

Our Transition Story

by Joelle Anzelc



Kristin receiving her Certificate of Completion

At 2 weeks of age, before leaving the hospital, we were told that maybe Kristin wouldn't walk...maybe she wouldn't talk...or maybe she would have learning problems in school. Oh, and "you need to follow up with a pediatric ophthalmologist because we are concerned that she might be blind."

Kristin was not blind as it turned out. She learned to walk. And talk. And last December she

graduated from Stevenson University with "honors" and a bachelor's degree in Human Services. Since the topic is transitions, let me back up.

High school: Throughout all school years through 12th grade, my husband, Bob, and I tutored Kristin, checked her work, kept her organized. We wanted her to learn, of course, but our goal was also that she earn a high school diploma. With our system of constant oversight, she earned mostly A's and B's, so it was a natural plan for her to TRANSITION to the local community college post high school.

Transition from high school to community college: Kristin needed updated testing in order to get accommodations in college. In Maryland, the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) provides transition services. They arranged testing including a psychological, OT/PT, Career Assessment, and even a driving assessment. Then a transition plan was created that included her attending community college and recommendations for accommodations. When Kristin first started at the college, I attended advising meetings with her to make sure her schedule was workable with mine (since I provided all transportation) and that her accommodations were appropriate. Kristin's accommodations included things like

extra time on tests, copies of overheads, a note taker, and tutoring. At that point, Bob and I decided that we needed to back off and let Kristin become more independent in her education. Our idea was that she made it through high school. If she was to succeed at the next level, it needed to be on her own steam. If she couldn't hack it, then we would need to help her choose another goal. While she did struggle with a few classes, she passed each one with at least a "C", earned B's and even some A's. She graduated in 3 years with an Associate's degree in business, then stayed a 4th year, earning a certificate in "Office Systems". We hoped she would develop skills to work in a small office. But she had other ideas. She loved her law classes. And one day, she plopped into the car and informed me that it had been "instant decision" day for Stevenson University, a small private school in the area. College Representatives were there and could put a student's statistics into their computer and could tell the student if they would be accepted or not. Guess what! Kristin got herself accepted to the four-year school!!

All this time, I was still helping Kristin with her hair, finger and toe nails, sometime even brushing her teeth, and such. She had door-to-door service everywhere she needed/wanted to go. And we continued all that as she transitioned from the community college to Stevenson University.

Stevenson University: Kristin continued to live at home and remained a commuter student. We continued to help her with daily living skills, always trying to get her to be more independent, but her weak areas – visual perceptual and motor – persisted and there were many things that we still did for her.

Finance: We got no help, financially. Maybe because she was living at home and our income was too high. All I know is, we footed the bill. Kristin did earn some nice scholarships because she got herself on the Dean's List and stayed there until graduation. Kristin applied for a few part-time jobs in the community and on campus, but never was selected. The beauty of Stevenson for Kristin was that it was a small school and required all students to do several practicums and a senior internship. They allowed Kristin to do those on campus since she does not drive.

How does she succeed in her classes? She reads, re-reads, then reads again. She works VERY hard. If she doesn't understand something, she asks for help from her professors.

Again, Bob and I did NOTHING to help in her coursework. We just provided her door-to-door transportation.

What to do after graduating from Stevenson? Then she wanted to go to graduate school. Bob and I told her we thought she needed to get a job, but she was insistent that she NEEDED to get a master's degree. It was our younger son's turn for his undergraduate degree and that was our financial priority. We told her we were not going to help her and she would have to figure it out on her own. She did. She had set herself a goal to work at a college, helping kids "the way that people helped (her)". Kristin applied to 2 graduate programs and got 2 interviews. She got accepted to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Student Affairs in Higher Education program. I had not even Googled the school until she got accepted, because I really didn't think she would. What a surprise I found. This is a good school. She was interviewed and got accepted. She had researched it and knew that it had on-campus housing for graduate students (necessary since Kristin doesn't drive), an efficient shuttle system for the college and the local town, and opportunities for assistantships that help with finances.

Leaving home for the first time. (*Indiana, PA is 4 1/2 hours from our home!*) Once Kristin was accepted, we began a more intense effort to make her more "independent". All summer we thought constantly about what she would need for independent living. Hair styling and nail trimming...still major issues. We finally found a hair style she can do o.k. Nails...forget it. She would have to get manicures. DORS did refer us for testing again so that she can get accommodations as before, and Kristin had a lengthy consultation with an OT to help with ideas for daily living. Kristin is living in an efficiency apartment on campus. She has a meal plan and goes to eat in a dining hall, but can do simple meals on her own, mostly in the microwave. Bob and I moved her up there and arranged her place, organized her kitchen and bathroom, hooked up her computer and T.V. We know that there is no way she could have done any of that without us and we just didn't have time to "help" her do it. I did tell her, though, that the next time she has to move, she has to pay us for our labor. ☺

She reports that she "loves it" and were it not for a needed dentist appointment, she would not be coming home until Thanksgiving. I am heading up to get her this weekend and am very excited to see her. She has been my life's work and I miss her. I am amazed at the journey.

We still are not getting any financial help, so we are in the middle of a battle for government help. It is hard to explain to people that a young woman who has accomplished so much still needs so much help. Bob and I do worry that if



Kristin in her on-campus efficiency apartment at grad school at the Indiana U of Penn.

something happened to us, Kristin would be at a loss. But we also knew that until she left home, we would never know if she COULD leave home. I call this our grand experiment. She is in a pretty structured place that has many of the things she needs. I'm not sure how she is doing in her program of work. I don't know if she will ever work full time. But then I was told she might not walk...or talk...or might be blind....What I do know is that Kristin seems happy.