

Why College Is Important to Me

by Garrett Bazany

As I opened my eyes I saw a view of a strange room and the presence of unfamiliar faces surrounding me, watching my every movement. They were quickly scratching notes on their clipboard. The atmosphere in the room was bleak, with the blinds shut and the only noise was the beeping of a machine next to me. Scared and concerned I called out for my mother, hoping she had the answers to my questions. She was right at my side, but I knew something was wrong when I saw the expression on her face. I reached for the cup next to my bed and noticed that something was missing ... the strength in my arms. Confused, I attempted to move my legs to get out of the bed and realized I couldn't feel them, nor could I move them. That was the moment I remembered everything and that I was paralyzed.

It was May 29, 2010 when I fractured my neck from a trampoline accident. The injury to my spinal cord left me being an incomplete quadriplegic. I couldn't move or feel any part of my body from my chest on down to my toes, and I had lost some feeling and strength in my arms and hands. Although the physicians never definitively answered my questions, I knew the chance of my ever walking again was not favorable.

Being only 15 years old at the time, I initially thought my life was over. I thought I would never finish school, drive a car, participate in sports, let alone realize my dreams of attending college. When I was transferred to the rehabilitation hospital, I discovered very quickly that I have a choice to make: lie in the hospital bed feeling sorry for myself or not giving up my dreams. I chose the latter.

I worked hard every day during therapy so I could learn how to be independent with a wheelchair. I was discharged ahead of schedule and promptly returned to school. I soared academically. My grades went from a 3.8 at the beginning of my sophomore year up to today's GPA of 3.96. Nothing was going to stop me from going to college.

As the months of therapy continued, I increasingly regained more feeling, strength and mobility in my arms and legs. Today, I can drive a car with hand controls, drive a snowmobile, snow ski and water ski with adaptive equipment, and I can even walk short distances with a walker. I am a living example of how determination and belief in oneself are so important for being successful in overcoming any challenges one faces in life.

My journey over these last few years has solidified my aspirations of pursuing a career in the medical field, specifically, a career in rehabilitation medicine or biomedical engineering. With my disability, I can offer a unique perspective to the advancement of either profession and really make a difference in people's lives. Becoming a physiatrist or a biomedical engineer is not possible without college. Additionally, attending college isn't just about fulfilling a prerequisite for a particular career. Rather, it is important to me because it represents so much more. It symbolizes my overcoming adversity, and my freedom. It also gives me the opportunity to choose the path of a successful life regardless of my disability.