

Why College is Important to Me

by Rachel Carpenter

Hovering over the isolette in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), and certain of his prediction, the Neonatologist offered the parents his expert and usually unchallenged opinion,

“She’ll never be able to learn. You should consider finding alternative living arrangements for her...”

Born three months premature, the diminutive infant girl weighed in at only 1 pound 14 ounces. Odds were she would have many health issues to navigate. Stunned speechless, the parents simply watched as the doctor hurriedly walked away. Always up for a challenge, and staunch advocates of education, that moment the parents dedicated themselves to assuring that their baby girl would have every opportunity available to learn all that she was capable of and live in their loving home with her siblings.

Some may think they were naïve or stubborn, but they were relentless in pursuing many avenues of education for their children. How do I know of this story? You see, I am that child and I am eternally grateful for my parents’ steadfast love. They instilled in me a love of learning that has made the past 18 years a joy. Yes, it has been a challenge because I live with Cerebral Palsy and cannot walk or stand on my own, but a bright purple walker enables me to get around. Hard to believe, but no cognitive issues have surfaced, at least not until I started AP Calculus this year. That class is very taxing on everyone’s ol’ brain. Now here I am at that crossroads of graduating from high school with honors and starting college.

Anyone can succeed when barriers are removed and they are surrounded with encouraging people. Having been blessed with a supportive “village” of people in my life, I want to continue my

education to enable me to forge a trail for others and offer help in removing barriers whether they be physical, social, or emotional. As Mom frequently reminds me, "...education is something that no one can take away from you..." I do not want to be lauded for the accomplishments and honors that I have received in high school. I do, however, want to make a difference in the lives of others with disabilities.

I'm fascinated with science, and art, and even Latin at this point. So I want to delve into Neuroscience in college as an avenue for beginning a life journey of research and service. Perhaps I can be part of finding a new "discovery" that offers students with Cerebral Palsy a new way to physically navigate their surroundings. Or perhaps I will simply be able to continue my community service volunteering with compassion while helping to make my community a barrier free place to live and learn.

Just because someone can't walk doesn't mean they can't blaze a trail. Just because someone can't speak doesn't mean they have nothing to say. And just because someone can't see doesn't mean they don't have a vision. To me a strong college education is the key to opening doors of opportunity. I can't wait to see what lies ahead for me on the campus of Davidson College. Go Wildcats!