tell you is what it's like to be a parent of a student who has graduated from Freedom Mountain Academy, and we can't tell you what it's like to be a student. Only they can do that.

Here are a few letters we have received, and an additional list of parents who are willing to talk with you about their experiences with Freedom Mountain Academy. We encourage you to make use of this list as you work to make this vital decision.

We are eager to speak with you and answer any questions you may still have, so please call us or email us anytime.

Sincerely,
Kevin, Patricia, Margaret, Mike and Dan
Freedom Mountain Academy Staff
(423) 727-4905
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June 26, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

I must write you a line this morning because something very important has happened. My son has taken one of the supreme steps in his own education. He has learned that control of his surroundings comes after control of his own soul, and the things that influence him and leave impressions on him are his to determine.

To you, the future parent of Freedom Mountain Academy, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on this adventure you are considering for both you and your young person.

In trying to decide what to say to prospective parents or to parents who have their offspring in FMA already, I went through a litany of thoughts: I could tell you about what I went through, or I could tell you about my emotional roller coaster, I could tell you about our son and his academic problems, or I could tell you how much we love our young person, or well, you get the idea. But, I think my focus needs to be on the most salient point.

During the time at FMA, the students learn the meaning of words from their Greek and Latin roots; they learn the prefixes, root, and suffixes. In this raw and earthy way, students learn the definition of a friend and they learn this in the practical sense, too. There is no friendship more sacred than that between a student and teacher. These teachers love these kids. There is no doubt in my mind that there is a bond of friendship between student and teacher at FMA that cannot be duplicated anywhere else. This friendship is a fire. These folks teach how to start a fire (literally and figuratively.) As soon as a fire is started with flint and steel there is a spark. They take the punk (the powdery dry material from the insides of a fallen log) and set it afire in a real and lasting way. This spark of realization will put a flame into the tinderbox of these scholars' bellies. They see the good qualities in each and every scholar. They hold in their hands this fire starter, this flint and steel, or hot coal. They help these kids handle the hot coal of life, not get burned, and start their own fires with finesse and poised assurance. When these young people can start their own fires effectively and efficiently, they let them see for themselves what power and fortitude lies within them. As spoken so movingly by Mr. Kevin, "This is a process." This process is poured out of the teachers for the love of the student and love of learning. In the process of heat radiating from this fire, ultimate enduring friends are created and fashioned, and these contented generous teachers get the joy, delight, and satisfaction of watching this small fire burn to a full flame.

The team at FMA has been endeared to our hearts. We will be forever grateful for the valued friendships and marvelous authentic bond we have forged, in the fires, with the staff. We will also be thankful for the school year that was spent in poetry, writing, reading, learning to wordsmith, growing in self, and growing in life. I welcome your calls or inquiry.

Sincerely,

Debi A. Church
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June 26, 2010

Dear Prospective Freedom Mountain Academy (FMA) Family,

FMA came recommended to us by a well regarded Educational Consultant from Washington, D.C. Originally recommended for our son, we ended up sending our daughter, because she was being plagued by shattering adversity from her peer group, i.e. mean girls. We drove our daughter to visit FMA three weeks into the start of their school year; she made the choice to attend based on that first visit.

She was the youngest of kids at FMA, but within weeks she was writing about feeling like she was a part of a large functional family. Her letters, phone calls, and pictures were all very positive from the first week and remained so for the full year.

FMA provides its students with a magical mix of structure balanced with personal choice, physical challenge balanced with sufficient wood lore to flourish in adversity, and finally a solid classical education. FMA has matured our daughter beyond her years. She came to the school an emotionally devastated thirteen-year-old girl and came back to us a mature young woman. We recommend FMA for your child with enthusiasm. The Cullinane's are a remarkable family that offers a learning experience that is unique and much more valuable than it first may appear. It is a chance for your child to get grounded on a firm foundation of accepting responsibilities and facing challenges, while learning the fundamentals of a classic education. This program showed our daughter that she could face challenges and achieve success that would be impossible before her amazing year at FMA.

We would gladly answer any question you may have and share more of our enthusiasm for FMA with you.

Sincerely,

Bernal and Julia Allen
Bernal.allen@comcast.net

July 8, 2010

Dear Prospective Parent:

Having stood in your shoes almost a year ago, I can remember feeling overwhelmingly worried and concerned about whether FMA was the right choice for my son. Our concern for Joseph was borne out of a few sad events in his life. Our very bright and happy son had turned inward, sullen and withdrawn. He pulled back from our otherwise close knit family. We felt that some intervention of some sort was needed. We had learned of FMA though a friend of a friend about a month before we even knew we would need it... but was it right for us?

Through a series of calls with the FMA family, Ms. Patricia and her daughter, Ms. Margaret, we were able seriously consider this as a choice of school for Joseph. They both were very generous with the phone time (many, many calls from me and my husband) and the advice. They were able to specifically address our fears and concerns and offer a safe environment for Joseph to find peace for himself. We struggled with the question of whether he could stay home and seek therapy and continue life as usual or were going away the right choice.

