

Centralia College Grad Moves On to Harvard

By Luke Kilgore / The Blaze | Posted: Wednesday, August 20, 2014 2:19 pm



Lillian Albright

Lillian Albright says she is considering economics and computer science as her focus at Harvard, but is keeping an open mind.

Last year, 34,295 hopefuls applied to Harvard University — the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and arguably the most notable of the exclusive Ivy League schools. Among the pool of applicants, only 2,048 applicants were accepted.

Lillian Albright was one of the few to overcome the odds.

Graduating from both Centralia High School and Centralia College this past school year, as well as being honored as one of four valedictorians for the Class of 2014, Albright will be flying out to Cambridge, Massachusetts,

this week.

The Blaze had the opportunity to catch up with Lillian — the sister of Harvard graduate and piano sensation Charlie Albright — about her plans, aspirations and what exactly has brought her to this point.

Q: You were one of the mere 5.9 percent of applicants to be accepted to Harvard. Were you nervous when you applied? Did you expect to make it, and was Harvard your first choice?

A: I applied Early Action in October and found out the results in December, before the people that applied Regular Decision did (they found out in March). When applying, I was nervous, of course, but I never expected to get admitted. However, I always told myself that although it seemed like a long shot, I would have a 0 percent chance of getting accepted if I never tried, so I gave it a chance and said a prayer before clicking "submit" on my application... and I'm glad I did! Harvard was my dream school, but it is also the dream school of thousands of brilliant, talented and well-deserving people in the world, and I was well aware of the high possibility that I would not get in ... So I didn't count on it.

Q: Do you remember the day you found out you got accepted? Walk the readers through that moment and how you felt.

A: Ironically, I was actually at Centralia College that day. It was Dec. 13, 2013. I had just finished talking to a group of high school freshmen about participating in the Running Start program with a few other current Running Start students and went to visit my mom, Hyesoo Albright, in her office in Kirk Library. To be honest, I did not know that results were coming out that day (that is embarrassing). My brother, Charlie, was the one who called me to let me know that they would be out any minute ... around noon! So I sat in my mother's computer chair for the next 35 minutes refreshing my email over and over again ... and I was getting nervous because there was an online Harvard forum on which everyone was posting their results, but I had not even received mine yet! Finally, at around 12:30 p.m., I refreshed my page and there it was...I closed my eyes and clicked to open the email and it said "Congratulations!" That's all I had to read before I started screaming and burst into tears. My mom did the same, and keep in mind, we were in the library, so everyone stared, of course. It was the most shocking and happy moment of my life! I never really thought it could happen and above all, I truly felt blessed that day.

Q: You were talking about Charlie and your family. They've obviously supported you through all of this. Were they instrumental in your choice to apply? How long has that been a dream of yours?

A: Yes, my family has been my biggest support system through the whole process of this journey and I could not have done it without them. My brother was in the Harvard Class of 2011, and his accomplishments there opened my eyes to the possibility of applying — he gave me a lot of advice on various parts of the application process and was always helpful in answering any and all of my questions. I think it was when my brother graduated (I was a freshman in high school) and I visited the campus for his commencement that I really fell in love with the school and wished to study there someday. For Christmas one year, he even gifted me the book "A is for Admission: The Insider's Guide to Getting Into The Ivy League and Other Top Colleges." He doesn't know this, but I never ended up reading it.

Although my family encouraged me to just send in an application, they never pushed or pressured me to feel as if I had to do anything. I knew they would be proud of me with whatever path I went down educationally and that made me feel a lot more relaxed about the whole thing. I never felt as if I had to live up to anyone — I just had to be me, work hard, and do my best at whatever I set my mind to.

Q: What are you going to be studying over there and what's your final goal through all of this?

A: At this point, I don't know exactly what I want to do for the rest of my life, but I am considering concentrating in Economics or Computer Science! That is, of course, subject to change and I plan on going into my freshman year with an open mind and ready to explore new areas of interest. I hope to discover what I love, develop talents and skills encompassing that passion, and somehow share those skills with the rest of the world. I want to make a difference!

Q: What are your expectations for Harvard? Are there any stereotypes about an Ivy League school that you are curious about?

A: I have talked to quite a few people in my class and I found some commonalities among all of them — everyone is driven and extremely passionate about something. Everyone has a unique story to be told, often with unexpected twists and turns. One thing I really love about Harvard is the diversity. I have not talked to one person who is not talented in one way or another and has not set goals for themselves. I find that extremely inspiring and I can't wait to be surrounded by that fervor and drive all the time.

Q: Do you think that Centralia College has had anything to do with getting you prepared or helping you on your way to Harvard? If so, then how?

A: I have so much thanks to give to CC for guiding me on my way to Harvard. It gave me a chance to experience the college setting — the classes, the diversity in people, new clubs and activities, the freedom of being a college student, etc. I also learned an incredible amount at my time there and all of the faculty and staff were amazing and caring people. Doing full-time Running Start allowed me to challenge myself, explore new classes that I otherwise couldn't have taken at my high school, and meet new friends. It prepared me to the best of my ability for success at the university level and if I had not completed two years at Centralia College, I don't know that I would be as ready for Harvard as I am now; also, if I had chosen not to do Running Start, who knows, I might not even be going to Harvard now. I am so grateful for my time at CC and it will always be a very special place to me.

Q: With this being a momentous achievement and a rare one at that, what would you say to others who have dreams and aspirations to get to where you are?

A: As for people who have dreams and aspirations like mine, I would first say that there is no one, single, straight and narrow route to getting there. I don't think that any competitive situation — jobs, colleges, etc. — seek two of the exact same people, so it's important to find what makes you YOU, what makes you different. Take that and run with it. Expand and develop who you are to the best of your ability and do your best at everything you do — schoolwork, activities, etc. It's also important to do things because you actually care. Just as an example, go to class for the sake of learning and join clubs because you are genuinely interested in them, not because it will "look good" on an application — people see right through that! Above all, work hard. I worked as hard as I could to achieve this and although it was not an easy road, it was worth it. I don't think that anything worth having comes easy and it's important to keep that in mind. Also, believe in yourself. Although it is crucial to stay humble and realize that thousands, even millions, of other people are just as deserving and want the same things that you do, it is still important to have faith in yourself. If you don't, then nobody else will. Even though a lot of luck plays into what school you end up at, much of it is determined by your actions, your words, and your choices. Be the best you that you can be — that's all you can do!

Q: Is there anyone that you would like to thank?

A: I would just like to make sure to acknowledge and thank all of my family and friends who have helped me along the way. They have brought me up to who I am today and I am eternally grateful for the wonderful people and the support I've received in this community.