

From tragedy to triumph: Agora's lessons empower a young woman for life.

You might say that Jamie Garrighan's path to Agora Cyber Charter School started early. She was raised by her mother and three older siblings and at age 11, Jamie's brother—whom in many ways stepped in as her father figure and whom Jamie adored—died tragically. With one more key person out of her life and more hardship entered in, her mother tried desperately to create a family structure in a difficult situation. Lack of sleep and nightmares were especially troublesome for Jamie and the loss of her brother, who was always around to help her with schoolwork and a tremendous influence in her life, was devastating.

Jamie's mother, Lucy, decided to try cyber school, *knowing* that "school from home" would allow her to give Jamie more educational support despite her working long hours to support the family—and *hoping* that a safer emotional environment would be more conducive for Jamie to learn. Lucy chose Agora, intending to just try it for a year to help Jamie. However, after experiencing the academic, emotional and independence-building support Agora offered Jamie, that one year turned into two years... two into three... all leading to Jamie being a proud high school graduate of Agora this spring!

"I'm almost ashamed to say that when Jamie was getting ready to enter 11th grade, I did look at a private cyber school with a university backing, thinking it might better prepare her for college applications," said Lucy. "But that was a short-lived notion—very short lived! With their daily classes, the individual attention they gave Jamie, and so much support on so many levels, no other program out there compares to Agora. Our experience at Agora has been just incredible."

Lucy is particularly outspoken about the difference between Agora and "home schooling" because she saw first-hand the way Agora fostered confidence and independence in Jamie.

"Agora is not home school. People hear that term and think the parents have to be home to school their child," said Lucy. "Agora provided so much support... was so connected with Jamie all the time... she could have done it all without any involvement from me. Mr. Mirth, her guidance counselor, Mrs. Thatcher, the family coach, the instructors—they all established such instant trust that I could leave and go to work without worry."

Lucy and Jamie go on to say that while Lucy could have left Jamie on her own in terms of schooling, that wasn't the case because Agora gives parents opportunities and encourages them to be part of their child's education and growth. At the same time, Agora is aware of the family challenges many students have and take great care in developing student plans that are flexible and meet the needs of both the parents and the students in terms of availability, time and other resources.

"Circumstances come your way and you don't know what to do. You hope you find a way to make a plan and get through it," said Jamie. "That was me, but I really wasn't sure what my plan was until Agora helped me to find it and pursue it. They helped me through a lot of roadblocks along the way. Like when my mother was injured and bedridden. Or when a family member tried to reenter my life—try and find a brick-and-mortar school that will help you through something like *that*. But Agora was there for me emotionally and professionally, and through all of it my academics didn't skip a beat. Agora has changed my life so significantly for the better."

Now, Jamie is thriving in first semester at Seton Hill, where she has enrolled in their business program with a \$15,000 scholarship to boot. In fact, Jamie's ACT scores were so high, coupled with the respectable, confident character she built for herself during her time with Agora, that she was accepted into the other two prestigious schools—Duquesne University and Chadham University—to which she applied. Jamie also shares that, where she might have felt intimidated entering the life of a college student if transitioning from a brick-and-mortar school, thanks to her being able to switch from synchronous learning to asynchronous for her last three years at Agora, she has the mindset and skills to work and live independently. Jamie has put this into practice, and all of her Freshman grades are 90% or better and she even has a 97% in macro-economics. As Lucy said, "She became an independent learner while at Agora and it is serving her well."

"Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Mirth, everyone at Agora were always there when I needed them," said Jamie. "And in a way, they still are. I've learned so much academically and grown so much as a person with Agora, those lessons will always be with me."