Now I can look back and see that FMA was really the only choice for Joseph. Staying home with us and in his current environment would not have given him the place and time to clear his head. He really needed an environment free of distractions to wipe the slate clean and see himself for who he really was... on his own.

Looking back, it was not an easy choice for us. We struggled with guilt of “sending him away”, the concern of what others (family and friends) would think and if FMA was even a safe and loving place for him. I am happy to say that the leap of faith we took was the right one. FMA is a firm, safe and loving place and I can say that now with complete certainty.

The process was not easy in the beginning. Though Jos chose to go to the school, he really struggled the first several weeks there. He wrote many a letter asking to come home, swearing to change and even threatened to run away. We wanted to rescue him... but stood firm and told him he needed to stick it out. He struggled with being held accountable and missed us and his electronics (music especially). By the holidays, he had turned a corner. He had found a rhythm, a love for the work, a fellowship with other students. He became responsible for himself.

On the last day of school, after graduation, we stood on the deck looking out at the mountains and he did not want to leave. Imagine! So, if I were to boil it down to the one big thing that changed for Joseph (and there were many!) it was a realization that he had the power in his life to create his own outcome. Not his parents, his friends, his circumstances. This seemed to free him in a powerful way. I wish you faith, courage and strength.

Sincerely,

Starr Sariego

May 17, 2009

I am happy to share with you our feelings regarding Freedom Mountain Academy. It was a life changing experience for our daughter.

Our daughter, Allison, was having performance and attitude issues with regard to school. Despite a previously excellent academic, athletic and attendance record, her grades fell precipitously, and she refused to attend school. She no longer engaged in her previous pursuits of sports and music. Where she had previously been upbeat, energetic, and a leader, she became disinterested in nearly everything. We agreed that she needed a new start to ensure a successful completion of high school.

Allie's research led her to the FMA website. She was enthusiastic about the integration of study, adventure and the opportunity to work in a farm environment. I was skeptical, but, following a visit to the school, agreed that it would be positive for her.

Initially, I think it was difficult for Allie. I think she was unprepared for the effects of isolation from family and friends. Having adjusted, however, she thrived at FMA. She began to think ahead, anticipate consequences and take responsibility for her actions. She once again became cheerful, determined and energetic. Most important, however, she regained an appreciation and respect for herself and others.

Academically, too, the change was significant. At FMA, Allie pursued the core curriculum as well as online, independent study courses. She prepared for the SAT with enthusiasm. In short, she regained her drive with regard to academic pursuits. She stayed for a second year at FMA as a student helper, completed her high school studies and earned her diploma.

Allison applied to a number of colleges, and accepted a full academic scholarship to Virginia Intermont College, where she is currently a freshman.

None of the previous narrative describes the atmosphere that made Allie's transformation possible. I believe that the success of FMA is in the creation of a family atmosphere that combines love, warmth, high expectations, discipline and responsibility. This atmosphere allows the students to see themselves as critical to the successful functioning of the school. They come to realize their performance affects not only themselves, but all of those around them. They learn they can place great physical and psychological demands on themselves through labor and adventure, and successfully meet challenges they might have found too daunting to otherwise attempt.

Allie counts the Cullinanes as her "second family" and is in frequent contact with them. For my part, I am fortunate to count the Cullinanes as my friends.

Should you have any questions, or require further information, please do not hesitate to call me at (610) 609 1487.

Cordially,
Julie Brierly Manning

The next two letters were written by students who graduated in June, and will be awaiting the student who will arrive in September to take up residence in the room vacated by the FMA-X graduate. (They signed their letter with their “Trail Name” which is given to those lucky souls who spend some time trekking on the Appalachian Trail.)

May 2010

Dear Roomie,

I give my room to you. I’ve given it up to move. In this room, I have laughed; I’ve cried; I’ve done my work.

And now this beautiful room is yours. I know tonight you don’t know how you will ever survive this wacky school. You do not know how to chop wood or light the lamp. It’s easy. You may have been sent by your parents, unwilling to go at first. Or maybe you are like me and you wanted to come. It was the best decision of my life. Just one tip – have an open mind. You will love going on expeditions like I did. Waking up at 4:30 a.m. is not so bad.

Having friends for the first time in your life – feeling relieved at being wrong about something your life seemed to revolve around – learning etymology is wonderful. This may seem like the phoniest letter you have ever read, but it’s from my heart.

You may pick up an amazing book and it may change you. You will leave behind habits you hate so much. You will borrow ideas on life, virtue, and people. You will leave lacking ignorance. You will leave as an adult, confident, and with a plan.

Yeah, you might miss your family and friends, but I assure you they are not gone forever.

Freedom Mountain Academy changed me – the unchangeable. I shall say one more thing – go in with an open mind and you will find family, the future at your fingertips, and yourself. It will be worth it, my friend. It will be worth it.

Love,

Hope A.
Card Trick

P.S. Ask Mr. Dan to show you my card trick.

