

# Josh's Letter to Families

“You are not fool's gold, shining only under a particular light. Whomever you become, whatever you make yourself into, that is who you always were.”

~ Tara Westover, *Educated*

“If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.”

~ Dr. Emmett Brown, *Back to the Future*

I'm not Bob, but I was pretty close. Chronically truant my junior year, suspended for parts of my senior year, I barely skidded past a 1000 on my SAT and almost failed to graduate high school. College was out of the picture.

This was a far cry from the visions I had as a child—visions of growing up to be a cardiologist or lawyer. I used to study medical dictionaries while watching E.R., put on my father's work jacket, and play pretend physician—diagnosing every obscure illness not known to man!

As a kid I loved learning. I hated school.

School was the bane of my existence. I was a decent enough student through elementary school and parts of middle school, but math was my Achilles heel.

I couldn't understand it and would become so frustrated with being obligated to learn it a certain way.

I would writhe in pain every time I had to do Math—swallowed whole by a ravenous insecurity. Instead of seeing it as an obstacle to overcome, I saw it as a tremendous handicap. I took it personally.

All the world's greatest geniuses were mathematical juggernauts.

And yet here I stood barely able to perform the simplest of calculations.

The only reasonable explanation was stupidity. I tried so hard to resist this conclusion but it was inescapable.

From here my perceptions of my abilities would only diminish.

A real-life  
classroom  
story that  
grounds  
our  
philosophy

Before I knew it, I was firmly settled into my role as Chief Insubordinator. I would openly challenge my teachers—as if to deflect attention from my academic weaknesses. If they were going to evaluate me as a dunce, I might as well give them proper reason to.

If I really tried, yet still failed...well, then, wouldn't the verdict on my intelligence be accurately rendered?

I used my sense of humor to disguise my inability to face my fears around math while my other grades also started to suffer.

Before I knew it, I was skipping school. My junior year I managed to miss close to 28 school days, fail multiple classes, and staple the remaining nail in the coffin that was my college education.

Senior year I needed to take multiple classes in both Math and English just to graduate. While my friends were yielding to the many ills of Senioritis (and having already gained acceptance to prestigious schools), I was working overtime just to simply say I made it through high school. They were all preparing themselves for the most important time of their lives.

I was barely whistling through the graveyard.



It all changed only a few years later when my mother-in-law confronted me—vehemently insisting I go to college. She looked me dead in the eye and said I was the smartest person she'd ever met and it would be a shame if I didn't go to school to pursue a higher education.

I had had this conversation before. With my own mother. And let me just point out that my mother *always* has told me I was capable and worthy of the very best. And I love her for that and always will. But, to some degree, mothers are *supposed* to tell their children this.

What made this conversation with my mother-in-law different was that I *believed* her. It was the seriousness with which she said it. The conviction and urgency in her tone. If *she* believed it, well, then, it must be true.

She taught me that the greatest gift you can give someone is to believe in them. She recognized my shine as something more than just fool's gold.

Whatever it was, I went on to enroll at UMass Boston where I graduated with honors. I made Dean's List just about every semester. I soared to new heights and discovered capabilities within I didn't realize existed.

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My favorite movie growing up was *Back to the Future*. A mad scientist perverting the laws of physics while riding in a time-machine with his recalcitrant sidekick? Sign me up. One of the most memorable lines in that movie is “if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything!”

It's great, sage advice. I would offer, however, a slight alteration to Dr. Emmett Brown's legendary maxim: “if you put your *belief* to it, you can accomplish anything.”

Students need to believe in the power they possess. And every child has a special power that he or she uniquely possesses. It's sitting there, illuminated in gold. Shining for all to see. Wildewood Education's mission is to help the student find it.

