



**Hill Talks from Hardwick is pleased to present  
An interview with Eagle Hill School parent, Eliza Gilsdorf.**

**Sue Cranford, Associate Director of Admission**

I'm here today with Eliza Gillsdorf, who is one of our Eagle Hill parents, and I'm so excited to be with her today. Eliza, welcome. It is great to have you on our podcast, and we are excited to hear about your experience at Eagle Hill. Why don't we start by just having you tell us a little bit about your family.

**Eliza Gilsdorf, Eagle Hill School Parent**

Well, hi Sue, and thank you for inviting me to participate with you in this. I'm really excited!

As you said, my name is Eliza Gilsdorf, and my husband and I, we currently live in northern Nevada, and our daughter Lucy has been going to Eagle Hill now for exactly two years.

**Sue Cranford**

Just to give a little bit of background and context, it is always interesting to hear a little bit about the journey prior to Eagle Hill and what led you to Eagle Hill because most families don't wake up and dream about sending their child to a specialized boarding school, especially across the country!

**Eliza Gilsdorf**

My daughter, Lucy, was diagnosed with a learning difference. She was diagnosed with Dyslexia fairly young, and so, her entire elementary and junior high years, we struggled to find the perfect school in our community.

I can't tell you how many schools Lucy tried, some with success, some with a lot of failure. Both of my parents actually attended boarding school. So, boarding school was offered to me, but it was not a choice that I wanted to pursue. I have two daughters, actually, but we're talking about my older daughter, Lucy. I have given the opportunity of boarding school to both of my daughters. And so, when Lucy was in middle school, 7th, 8th grade, I told her there is such a thing as boarding school.

And since the options in northern Nevada, where we are, aren't great for Dyslexia, would you like to pursue this as an option? And we can see what we can find. And we did. We are so lucky that we found Eagle Hill and it has been the most amazing experience ever for us.

### **Sue Cranford**

That gives us a good sense. And I would say that you are unique in so many ways, but definitely unique in the sense that you did have some experience with a boarding school and a little bit of comfort, actually, with the concept of boarding school. But, let me ask you, did your husband have an equal level of comfort with it? Or can you say anything about that because oftentimes it's not always equal.

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

It is not equal. My husband grew up thinking that only bad kids went to boarding school. You were shipped off to boarding school if you were a bad kid, a troublemaker, if you will. And so, I actually had to educate him on the positive aspects of what a boarding school could be, even though I had never attended one.

My mother, in particular, loved her boarding school experience, and so she always just raved about it and talked about it. So, I knew that even though I never attended one, there were so many positive attributes to attending a boarding school.

So, I had to educate my husband on it and make him be more comfortable with it. But I'll be honest, once you tour Eagle Hill, it's pretty amazing to think that you can send your kid to a school with the facilities, the structure, the staff, the teachers, everybody.

### **Sue Cranford**

Talk us through a little bit about life after 3:00. The things that Lucy has been able to get involved in. I know there are some things that Lucy has done here that you might not have known she was interested in.

Oftentimes, it's really clear and understandable how incredible the academic experience is here. It's the other piece. What is it that boarding piece going to give to my child?

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

Okay, so the activities wow! She is so busy. When she started Eagle Hill, she got interested in clubs. She did clubs from the very first get go. And the offerings of the clubs are really fantastic. Clubs, sports.

And this is the piece that has blown me away. Lucy enjoys sports, but she doesn't like to participate in sports per se. What she has learned is she likes to manage. So, actually, let me backtrack. The very first semester she started; she actually joined the wrestling team. And that was so monumental for her because she realized she actually didn't want to wrestle, but she learned that she actually loved the sport. And so, the following year, her sophomore year, she became the team manager.

And this has now shaped her. She absolutely loved being the team manager for the wrestling team because she had participated the year before. She actually understood the sport. But now, being a manager and being a leader, being in charge of helping set up, being in charge of keeping score, she loves everything about being the team manager.

And I had no idea. I was like, I'm sorry, what? You're a team manager of a boys' wrestling team. This is amazing! And this is one of her most favorite activities, and she's currently doing it right now. That has really shaped her. So, clubs, sports, you can participate, you can get jobs. She has helped run the snack shack. She has done a lot in the gym, in the school gym.

### **Sue Cranford**

I see Lucy up there a lot during the day, and I believe that she's helping to sort of manage the facility, in a way with our athletic director. We offer these internships at Eagle Hill both in theater management and in our athletic center in management, and Lucy has naturally kind of glided right into that role. Do you think that in your mind, could this possibly lead her when she goes to college?

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

Absolutely. Because of learning that she wanted to be a team manager, she's like, oh, well, maybe I should look into sports management. And there is a degree, there's a degree in sports management.

So, this decision, number one, trying wrestling, which didn't work, but yet it did work because she became the team manager, has now led to, oh, my gosh, I can actually do this as a potential career. So, this is leading our current college search right now. So, it is amazing!

The opportunities that kids are given when they go to a boarding school is they just get to try this, try that, try just dabbling in this, and there's no pressure. If you don't like it or if it doesn't work out, then let's try something else. That's the beauty of a boarding school. In the afternoon, all these opportunities are given to these kids that they can just try and keep trying and keep trying and keep trying until you find something that you love.

## **Sue Cranford**

So, now that we've talked a little bit about all the opportunities that are available to kids after school, let's circle back a little bit to the learning piece. Since I know that you are looking for a school to really help Lucy with her learning, specifically with her reading and other areas within her profile.

