

2004 HS Scholarship Winner



Ryan Vill'Neuve

I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome shortly after having arthroscopic knee surgery as a freshman in high school. I went from being Junior Varsity, starting goalie, being a part of the school's marching band and sound and lighting group, participating in Best Buddies, as well as a Venturing Boy Scouts and Native American Dancing to barely being able to get up in the morning. Attending school on a full day basis was extremely hard, and most times I would find myself falling asleep during class, even during marching band. Medications that I was, and still am taking, allowed me to sleep at night, but over-lapped in the morning, making it hard to get up. I was put on a half-day

schedule, receiving homebound instruction for my morning classes, and then for my afternoon classes when I fell behind. Yet there were times that I was so tired I couldn't even handle that. I only worked one day a week, and even then would have to call out at the last minute. If I got sick, I would be out of school anywhere from three weeks to three months. Injuries triggered the fibromyalgia in my back and would send me into muscle spasms, putting me back into physical therapy three or four times a week. I would be doing good for a few months and then I would suddenly "crash" as my mother puts it. I began to cherish the times that I was able to make it to school or work.

Summers were easier, the warm weather and absence of normal, everyday stress made it easier for me to function. I worked as much as the doctors and my mother would allow me, and after a few years was able to buy my very own car. During that time, my church and I became involved in the Appalachia Service Project, a program much like Habitat for Humanity. For one week during the summer, I would go to West Virginia or Tennessee and work for a week building a roof, or someone's first indoor bathroom, or repairing a house or church. I finally found something that I loved doing, and even though I was killing myself to make it through the week, doing everything I could to keep moving, it became something that I looked forward to each summer, and at times the thought of going back was the only thing that got me through the school year.

I am explaining all of this so that you, as the reader, will understand why I have chosen the career path that I have. I have been accepted to Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas. Not only that, but I have also been accepted into their Habitat for Humanity program where I will major in Social Entrepreneurship. My career goal is to work with and for Habitat or ASP. The past few years I found that I don't mind wearing myself ragged if it means doing something good for someone else. The smiles and tears and hugs that I find at the end of the week are all I need to keep myself going. Sure I might go home and sleep straight through the next few days, but I always find myself wanting to go back and do more.

Also during my time at Sterling College, I wish to pursue a double major in Secondary English Education. English is a passion, I love to read and write and I find the English language

fascinating. I have been encouraged to follow this by teachers and my mother alike, but I realized that I wanted to teach after witnessing possibly some of the best teachers I have ever had the privilege of having. The first was my English tutor during my first year on homebound instruction. Her name was Mrs. Costa. We were reading "Romeo and Juliet." I was amazed at the way she made the play come alive right before my eyes. It was from her that I found my love of Shakespeare. My second influence was Mr. Craig, my junior English teacher and now my senior tutor. He has a different way of teaching. He doesn't just follow a paper and pencil routine, but incorporates music and visuals, hands on teaching and the student's own creativity. Every day in his class was a new experience. I realized that I wanted to be just like these two teachers.

An over-achiever I am not, but I have been taught and I have learned that I have to fight through the CFS condition to get to where I want to be. I've seen so many teenagers with the same condition just give up and stop trying. I'm lucky enough to have a mother, when I wanted to just give up, she was there to encourage me and push me along. So yes, having Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has influenced my career decision. It has introduced me to two people who I highly respect and want to model myself after. Most importantly, it has brought me closer to my mother. Without her I don't know if I would have been able to make it this far, and for that I will always be thankful.