

COLLEGE AFTER HOMESCHOOLING

By Mary Jo Larson

When you have invested your own life, heart, and soul into husbanding a love of learning and life in your children through homeschooling, where can you turn when they are ready for college? Who could you possibly entrust with your children's future? We struggled with this question when our son Jordan was ready for college. Searching for a program that was demanding and high engagement, we traveled across the country. Where was the college equivalent of, the next academic step up from, a high caliber homeschool experience? We were just about to surrender to "reality" and accept the "inherent" limitations of higher institutions of learning when we stumbled across our answer: Quest University Canada.

I discovered Quest while reading the New York Times Magazine in January of 2012. Jordan had finally finished all his college applications and essays and was glad to be done with his part of the process. But as I read, I ventured: "Jordan, we may want to check out one more college." Groaning, he listened to what the article had to say. We agreed it was worth investigating. After we reviewed everything available online, our excitement grew and Jordan decided to apply.

Jordan's Quest application turned his energies into high gear. He hadn't worked that hard, or had as much fun, on all his other applications combined. I thought, "If even the application can so motivate and engage him, something good is happening here."

We visited Quest in the spring, for the admitted students weekend. His Dad and I accompanied him because, if he decided to go that far away, we wanted to be committed too. Quest is in British Columbia, and we live in Detroit, Michigan. We expected we would discover all of the school's shortcomings during our visit; it couldn't possibly be as idyllic as it looked. Instead we all came away more inspired and excited - and certain that Quest was right for Jordan.

What makes Quest so special? It is:

- **Academically rigorous.** Every class has 20 or fewer students and is taught as an interactive seminar. No lectures. In a seminar class of twenty, no one can hide. As one student recently explained, "The least popular person in the class is the one who comes unprepared." Everyone is expected to have read and thought about the material in advance. Deep understanding is required. For example, in one of Jordan's fall classes, the grading for in-class participation was explained as follows: C+ if you demonstrate you have read and understood the material; B if you connect the various readings; A if you connect the day's material to prior readings and your own ideas. In addition to the three hours of class each day, at least 5 hours of out-of-class work is expected. These hours include reading, writing, group work, labs, etc. I think Jordan would now say he has worked harder than that. Every student also must master both rhetoric and quantitative reasoning,

regardless of his or her area of study.

- **Taught in blocks.** Each student takes only one class at a time, which lasts approximately one month. Every class is an immersion experience, as it is the only class each student is taking. Each student still completes four classes each semester, but takes the classes serially rather than contemporaneously.
- **Experiential.** The block approach allows and invites a significant experiential component to the classes. Because all the students are on the same schedule, off-campus experiences are much easier to organize. For example, a hydrology class camped their way from the glaciers and ice melt, to the rivers, and to the ocean. A geology class took a trip to Hawaii to work for 10 days with the researchers studying Kilauea. An international development class traveled to Belize for the entire semester to work with NGOs. All of these classes bring with them the academics required to learn and understand in depth what they are seeing in real life.
- **Interdisciplinary.** Quest eschews the compartmentalization of academic subjects. It is founded on the belief that the future belongs to those who can work across boundaries.
- **Global.** About 25% of the student body is recruited from outside of North America, coming from over 35 countries on 6 continents. (Approximately 50% are Canadian and 25% U.S.) Quest believes that interaction across cultures is essential to today's education. Overseas experience is also woven into Quest's programs.
- **Connected to the natural world.** Quest is cradled among mountain peaks, adjacent to Garibaldi Provincial Park. While walking on campus, you can hear the rushing water of a nearby waterfall. Attending Quest without developing a perspective on our human place in the natural world would be nearly impossible. The pictures online and in pamphlets make the campus look impossibly beautiful. What a shock to arrive on campus to find the pictures don't do it justice. Photos can't come close to capturing the grandeur of the surroundings. And it's not just beautiful -- the student body connects to that beauty through many outdoor pursuits: mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding, surfing, kayaking, hiking, mountain and rock climbing, etc.

