

## *A Letter from an ERA Graduate*

September 1, 2012

Dear Parents,

In December of 2011, my mom decided to enroll me in the program at Eagle Ranch Academy. I know that choosing to send your child to a treatment center is one of the most difficult things you'll ever have to do as a parent, so I'd like to do what I can to make the process somewhat easier. Hopefully, by hearing this from me directly, you'll further understand how ERA can transform your child's life for the better.

I was seventeen years old when I was sent to Eagle Ranch Academy. My mom, like many other parents of troubled teens, knew I was spiraling out of control. She feared for my safety on a daily basis, not knowing what kind of trouble I was going to get myself into. There were many nights she worried tirelessly, having no idea where I was or when I would come home. She watched as her beautiful, happy little girl turned into a sick, miserable person who had absolutely no sense of self-worth or appreciation for anything.

My downward spiral began at age thirteen, shortly after my parents' divorce. As I grew older, I became more and more volatile. Everything about my life was unstable. I fought with my mom constantly. I began experimenting with drugs & alcohol, which soon became a habit. My days lacked any kind of regimen; I hardly slept, I ate whenever I felt like it, I exercised infrequently. I found myself unable to hold a healthy relationship for long period of time. At seventeen, my life rapidly fell apart. I went to school sporadically and my grades were slipping. I was never home and I didn't care if I was worrying anyone. I was depressed, lonely, apathetic, selfish, impulsive, lost. I didn't realize how quickly my life was deteriorating and how severely I was impacting the people around me.

My mom began feeling hopeless when none of her efforts seemed to have any lasting effect on me. She hoped and prayed that somehow, I would pull through. By some immaculate miracle, my mom found the ERA website and began looking into the program. She was impressed with the information she gathered, but what really appealed to her about Eagle Ranch Academy was much more. There was an exuberant sense of security she felt from ERA that was without parallel to that of any of the other facilities she had researched. My mom found it effortless to place her trust in the process, even though she was unsure of what the outcome would be like. She had a feeling that Eagle Ranch Academy had the ability to save my life, and she was right.



Now, my world has changed completely. My mom and I have an excellent relationship, and mutual respect for each other. I am a high school graduate. I have been sober for nine months. I have lost over 50 lbs due to exercise and change in diet. I know how to form healthy relationships and have gained lifelong friends. I have learned positive coping skills, and know how to apply them in real-life situations. I am days away from graduating from Eagle Ranch Academy. More importantly than anything else; I am happy. I have forgiven myself for my mistakes, and I no longer let my past affect the person I want to become. I am confident, I am sincere, and I am driven. The best part of it all is that I did it myself; Eagle Ranch Academy was just there to guide me through the process.

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At the end of the program, students choose a service project to take on, which allows them to give back to the community in some way. Writing this letter is part of what I have chosen to do for my own service project, in the hopes that I can help you and your family in some way.

I can imagine that as a parent, you have many questions about the program, so I'll do my best to cover anything you might be wondering about:

Students at ERA abide by a weekly schedule, which incorporates structure and variety into the program. We have certain periods everyday, including: time to work on our packets and talk to staff members on a one-on-one basis, PE activities outside, and groups when we have the opportunity to express or talk about highlights of the day. There are other periods that we have various times throughout the week, such as: use of the Rec Room, free time to relax or socialize, time to do an activity as a family, and more. The schedule is reasonably balanced between structured time and leisure time, which helps establish an understanding of moderation.

Schooling may be a concern considering your son or daughter may have been doing poorly or avoiding school altogether. Your child will be able to receive school credits while at ERA by taking online courses. We have school for certain blocks in our daily schedule, but never for a long period of time. This makes it easier to find motivation and stay focused. Also, progressing in school is necessary in order to progress in the program, so kids use that as an incentive to move forward. There are many tutors available to help your child as well.



Because of the way your child is acting, you may be afraid that they will never forgive you for sending them away. In my observations, he or she will be angry for the first week or two of being at ERA. Once your child starts becoming acquainted with the program and realizes how greatly his or her life can improve, they will understand that being at ERA is an opportunity rather than a punishment.

Actually getting your child to Eagle Ranch Academy might be a struggle, but don't let that stop you from going through with the process. Bringing your child here on your own is the best method of transportation. If not, it is important you get your son or daughter here any way possible. Don't let this make you feel guilty. What matters in the end is that your child gets to Eagle Ranch Academy. Remember that this is what your child needs, and it's for the best.

Eagle Ranch Academy provides an extremely safe and comforting environment, which will help put your child at ease as he or she goes through the program. The staff members are caring and supportive; there is always someone available and willing to talk at any hour of the day or night. I have received constant help throughout my time at ERA, which is a journey I wouldn't have completed successfully on my own.

