

Interview with David White

By Jacqui Dres

David is presently an attorney in Portland, Oregon specializing in the field of energy. David is a graduate of Harvard Law School.



Highland Hall Alum
David White
Class of '81

Tell me what sort of work are you currently doing in your law firm?

Right now I mostly work with energy companies, mainly companies that sell electricity and gas. These companies are very active these days in terms of renewable energy, such as solar, wind, and alternative ways of generating electricity. Our work involves helping them with their relationship with state, local and federal regulators.

How did your firm choose this line of work?

Law firms in general are reactive to what goes on in the business world. Ten years ago we were doing mostly telephone, cable and internet companies which were at the time very busy. In the last 5 years energy, and in particular alternative energy, has become much busier and so they're in need of help with regulators.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

I think it's pretty interesting to learn about new companies. When I started out 15 years ago I did a lot of work for airlines and so I met a lot of people in that industry and learned about solving their problems. Afterwards, I worked in the telecommunications industry and now, for the past five years, I've been working in energy. I think it's interesting that you're continually being challenged and you're constantly being exposed to new things.

Right now, it's very interesting doing energy work because it's in the news. You hear about sustainability and environmental impact. The sustainability issue coincides with our firm's personal beliefs, but it's also a reaction to the business world in terms of more and more businesses getting into that area.

So, can you tell me about your education at Highland Hall and why you think your parents chose Waldorf education?

I first attended a Waldorf school in the Washington D.C. and was part of the first class there. Then my father got a job in Los Angeles and so we moved and I started the 3rd grade at Highland Hall. We got started with Waldorf because my mom and dad were interested in artistic things and they really liked the Waldorf philosophy of education. That's what attracted them initially, but then they found that they very much enjoyed the community of families and teachers of the school.

Do you feel that your education challenged you academically?

I think it did. The most valuable thing I got out of the Waldorf education was the love and interest in learning that has continued throughout my life. The school did a great job at providing interesting things and challenges, but the most important for me was that they planted the seed for wanting to learn and being interested in new things, not just as we were in school, but as we went out into the world.

Do you recall any favorite teachers or subjects?

I had in high school literature classes that really challenged me. I can remember reading, though this may have become blacklisted, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. I just reread it recently and I was amazed at what was in it and that we had read it in high school.

What was great about Waldorf education was that we were exposed to a wider range of materials and subject matter than we would have been at a public school where we would have probably been given a bunch of worksheets.

Highland Hall Alumni Interview Continued

It's hard to point to a specific class as being my favorite, not because I can't remember the classes or teachers, but because I remember them all. We used to have great history classes with Noah Williams IV, and we had great science classes with his dad. There were many good math teachers as well. My class sponsor, Harry Schoffstall, was like a father figure to me, and he was both a great teacher and a great sponsor. In many ways I remember all of that and I have fond memories of those years.

After Highland Hall, when you went off to college, were you nervous being ready academically?

Yeah. Maybe it was specific to me, but I was particularly worried about being prepared and it did cause me a lot of anxiety. But the good part of the story is that when I got to college I was able to do just fine. So my worries actually weren't well founded.

What Highland Hall gave me was an enthusiasm and passion for learning and being creative. Those things are much more important to your success in college and beyond. So in the end, I think that Highland Hall did prepare me well for college, but I have to say I didn't feel that way when I was starting out.

As I recall there was a gap between the time you finished college and the time you started Harvard, what did you do in that period?

I went to graduate school at John Hopkins University in Baltimore and I was in the PhD program in philosophy there for about three years. At some point I realized that about the only thing you can do with a PhD in philosophy was to teach college and I decided that it really wasn't what I wanted to do for a living. So I looked at other professions and ended up working for two years as a paralegal at a law firm before I went to Harvard.

Are there any special experiences that you recall from your time at Highland Hall?

When I think about as a child growing up, the greatest thing about Highland Hall was that it was part of the fabric of our lives. The students, the teachers, and the parents were part of our community. It was a very loving and nurturing community to be part of and it was like an extended family.

Do you have any gifts or talents that you feel that you can attribute to your education at Highland Hall?

I wouldn't call it a talent per se, but one of the traits I can attribute to Highland Hall was that it encouraged and fostered a sense of tolerance, and being accepting of people's differences. What I remember was that there weren't a lot of cliques. I played a lot of sports, and so I had friends who did sports, but I also had friends who did art, and others who went on to be computer science majors. I think that Highland Hall fostered a very open and tolerant community and I still have a lot of that in me. I get a lot of joy and pleasure out of that because I get to interact and enjoy a lot of different things.

Would you recommend Highland Hall for someone looking for a private school?

I definitely would. I think I got a great education and preparation for life. I think the reservation that someone might have about how you are going to do on test scores, or if you're going to be ready for college, isn't well founded. What you get at Highland Hall, such as the love of learning and interest in life, is far more important as you look back.

Is there anything you'd like to say to our graduating seniors?

What I would say to them is that they shouldn't be unduly worried. As they get excited about graduating and start thinking about the future they should be confident that they can meet whatever challenges that await them and that they've been exceedingly well prepared for college and beyond.