May 2010

Dear Future Person,

I know that when you first get here you won't like it, and I'm not telling you to believe it gets better, but it does. If you make it the nine months and challenge yourself, I guarantee that you will leave here stronger, not only physically, but also with the mental strength to pursue whatever you want.

- One thing I picked up: Some of the best friends I will ever have.
- One thing I gave away: My strength and hard work during work chores.
- One thing I left behind: This letter to you, my friend, and a little child that was inside of me who wanted to destroy me.
- One thing I want to say: Live all the days of your life.
- One thing I borrowed: The knowledge of others to start my journey.
- One thing I would take back: Not doing my homework at the beginning, because I would have enjoyed myself more in my short stay here.
- One thing I came to love: My friends, my inner self, and my spirit.
- One thing I lack: The ability to now say, "It's just good enough."

So enjoy yourself and have a blast, because I guarantee by the time you get where I am, you'll love it too. I don't know you, but I'm your friend when you think you don't have one. Oh, and when you are on expedition and you're hiking through five feet of snow, don't get down because you have good food and a warm shower when you return. You will get a trail name for your actions – mine was Mountain Mover because I carried a rock (40 lb) from Highway 58 to Saunders Shelter then back to FMA because it was warm from the fire. Ha! That does sound crazy. Don't ever sit on the side of the trail and die.

Your friend in Australia,

Cree D.
Mountain Mover

Excerpts of letters from parents and students.

“I have never had a better relationship with Jessie. We are communicating on a completely different level. She has more resilience and credits her hiking experience for the confidence she now can draw upon. She still refuses to admit she liked the experiences, but in moments of clarity, she acknowledges how they shoed her she could do more than she ever thought she could.”

—Liz Huber, Parent, FMA9

“I don’t regret any of it. In fact, I would do it over if I could. Even the tough times, hauling up a mountain and sleeping in the cold, all of it, I cherish. My time at FMA never leaves my thoughts. It has impacted me so much. I don’t know who or where I’d be if I hadn’t shared that time with all of you.”

—Sofia Candel, Student, FMA 8

“I want to thank you for all your kindness to Garrett. You have given him a new lease on life.”

—Linda Homan, Grandparent, FMA 8

“Thank you for all the hard work you and your staff are doing to give Chandler a better chance in life. I enjoyed her so much during Spring Break. She was such a joy to be around.”

—Renate Mathews, Grandparent, FMA 9

“We certainly want to thank you for he many opportunities you shared with Jeremy. He certainly obtained knowledge at FMA far beyond what he would have in a conventional school.”

—Camille Williams, Parent, FMA8

“We had really tried everything we could think of to motivate Sarah. I always knew she was bored and needed something more stimulating than what the public schools could offer. You all are giving her a great gift. She’s already more disciplined and self-reliant. I’m sure she’s learning a great deal about herself that she would have a hard time putting into words.”

—Carol Geiger, Parent, FMA 4

“Kendra has been home for over a week now, and the change is pronounced. She has grown so much during her time with you. I feel like she has become the best version of herself. Its really a pleasure to be around her.

—Patrick Morgan, Parent, FMA 7

“This was all meant to be indeed, and its worth more than you can ever imagine to us. Thank you for saving my daughter’s future. She was on her way to self-destruction, and now I feel like she has the future she so deserves; to be happy, fulfilled, and to make the right choices.”

—Wendy Herranen, Parent, FMA 9

“I still remember my tears, my trepidation, my frustration, and my sadness at not being able to help Matthew help himself. He is a joy to have home with us. He is maturing nicely, his grades are much better, and he has more conviction. To see him thinking and to see his ability to reason

and apply himself is good. The land, the family, the climate, and the expectations from FMA have helped mold him into a fine young man.”

—June Postal, Parent, FMA 6

“Javier is an absolute delight. He is definitely on the right path and much thanks goes to you all at FMA. I think the absolute biggest thing is that he has let go of his anger. I truly believe he let it all go up in the mountains. I never doubted your program once, or that Javier would graduate and succeed. We are so thankful that God placed you in our paths, and I know that Javier will be forever grateful and endeared to you all.”

—Elizabeth Barrera, Parent, FMA 6

“I am so happy to go see my family, but to leave the peaceful beauty of this place is almost hard to bear. This whole place is filled with a different kind of love that surges with a passion to bring life back into people. I am so happy to have gone through this. I have made a love-line family I never expected to get. I want you to know it has made a huge difference in my life.”

—Katy Keenan, Student, FMA 9

“I don’t think a day has gone by that I have not thought of you and the gift you gave our family. I’m guessing its no surprise to you, because you recognized so much of the good in him, that Russell has blossomed into a happy, confident person. He is empowered and has a confidence and self-esteem we haven’t seen since he was tiny. So, thank you from the bottom of my heart. My tears have been flowing since I started typing; tears of old pain and current happiness combine in the deepest feeling of gratitude a person can have.”

—Linda Belleville, Parent, FMA 5

In addition to the endorsements provided here, the parents listed below, whose sons or daughters have attended FMA, have offered to share their experiences with you and answer any questions you might have.

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