

June, 2006

The graduation speech of Valedictorian A. Reiss:

I do not know whether my experience at Karafin was anything like that of my fellow students. Nor can I give an unbiased idea of what the school meant to anyone, especially when it comes from my perspective alone. What I can do, however, is give you my personal story of Karafin, and allow you to judge from there.

Before Karafin , when I was in middle school, I loathed work, and hated my teachers. My weaknesses prevented me from obtaining a solid education as I could not work under mainstream settings. However, through research and interviews, I was able to find a place that could cater to my needs without a great sacrifice in education. So in eighth grade, I walked up to Karafin's doors for the first time as a student. Of course, I didn't actually walk through the doors until one of teachers arrived unlocked them for me, but you get the point.

It was from then on, that I knew I was in a place that was...special. My first year was a blast, as for the first time in two years I had been given the opportunity to really learn, and finally had something to say when somebody asked "how was school?" Not that I would actually respond with anything more than "fine," but it was good to know that if I wanted to I could. For the first time in a long time I was actually enjoying myself in school. In some ways I enjoyed being in school more than I enjoyed being at home.

Each year that followed became harder, challenging me more and more, as any good school do. Karafin, for me, at least, was that bridge between a strange world and a strange person. Had I not been at Karafin I almost doubt I would even be graduating, let alone standing in front of you giving a speech as valedictorian. I really owe it to the school's almost family-like closeness to bring me through these four years of high school.

It really felt good to know that I was in a place where the teachers did not react harshly on you for being strange, obnoxious, or just plain different. They were always concerned about your well-being, and supported you all the way. I would like to take this opportunity to commend all you teachers for never giving up on us and for your patience while teaching us. Your great... great... patience. I may actually miss some of you.

Basically, I enjoyed being in Karafin, and even with all my criticisms and jokes, I truly did enjoy myself. Karafin was a perfect fit for me. It was a place where I could finally learn without being destroyed and picked on by kids of any age because I was "different." There have been no labels here. Sure, there are the cool kids and the nerds, but there are no "stupid" kids, no "retards" or "freaks." We are all a little strange and that makes us equal, it is a common ground if you will. And I have Karafin to thank for that.

Now, as we take our first step away from this place where we have spent most of our teenage lives we must redefine ourselves as individuals. Perhaps, one day we will see each other again, and see just how successful we have become. I hope that everyone in this room brings great respect to themselves and their families. Now, all I have left to say is; good luck, and thanks for listening.