

First PA Homeschooler Accepted at Harvard

from Howard Richman

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On December 16, 1997, Noah Snyder became the first PHAA (Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency) student accepted at Harvard. Other homeschoolers from Pennsylvania have been accepted at other Ivy League Schools, including Princeton, but Noah is the first, to our knowledge, to have been accepted by what is generally considered to be the most prestigious college in the country.

Seventeen-year-old Noah Snyder has always been homeschooled by his parents Chuck and Nancy Snyder. He lives with his parents and three younger homeschooled brothers within the city of York, PA. His parents are missionaries to the Deaf Community in York County and also do much freelance interpreting as well as interpreting for deaf pastors at conferences and on video tapes.

His college admissions saga began last April in his junior year when his parents took him on a college visiting trip to see which colleges would give him the opportunities he desired for advanced studies in math.

At each college they would drop in at the Admissions Office and attend a session about the college and its admissions process. During the question-and-answer time, Noah or his mother would always ask if there were special admissions procedures for homeschoolers. They were invariably told that the colleges admitted homeschoolers on a normal basis, but would look more closely at homeschoolers' test scores and references than they would at those of other students. This didn't bother Noah. He had always scored at top levels on the College Boards (SAT I & II) and Advanced Placement (AP) exams and he had very good references from his evaluator and from one of his professors at Franklin & Marshall College.

The most friendly of all of the colleges that Noah visited was the University of Chicago. The admissions people said that they "loved homeschoolers" because those who had been admitted were doing so well.

After the admissions presentation on the Harvard Campus, Noah and his family began a tour. Noah only made it half way through because, as the tour passed the math building, he kept seeing old friends coming out.

Noah had attended the Ross Young Scholars Program, an eight-week summer math program, after both his sophomore and junior years of high school. (For information write to Professor Arnold E. Ross, Dept. of Math, Ohio State University, 231 W 18th Ave, Columbus OH 43210.) Many of Noah's fellow-students or counselors from Ross were at Harvard.

The next day, Noah went with one of his friends from the Ross program to a Topology class. "Topology is one of those rigorous courses where you do silly things, but do them rigorously," Noah told me. "The teacher was proving that the only way to go around a circle was to do it clockwise or counter clockwise."

Noah came back from the visit knowing that he definitely liked Harvard. It was one of three schools that met his criteria for the college of his choice. The other two were Yale and the University of Chicago.

In October, Noah went ahead and filled out the Harvard application. He applied for early action which means that Harvard would let him know by mid-December if he were accepted. At Harvard early action is not binding on the student, but is binding on the University.

The application called for a standard college essay about himself. Noah explained who he was by focusing on the time that he had directed a York Teen Theater play, pointing out that making an original contribution was one of his goals in life.

In early December, Noah was interviewed by a local lawyer, an alumnus of Harvard. He was taken back into the lawyer's office and asked questions about why he was interested in Harvard and what other colleges he was applying to.

The lawyer asked Noah about his extra curricular activities and other aspects that set him apart from others. Noah told about his activities with theater, chess, and fencing, and the college math and science courses that he had taken though still in high school, and his Westinghouse Science Talent Search Project (Noah was a semi-finalist).

The lawyer asked him how he was able to accomplish so much and Noah mentioned the flexibility of homeschooling which had given him the opportunity to pursue so many of his interests.

At one point the lawyer asked "Do you have any learning disabilities?" Noah answered, "I don't have a learning disability but I have 12 of the 15 characteristics of ADD." The lawyer then said that he also had many of the characteristics of ADD and they had a friendly discussion about how ADD isn't always a bad thing.

Noah knew that he would find out if he were admitted to Harvard on Monday, December 16. That day he was scheduled to help take down the set for "Miracle on 34th Street," the latest show at the Dream Wrights Youth and Family Theater. Noah had just played the parts of Mr. Gimble and the Mouse King Float (a float in the parade). The set was a tough one to take down and Noah, part of the stage crew, needed to be working from 11:00 that morning to 9:30 that night.

Every hour, starting at noon, he called home asking his mother if she had yet received the letter from Harvard. She had promised not to open it until he called. The mail finally came at 4:30 and Nancy tried to keep herself busy so she could resist the urge to open the envelope. However, shaking the envelope a little, and peeking through the cellophane on the envelope, she could tell that it looked like an acceptance letter. Finally, when Noah called at 5:10, she opened the envelope and read him the letter. Noah was thrilled and excited and started right away telling everyone at the theater that he had just been accepted to Harvard. E-mail messages were flashed to his many friends the next day telling everyone the good news.

Ironically, Noah may not go to Harvard. He is expecting offers from Yale and the University of Chicago. If one of those two colleges offers him a better scholarship, he may yet go to one of them instead.

Noah and his family thank PA Homeschoolers, the York City School District, Martin Memorial Library, Franklin & Marshall College, all the homeschool heroes who plug away day by day, and first and foremost our heavenly Father. ❧