We are a diverse learning community here. We don't have just students with Dyslexia. And typically, a student with Dyslexia isn't just like the next student that's Dyslexic. Everyone is different and unique. So, can you talk a little bit about the support you think Lucy has received after 3:00, perhaps in the evenings within her academics, within her learning?

## **Eliza Gilsdorf**

Number one, I'd like to talk about the fact that every kid gets assigned an advisor. The advisors do a great job, and we are very lucky. We have an amazing advisor, and we have a connection with our advisor. And I feel like that's one of the most important things because, number one, the kid needs to have a connection with that advisor because they're there to help them.

They're there to help them if they have issues with any of their classes, if they have personal issues, that advisor is there. They are their confidants and cheerleaders, confidants, but also somebody to help guide them and support them. So, I think the advisor is such an important role at Eagle Hill.

It's not essentially academic, but Eagle Hill has something very different, in that they have natural dorm parents. And I think this person plays such a critical role, especially if you're worried about your kid not waking up on time. If you're worried about your kid not brushing their teeth. This person lives in the dorm with the kids, and they don't teach classes, that is their job. They are the dorm parent. They are there to support the kids.

Lucy can tell you so many wonderful things about her first two dorm parents. They were so instrumental. Especially, I think, that first year, having somebody who truly cares. As a parent, you can reach out to them, and they'll email you back. They'll call you. The communication is there for you to know that your kid is okay.

So, the fact that at Eagle Hill, they put in so many people in place to help you feel like you're not sending your kid off to some school, and they're going to be alone. No, they're supported in so many different ways.

There are so many different touch points. Advisor, like I mentioned, dorm parent, like I mentioned, your coaches, if your kids do a sport. My daughter loves the art room, so she is connected with the art teacher. There are so many touch points of people who care about your kids and support beyond just the academics.

I would actually like to just also quickly talk about another tool that Eagle Hill uses and excuse me if I don't say the right word. Your website portal is amazing! And I love it because you're able to log on, you're able to look at your child's schedule, what classes is she in right he or she in right now.

But I love the notes factor and I love the fact that you get notes. Obviously, it depends from kid to kid. When Lucy does something or maybe she's missing something, I'll get a little note, a little hi, I'm reaching out. It's a touch point. And it can be anybody in the community. It doesn't have to be the advisor. It doesn't have to be the dorm parent. It can be anybody in the community who can reach out and send you a little personalized note. You have another point of caring.

### **Sue Cranford**

And it's amazing because thousands of these notes are written every year. And what's really neat is I'm an advisor here. And so one of the things I do in the morning is I look at all the notes. I find my advisees to see if they have any notes. I read the note, I publish it, and it goes out to the parent and the student. So, the student is also included in the conversation.

And the other thing I like about the notes is that it's not, oh, we have a problem. It's like we had something come up, and we have a solution. Here's what we're going to do. And so, Lucy forgot her homework, so she's coming after school today. Not that Lucy would ever forget her homework, but as an example, she's coming back after school today to complete it. So, you make such a really good point.

And that kind of segues into maybe one of my last questions. I want to know how you feel as a parent. When your child is in a school community, and it's right in your backyard, you may feel that you can be really connected. I feel the parents at Eagle Hill are connected even if they live far away. How have you felt as a parent, as part of this community?

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

It's amazing and remarkable to me that I feel so incredibly connected to a community that is just under 3000 miles away from me. I feel so incredibly connected to Eagle Hill, and I live so far away. It truly blows me away just thinking about that and the fact that I love all of the events.

So, Eagle Hill has a fall event and a spring family weekend. I love attending them. It's like coming home. I get to see other parents, I get to see the faculty, I get to see you. I have made a connection with so many people at Eagle Hill. I absolutely love being a part of this community.

And I'm so grateful that we are at Eagle Hill because it is a welcoming, caring, supportive community, not only for your child, but as a parent, you feel welcomed. I can tell you about

our very first family weekend and it was the most amazing experience. I think that's what cemented it for my husband and I. Just realizing, wow, how special this community is.

Eagle Hill has blown us away.

### **Sue Cranford**

What was it about family weekend? We have two family weekends, one in the fall, one in the spring. Was it the kinds of events we had or the feeling of it? Or was there any one thing that you think was really important about that family weekend?

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

Matt and I are not East Coast people, we're West Coast people, and we come into a school that we don't know very well. We've sent our kid there now for at least a semester. But walking onto the campus, I can't tell you how many teachers, faculty who run clubs, who came up to Matt and I —because we're all wearing name tags—came up to Matt and I introduced themselves to us and told us how they know Lucy. What an impact she's made on the community so far.

It was the most welcoming weekend evening, the first evening, I will never forget it. And it was an amazing experience. And a really wonderful weekend to also meet other parents and get to know all of Lucy's teachers. It's very busy, but it's wonderful. So much school support. You go to games. Obviously, you have all your conferences, and then you have fun evening events. It's a great time.

### **Sue Cranford**

Well, I'm so happy, and I can't wait till the spring one that we're going to have so we can hang out together and have some fun. I am so glad that we had the chance to have this conversation. And I know that families really appreciate hearing your perspective. And I know that if families have questions, they will reach out to me. And I know that they can reach out to you. And there are many other parents that we have who are so eager to talk with our prospective families coming in.

So, is there anything else that is there anything you wanted to say, Eliza, that I didn't allow you to say during our time together?

### **Eliza Gilsdorf**

I really think we touched upon it, except all I will just reiterate is Eagle Hill is such a welcoming, supportive, caring, wonderful community. And I just hope that you enjoy your time at Eagle Hill because it's a wonderful place.