This process is healing for you just as much as it is for your child. The program at Eagle Ranch Academy incorporates parents by emphasizing the need for a healthy and stable home environment. You will keep in contact with your child's therapist, and he or she will be able to provide you with updates on your son or daughter's progress. Your child's therapist will also schedule weekly therapy sessions for you and your child, so you can have a first-hand experience of the changes he or she is making. Your child won't become a changed person overnight; don't let this discourage you at the beginning of the process.



Tess and Mom

Service Project 9/11/12



It wouldn't be possible for me to explain to you exactly what it is about this program that makes it work. For me, what helped the most was the change in lifestyle. I have found that my physical health and emotional health are directly related. Eating three scheduled meals, getting about nine hours of sleep every night and exercising daily all contributed to my overall happiness. This environment is ideal for finding and regulating the right balance of medications for your child, if you choose. My moods before were irrational and unpredictable; I now am much calmer and more stable. Because I have learned the importance of having a regular routine here, I am ready and willing to apply these skills to my life at home.

**If you're skeptical to believe in the powerful impact of this program, the proof is in my story.** On April 23, 2012, I turned eighteen years old. At that point, I had not yet graduated from high school. As a legal adult, I am able to sign myself out and leave if I chose to do so. Even after graduating from high school, I am still here, for no purpose other than to finish the program. I am an avid believer in the beauty of this process. I won't leave until my picture hangs among those of other graduates and my handprints rest on the wall, where they will remain forever. ERA changed me from a quitter to an achiever, a slacker to a leader, a skeptic to a believer. I recognize my life as something so beautiful and valuable, because I love who I am and the person I've become.

Sending your child to Eagle Ranch Academy will bring back the light in your son's eyes, the talents in your daughter's soul, and the peace in your family's home. The love and gratitude that your child will show you will impress you beyond belief. I hope you believe that these changes are possible for your child too.

Sincerely,

**Tess**

*ERA graduate October 19, 2012*



12/18/11  
(Date enrolled)

7/28/12  
(HS Grad)

10/19/12  
(ERA Program Grad)

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## Letter from Mother of Tess a Recent ERA Graduate

December 30, 2012

Dear Parents,

One year ago, I was where you might be at this moment - beside myself with fear and anxiety about my child. I was losing my daughter, and I did not know where to turn. She was on a path of self-destruction, spiraling downhill rapidly. I knew I had to do something to save her. That's when Eagle Ranch Academy entered the picture. I am so grateful that it did, because ERA saved my daughter's life.

I decided to write this letter for parents who might be considering sending a child to Eagle Ranch. I know how tough it is to make such a decision. The emotional and financial implications are enormous. **It takes great strength to turn your child over to people you barely know for such a long period of time. I thought it might help to hear my story.**

Let me start from the beginning. On April 23, 1994, I was given the precious gift of a beautiful, happy, smart, funny, dynamic, spirited baby girl named Tess. She was born right on her due date, which was also Shakespeare's birthday - just perfect for her English teacher mother! Tess was a joy to everyone who met her. She learned how to speak very early on and in no time was talking in full sentences, singing show tunes around the house and soaking up her surroundings with glee. I was aware of how fortunate I was to have this wonderful girl in my life.

Then, through no fault of her own, Tess' world fell apart when her father and I went through an ugly and painful divorce. This was very difficult on Tess and her younger brother. It happened just as Tess was entering adolescence, and it was then that she began to act out. First came the decline in grades and motivation to do well in school. I repeatedly heard from teachers: "Tess has so much potential, but..." **Then, she became belligerent towards all authority and disrespectful toward me. She started engaging in self-destructive, risky behaviors. She had severe emotional difficulties and did not seem to care about anything. She was clearly miserable and had very little self-worth.** I was worried that she would not even make it through high school. Even more significantly, I had serious concerns about her safety and well-being. I tried everything possible to help her, but nothing seemed to work.

I finally realized that more drastic measures needed to be taken. With trepidation, I began looking at residential treatment programs and stumbled upon Eagle Ranch Academy on the Internet. When I discovered that it was located in Utah, all the way on the other side of the



country from our hometown of Baltimore, Maryland, I was hesitant to even consider it. But, I was impressed by its unique, value-based approach, where students gradually work their way through the eight core values of Accountability, Honesty, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Integrity, Respect, Trust and Service. Most importantly, students are required to actually LIVE these values by incorporating them into their everyday lives, one value at a time. **This is very different from the behavior modification programs in most other facilities. The idea of Tess voluntarily making the choice to change based on these eight core values appealed to me.** Tess was 17years-old at the time, very close to adulthood, and it was essential that she make changes from the inside out if the program were to have any long-lasting effect.

