

TCTC Student Overcomes Brain Injury to Achieve Success in School

**“I will live my life as if I were not an IEP student.”
Kelly Henderson**



Most of us associate courage with the actions of a soldier on the battlefield or the determination of the rescue workers on 9/11/01, but courage takes many forms. The next time that someone says, “This is too hard, I can’t do it, or it hurts,” your response should include a story. Tell them about Kelly Henderson.

On June 10, 2002 Kelly’s life changed forever. She was driving a go-cart when a rock the size of a golf ball struck her above the left temple. As her friend ran to find her parents, she remembers being in a state of semi-consciousness. “I was lying on the ground awake, but my body didn’t work. It was like I could not breathe or move.” When the ambulance arrived to transport her to the hospital, she started to speak, but she did not make sense. “I was telling everyone this was my birthday, but it was not.”

After being examined by physicians, Kelly was life flighted to Rainbow Children’s Hospital in Cleveland. The diagnosis was very serious. She had suffered a fractured skull. The fractures were pressing against the brain causing internal bleeding. She underwent surgery to replace the damaged tissue with metal plates.

With the exception of frequent headaches, Kelly has recovered, but she incurred brain injury from the accident “I never had a problem at school until this happened. When they tested me, I was functioning at a second grade level. When I returned to school, they enrolled me in special education classes. It has been blank years, but I still have trouble remembering things

Kelly Henderson could have taken refuge in the sheltered security provided for students who have disabilities, but she did not. She had always harbored a strong desire to succeed in school. The accident did not affect her resolve. She stated, “I am not a slacker. It takes me longer than my classmates to complete assignments; I average about three hours per night on my homework and I am a waitress at Ponderosa Steak House, but this is the price I am willing to pay. I want to earn my way. I will live my life as if I were not an IEP student.” AND INDEED SHE HAS!

She is presently a senior enrolled in the Computerized Business Tech Prep Program at the TCTC. She is taking the pre-college curriculum for her academic courses that includes Honors English at both the junior and senior levels as well as Advanced Algebra. Next year she will attend Youngstown State University with a major in Business Management. Ultimately, she wants to own an animal shelter.

Kelly credits her parents and home and her teachers both at Badger and the TCTC for pushing her to excel. She said, "They have been there for me. They understand my situation, but they hold me to the same standards as the other students."

Charmayne Polen was Kelly's Honors English instructor during her junior year at the TCTC. Her pride in Kelly's determination is evident. She said, "Kelly knew the class would be difficult, but she was willing to work harder than others to be successful. She improved tremendously in her reading and writing skills throughout the year. Her self confidence also got a boost because of her strong performance."

In recognition of Kelly's achievement, the French Street Café presented her with the fresh baked cake of her choice. The cake left a sweet taste in her mouth, but long into the future, Kelly's saga will touch a responsive chord in our memories. Six years ago, adversity knocked her flat on the canvas, but there is a difference between being down and being out. Kelly Henderson is back on her feet.