If you visit the Quest campus, you will also notice right away the difference between Quest students and other students. The Quest students are:

- **Highly engaged.** Quest outranks, by a substantial margin, all of the other participating colleges and universities in Canada and the U.S. in every category surveyed by the National Survey of Student Engagement. (NSSE) Quest was the only college we visited where we saw the shining eyes and excitement of young people on a learning binge that is so familiar to

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THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

By Austin Aoyagi

What is the inspiration for genuine, heartfelt music? Or alluring abstract artwork? Or an emotional, motivational speech? Although this may disappoint you, the answer is simple: life.

Since the moment you were born, you have slowly accumulated a vast array of life experiences. Over time, these life experiences have shaped you and have come to form the filter that you see the world through. It is this filter, your unique perspective of the world and the people and places in it, that influences your decisions and provides a way to handle new situations. And it is this filter that shapes an artist and provides inspiration.

When an artist creates a new work, he is trying to communicate an emotion, a personal experience, or a message to his potential audience. Where does he look for the source of his creativity? The enormous collection of information that he has stored over the course of his life. If he was a citizen that viewed the bombing of Dresden during World War II, he might be urged to spread a message of peace through his writing. Likewise, if he was a Native American, he might be inclined to paint pictures about the atrocities that have been committed against the Indians over the past five centuries, or about living in harmony with the Earth and its inhabitants.

Now, you might (hopefully) be thinking, “This is all very interesting and useful, but how can I use it to become more

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homeschooling parents. Nowhere else did the students talk so enthusiastically and without prompting about their academics.

- **Physically fit.** With the abundance of outdoor opportunities, most students are or become naturally active, developing their strength and coordination while they develop their brains. This mix results in explosive mental and physical growth. For a student like Jordan, who already loves snowboarding and bicycling, the rich activities available through Quest are the icing on the cake.

We were reluctant when we first read about Quest to send our son to a college that is so new and unknown. But after visiting, we felt that sending him to Quest was a statement of faith and hope in the human race, just like our decision to homeschool was 20 some years ago. Our choice is an affirmation of our confidence in the natural drive of human beings to learn, share, and grow, and to reach beyond boundaries – boundaries between academic areas, boundaries between peoples and the boundaries of what we believe may be possible.

P.S. Since I wrote this article, Jordan has finished his first semester at Quest and come home for Christmas break. We had wondered whether he would be different. The answer is yes and no. He has come back even more confidently himself. He had an intense and wonderful experience and cannot imagine being anywhere else.

creative?” Don’t worry, my dear reader, I was just about to explain how this revelation relates to you. Here are three ways that you can use this information to increase the flow of your creative juices (and improve your life):

Pay closer attention or The Three E’s (Emotions, experiences, and encounters). If life is the inspiration for all creative pursuits, as I have suggested, then tuning into your emotions, experiences, and encounters will provide endless possibilities for your next masterpiece.

Define yourself or The Two P’s (Personality and perspective). Do you want to let your experiences shape your personality and perspective, or do you want to take responsibility for your life and consciously create the person that you want to be? If you chose the former, then you are out of luck. However, if you chose the latter, then you will be able to develop your own personal style and incorporate your own interests into your work.

Test your comfort zone or The Three C’s (Comfort, consider, and change). When you step out of your comfort zone, you expand as a person, and it also happens to give you a wider range of experiences to draw from. Strange, huh? So, if you are stuck in a rut, you might want to consider writing in a different style or format, or composing in a different genre, or even something as simple as meeting someone new, or as terrifying as cliff diving or bungee jumping.

I am a first year senior at Clonlara. In the past, I have been published in “The (Un)Occupy Movement” (Allbook Books, 2011), an anthology about the Occupy movement and the overall need for a change to come in our society. Currently, I am recording my first album, “State of Discord”, which is about the emotions and experiences that one might encounter in depression, as well as the general disharmony that our society is in at the moment. If you want to listen to what I have recorded so far, you can click here: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ve9xfeh9ydxrsao/fwML0lbzFE> (did I mention that it’s free?).



“Snowman,” Zeena Biro, grade 11