Being a single mom on a teacher's salary, I had no idea how I could afford to send Tess away to a place like ERA, but once I contacted the admissions coordinator, things just fell into place. The ERA staff spent a great deal of time and energy helping me figure out how to make it all work. This allowed me to feel comfortable with such a monumental decision. **I had lots of questions, and every concern was treated with gentle respect.** This boded well, I thought, for the way my daughter would be treated.

When the time came to visit ERA and, ultimately, place Tess in the program, I felt confident that she would be in capable hands. Leaving her there on December 18, 2011 was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do, but **not once have I regretted my decision.** Every cent of the cost of her treatment was worth it.

My contact with Tess was limited at first; but little by little, I could see changes taking place in her. Through my weekly Skype sessions with her and her therapist, it became clear that Tess was determined to turn her life around. It was not easy for us to hash out the issues, but each session brought increased progress. **I discovered that I, too, needed to make some changes in order to help her and to make my own life more**



Tess - April, 2012

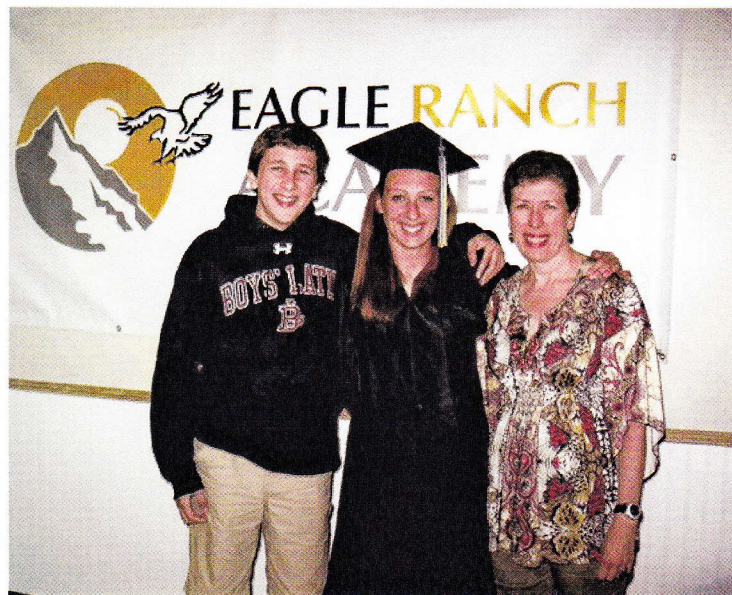
**manageable.** All of the years of trying to force her to change by nagging, threatening and arguing had never worked. I sought out support through ERA's parent seminars, Al-anon and Families Anonymous, where I learned how to detach with love and allow Tess to make her own choices.

In April 2012, I visited Tess at ERA and attended a parent workshop. When I saw her for the first time in four months, I was astounded at the change. She looked completely different, physically fit and healthy, and there was a glow about her that I had not seen for years. We had the opportunity to visit Zion National Park together, and I noted the beauty of my healing daughter against the stunning natural beauty of the canyons.



Turning Tess back over to ERA at the end of the visit was nowhere near as difficult as I thought it would be. I was eager to have her finish the program and come back to me healthy and whole.

In October 2011, Tess was ready to graduate from both high school and the ERA program. Her brother and I traveled to St. George to attend the family workshop and her graduation. It was one of the happiest days of my life! The ceremony was a joyful celebration which included the entire ERA community. One of the most moving moments for me was watching a slide show the staff had prepared. It began with the picture taken of Tess on the day of her arrival, and as it showed the many pictures taken of her during her stay, **I could see the gradual transformation of my daughter from a troubled teen into a confident, self-assured, happy, spirited and loving young woman.** I had my daughter back again.



A Happy Day for Our Family - 10/19/12

Now that Tess is back at home, I am fully aware of how fortunate it was that I happened upon ERA on the Internet when I was desperately looking for help. It was the perfect place to address Tess' needs. She even says so herself. For one of her final service projects, she wrote a letter to parents, touting the benefits of ERA from a student's point of view. I think it is beautifully-written, and I know it is sincere. My letter is designed to be a companion to hers -- the same story from a parent's perspective. Our testimonies bring the experience full circle.

Eagle Ranch Academy is a remarkable program, one that is respected by many in the local community. When I was out and about in St. George, people from random walks of life would tell me what an excellent choice I made in ERA - hotel staff, cab and shuttle drivers, restaurant



workers and others said it is the best place around. This endorsement speaks volumes. What mattered most to me, however, was input from the parents of students who had attended ERA. **I hope that my story provides you with some assurance that sending your child to ERA is a wise decision.** ERA is a program that works. It might be just what is needed to save your child and put him or her on a path to happiness and success.

I wish you the best of luck as you endeavor to help your child. My heart is with you as you make these tough decisions. If you decide to choose Eagle Ranch Academy, please know that your child will be in good hands.

Sincerely,

Beverly E.



Tess upon returning home from ERA