October 15, 2018

Attention: Admission Department

I am writing this letter in reference to Isabella Parks, a senior at Freeport High School. Isabella was a student in both my Honors English 10 and Honors English 11 classes. This year, she still spends time in my room during her infrequent study halls, much to my joy.

Isabella was an absolutely wonderful student in my English classes. It was such fun to read her writing. She has an innate sense of the dramatic turn of phrase. While other students are content to fill out their papers with ‘this paper will now discuss’ sorts of phraseology, Isabella says powerful, surprising things. She wrote a research paper for me at the beginning of her junior year on the immigrant experience in America as seen through the eyes of the central character in Colm Toibin’s *Brooklyn*. Her paper ended as follows: “Eilis Lacy came to America as a soft-spoken, timid person, and she became a young woman who refused to be tormented by others….By the end of *Brooklyn*, Eilis belonged in a city that was once a dreadful and unwelcoming place. She belonged in Brooklyn, New York.”

After plowing through a stack of so-so analyses and half-expressed thoughts, reading that powerful final sentence made me want to stand up and cheer!

Perhaps it is Isabella’s deep immersion in other dramatic arenas that makes her able to pull off such writerly hat tricks. Isabella plays and sings, dances and acts--in our small community of Freeport, out into Pittsburgh, and even at the state level. She has spent years honing her various skills and in so many ways comes across as a true professional. She presents herself with a mature, ‘wise-beyond-her-years’ self-confidence, whether in the classroom or on the stage. In some ways, I suppose, that’s a learned behavior, but in watching how she handled herself in the face of the demanding expectations of my classroom for two years in a row, I can absolutely vouch for the fact that her self-confidence comes from putting in the time and the effort with an eye toward achieving excellence.

Isabella’s enthusiasm for all things artful and beautiful is a pleasure to behold. It’s thrilling to hear her talk about performing Leonard Bernstein music at Pittsburgh’s Heinz Hall. She has such sophisticated musical and literary taste. She waxes enthusiastic about artists most people her age have never even heard of.

Isabella also has a very warm heart. Every year I bring my autistic son to speak to my classes on the subject of living with a disability. He is a musician, and always performs for the students as well. On a few occasions, Isabella has been a good enough sport to step up and sing with along with him. He can be socially inappropriate and tough on others, but Isabella always handled these moments with extraordinary grace.

I can’t say enough about how much admiration I have for this young woman, and how much confidence I have in her future success. I give her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Van Cott

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