



Alumni Profile for AJ Smith – Nysmith Class of 2005

What kinds of activities did you participate in at Nysmith?

During my time at Nysmith, I was the President of the Chess Club, a member of Rocket Club, and was the SGA Treasurer. I still play a game of chess every day!

What did you do after Nysmith? High School? College? Major, Activities, Awards, Concerts, Recording, etc. (You can brag a little!)

After graduating from Nysmith, I went to TJHSST where I was active in student government, orchestra, drama, and the captain of the lacrosse team. I participated in the mentorship program with the Naval Research Laboratory and was hired on as a part-time contractor while I was in school at the conclusion of the internship. My work at the Naval Research Lab lasted through college and I was responsible for writing the code that helps analyze and correct nighttime imagery for the Navy's large-format infrared sensors! I was also a violinist in the American Youth Philharmonic and a Young Associate to the National Symphony Orchestra.

After TJ, I went to New York University for both my undergrad and my masters. As a University Scholar, I was involved in many on and off-campus programs, including our annual community-service initiatives, highlighted by trips to work at an orphanage outside Puebla, Mexico and assist on Habitat for Humanity projects in Oakland, California. I was a three-year captain of NYU's lacrosse team, the Vice President of the sports committee, a Resident Assistant, and in 2013, I was actually named one of NYU's most influential students, which was such an incredible honor.

While at NYU, I began to professionally pursue my music career, leading to awards from the Songwriters Hall of Fame, being named a Carole Bayer Sager Songwriting Scholar, and my first show on a major stage when I opened for The Eagles at the Beacon Theatre in New York City.

Since then, I've headlined my own tours in addition to serving as support for artists including Lindsey Stirling, Emily Kinney, MisterWives, and more. One of my songs, "Summertime" charted internationally, reaching #3 in Australia, and my 2016 EP "Brooklyn Nights" (which I co-produced with GRAMMY-winning producer Scott Jacoby and my bassist Lloyd Kikoler) has recently been featured on iHeart Radio, DC101, Z100, and other regional and national major radio stations!

Please talk about the mix-up of your college application with another Andrew Smith and how that college's mistake changed your life - in a good way!

I was asked to share with you my college application story, so here it is. Auditions and college applications can be very stressful, though I always had the attitude that the right school and I would "want" each other.

Johns Hopkins was difficult to rule out because I had been given a very generous scholarship by their engineering school, but when Peabody (the conservatory) admitted to mixing up my music theory entrance exam scores with another Andrew Smith who was given my acceptance letter (can't imagine how...not like it's a common name or anything, right?), they claimed the only solution would be for me to re-apply as a student from within the engineering school in the fall, seeking a second degree in the conservatory.

As I dug a little deeper and received my acceptance letters from other schools like NYU, I realized that Peabody was not the right fit for me and that I wanted to study in an environment where I would have the full support of the faculty, not always feel one administrative error away from disappointment. I don't say this to take away from Peabody - they have an excellent reputation for a reason, but after visiting New York City again and touring the music and physics departments, the choice for me was clear.

Regarding my time at Nysmith, I still vividly remember the first day that I visited. I was in second grade and my family was getting ready to move from Rockville, Maryland to Great Falls, Virginia. In Math class, we started off with the "Magic Minute" multiplication tables and in Logic, we solved complex whodunit challenges. I remember feeling refreshed after being challenged and, when my parents asked how I liked the school, I told them, "I need this place."

How did going to Nysmith impact your life? Or, another way to ask, what did Nysmith teach you about life, in addition to the academics?

Nysmith taught me how to learn, how to be both a leader within and also a member of a community, how to dare to be different and ask challenging questions. My teachers encouraged to use my creativity to solve seemingly non-creative problems, pushed me to be a better writer and critical thinker, and I credit this early development for the authenticity of my voice in my lyrics. I know that I'm not alone when I say that I met my best friend to this date at Nysmith over fifteen years ago.

What advice (if any) would you give to a current Nysmith student and/or parent? Kind of like, if I only had known back then what I know now.

I have two pieces of advice for current Nysmith students. First of all, try not to worry so much over dates to school dances or party invites - focus on building friendships and make the effort to stay in touch through high school and college. Be genuinely kind to everyone and don't be afraid to embrace and nurture the qualities and talents that make you unique.

Second, remember that high school and college applications can turn your qualifications into numbers, but your experiences will always stand out - so feed your passions with a diet of excitement, discipline, and perseverance. There are many other paths besides TJ, Exeter, Madeira, or the numerous other high school choices you will have that will lead you to happiness. Never forget that out of our seemingly biggest failures can come our most triumphant successes.

Favorites:

Field Trip: **Gettysburg or Camp Silver Beach**

School Play: ***Grease***

Science Fair Project: **I don't remember the title of the project, but it was one of my first explorations into the world of optics, experimenting with different polarized lenses and light sensors.**

Place to Hang out at Nysmith: **The soccer fields**

Book that you had to read for one of your classes: **1984 or The Giver**

Classroom story involving one of your teachers: **In Mrs. Stephens' 8th grade class, we wrote alternate endings to A Tale of Two Cities - I went a little overboard with mine and ended up writing over 40 pages. I got so creatively woven into my own ending while simultaneously reading the rest of the novel so that when we had a quiz that week, I blanked for a moment and couldn't remember what events had actually happened and which I had invented.**

After school Club: **Chess club**

Nysmith Memory: **The Renaissance Fair - we had life size chess!**

Yes or No (For those who attended Nysmith in the 2nd grade) – Do you still know all the words to the 50 states song? What state were you?

I didn't start at Nysmith until 3rd grade, though I picked up the song from the rest of my class and still remember the words! In 3rd grade, we each did an assignment on a country - I was Canada!



