

**To all the teachers, administrators, coaches and support staff who have guided my children through high school,**

As the minutes tick down to Sean's prom, I find myself growing more and more emotional. It's hard to imagine that our family's relationship with John Rennie, with Sport-Études is reaching its end. I don't know to what extent you're aware of the impact you have on the lives of the families that pass through your program, but on the off chance that even one of you doubts the contribution you make, here is our story.

Anyone who knows me knows I'm insanely proud of my sons. I am so proud of the outgoing, social and athletic young men they have become. But I also know they were not necessarily born to be any of those things. My sons are shy by nature. They were painfully shy as children; always smart but never outgoing, always capable at sports but never the star. So when I see them now, meeting new people, shaking hands with confidence, sharing an easy joke, I am so overwhelmingly grateful to you for all the ways you've helped shape them. The sons I have today, the strong, confident young men who get offered jobs by total strangers, are the result of a thousand small successes. These were your gifts to them.

One of the first articles I ever wrote as a journalist 30-some years ago was about a high school in Montreal testing out a new sports program for elite athletes in Quebec. I wrote what I'm sure was a pretty dull article about all the logistical advantages for athletes forced to juggle a demanding training schedule and homework. I vaguely remember thinking, what a great idea. But it wasn't until years later that I truly understood the beauty of it all. Brilliant and simple at the same time. The carrot versus the stick. A program designed for elite athletes that can be used to motivate just about any student. It doesn't even have to be an athlete. I imagine the same principles would hold true for musicians, artists or anyone with a passion.

In theory, Graeme should never have gotten into Sport-Études. All through elementary school Graeme had one love, one passion... sports, or specifically hockey. But the truth is he wasn't that good at any of them. His friends were all athletes. He only ever befriended athletes. But as they went on to play Atom BB and PeeWee AA, Graeme never quite made the cut. He could beat them in school, but never on the ice. And in a world where little boys dole out respect for goals not grades, Graeme struggled to find his place. There were days it broke my heart.

The night we went to your open house, Graeme nearly backed out. He was scared the other boys, « the real athletes », would see him and say, « What are you doing here? » I fought to get him out the front door. But then we sat in the auditorium and Russ Kelly started talking. With each word, Graeme looked from Mr. Kelly to me and back again, eyes wide, his imagination running wild, and he knew this was where he was meant to be. Passing the exam wasn't a problem. Getting a single letter player into an elite sports program was a little trickier. But as fate would have it, Pro-Action had had attitude problems that year with several of their star athletes. Matt and Carl were toying with the idea of taking a few weaker « nice » kids and seeing if they could turn them into elite athletes. After waiting anxiously all winter, Graeme finally got the call. He was in. Two years later, Matt would give Sean, a PeeWee B player, his shot in the program as well.

Not once in the seven years that have passed since have I ever had to drag either of my sons out of bed in the morning. They enjoyed going to school. Teenaged boys who actually enjoyed going to school. Nor did I ever have to tell them to do their homework. Every incentive necessary is already built into the program. Three hours a day of playing hockey!!! The ultimate carrot. Three-quarters of my job was done for me by the design of your program. « You want to play hockey every day, I want good grades. » « You want Sport-Études, I want polite children. » « I paid for those muscles, please go move the firewood. » This is what our house sounded like. And it worked, I suspect, because three hours of exercise a day makes teenaged boys too tired to argue with their parents. The advantages were/are endless; the organizational skills they're forced to learn, the team building, the camaraderie, the sense of community, the list just goes on and on. The

magic formula you offered us, the brilliant idea that is Sport-Études, gave us a peaceful, positive high school and home experience.

Graeme has decided this year, for the first time, that he will not play organized hockey. No team, no teammates. And no regrets. He starts McGill in September. He'll do a Political Science degree, then Law. Between school, work, his girlfriend, friends etc. there's just no time left over. From an elite athlete's perspective this might be considered a failure. He never did play Midget AAA or get drafted to the Q. From my perspective, Graeme is the ultimate success story. He came to you a shy, insecure 12-yr-old with a slight stammer and a slightly bigger fear of the spotlight; a kid who wrote in his first grade 7 essay that all he wanted was to be respected by his classmates. Out there on the ice every day, Graeme did improve at the one thing that mattered most to him. He inched his way up the hockey ladder until he was good enough to look any one of his friends in the eye. He eventually played AA and had the time of his life. He was never the best, but he did graduate with the one thing that matters most, self-respect.

Sean's goal was always a little different. For years all he ever wanted to do was surpass his brother. So every day, in class and on the ice, Sean pushed himself a little further, a little harder, until one day he'd gone so far, beating Graeme no longer mattered. From Pee wee B, Sean climbed six levels in three years, to eventually win an LEQ championship with the Bantam AAAs. He owns that memory for life. Like all of his teammates, Sean started this past year with prep schools in mind. But as a mid-range player, he figured his only hope was an academic scholarship. So he pushed himself even harder. When he finally decided he didn't want to go away to school and started asking himself what his options were, the answer was easy. He had a 96 average. He could do anything he wanted. I don't know if Sean will follow through on his plans to become a doctor. Honestly, I don't care. What matters to me is that at 17 years old my son believes he can be anything he wants to be. For that I am so grateful.

Sport-Études is an equation, a beautiful formula with two symbiotic elements balancing together perfectly. My sons wanted the Sports. I wanted the Études. And in the end it is all win-win. But, no matter how perfect the idea in theory, the formula does not work without you. When Graeme started coming home in Grade 10 asking about world events, Mr. McKoy, you without knowing it, became my new best friend. When Sean started throwing around the word physics, Mr. Leggett, I could feel you in the room with us. You have piqued their curiosity and sustained their interests. I've seen the enthusiasm they've put into their French video projects and the fun they've had doing them. C'est seulement possible Mde. Gaudreault, quand on aime sincèrement notre professeur. Sean actually enjoyed writing poetry. He read it to me with so much pride, I could have hugged you Mr. Whiston. And the parliamentary debates! Do you have any idea how intense these kids get about that debate!!! You have taught them everything they needed to know, and that on an accelerated schedule. The way Graeme breezed through his CEGEP math courses was a testament to you Ms. Bowen. You have all treated my sons with absolute respect and in so doing contributed to their own self-respect. And to the extent that it's possible, you have made high school fun.

You are an outstanding group of educators. My sons have been privileged to have been taught by you. You have given them all the tools they need and I could not be more grateful.

John and I both graduated from John Rennie nearly 35 years ago, so prom on Friday will mark the end of a long and very significant relationship with the school. It is hard to imagine. But you will remain in our hearts and memories and anecdotes for years to come. I cannot thank you enough for all that you have done.

Most sincerely,

Sonia