

July 29, 2006

Dear Lyman Ward Military School staff and faculty;

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the positive impact you have had on my family and in particular my son, Benjamin Gardner. We had tried everything to make him feel empowered in his own life, feel good about himself and want to excel. Nothing worked. He wasn't a "bad" kid, just directionless.

My son came to you as a confused, unmotivated and underachieving 13 yr old. He graduated after 4 years in your institution a strong, confident and motivated young man of 17 with goals and aspirations and the academic and leadership tools to meet them. He graduated 3rd in his class and was one of the most decorated cadets in your school. He learned self discipline and perseverance through your strict military and academic system and flourished in that system.

Each time he came home on leave, we noticed differences in his demeanor, his posture and his confidence. He started to take pride in himself, his surroundings and his accomplishments. He looked adults in the eye, stood taller and spoke clearly and with conviction. When we first sent him to LWMA, other parents' reactions were often "how could you send him so far away; wasn't there something else you could have done?" But when they met with Ben on each school leave, the main question was "what was the name of that school?"

Ben excelled academically and militarily due to his own strengths; strengths he was unaware he had until your system of discipline and accountability forced him to pick himself up by his boot straps and take charge of his own life. Your staff and teachers were always there to support and guide him on his path to success. It helped us here at home to visit the school and hear the teachers and administrators speak of him warmly. It felt like he had a family there who cared about him.

As I write this letter, we are preparing for another phase in Ben's life. He will be a freshman this fall at Virginia Military Institute, studying Civil Engineering. He was admitted early decision, the first cadet from Lyman Ward to do so. VMI is a rigorous school, nationally ranked and respected for its strict disciplinary system of graduating "citizen-soldiers". Ben did not choose the easiest path, he never has. He has chosen the path less traveled and thanks to Lyman Ward Military Academy; he has the tools and confidence to succeed on this path. So again we thank you, for giving Ben his life back, and giving us our son back.

Anne E. Chabot Biddeford, Maine