

## Never Underestimate Anyone--Especially Yourself!

Everyone sitting in this church has a "different ability". Allow me to clearly explain these words to you. It's a disability, but rather than having a negative connotation it's more positive and it applies to everyone in some way. My obstacle was learning to adapt to allow my "different ability" to work for me instead of against me.

I wasn't expected to ever learn to walk or talk but, my parents and grandparents wanted me to succeed more than anything. It's because of them I am where I am today...standing here right in front of you talking.

In life, each and every one of us needs to take risks in order to get out what we want of life. Growing up during elementary school was challenging because I was different and no one could understand me. Another problem was running. Whenever I ran my right arm would go up immediately and the other students thought it was different so they would make fun of it. Of course nobody likes to be teased. Whenever it happened to me I felt bad. I learned to let it go and spend my time with people who bring out the best in me. In high school the deaf kids all stuck together--it's just what we did. But after a couple years I was bored. There was a girl I liked--a hearing girl, a popular girl. I decided to give her a Christmas card and ask her to talk. My senior year I hung out with her and all the popular kids. The only problem was the deaf guys were pretty mad at me!

For me the biggest risk was going to college. I knew I wasn't as well prepared as other high school graduates. It took a lot of perseverance. Regardless that it took me 9 years to finish school. I got my degree. Better yet, twenty years down the road who's going to care that it took me more time to finish. Nobody!

When I was a freshman in college I was pulled aside by one of the professors--Dr. Watson. He asked me to talk to his class on Educational Diversity--Disabilities are just another type of Diversity after all. Do you know how much time he gave me to prepare for that talk? None! I guess he liked what I had to say because I've spoken to his class every year since. And I've begun speaking in schools to groups of students and parents. If I can help one kid gain some understanding and sensitivity--I feel great.

And let me tell you about running the Chicago Marathon. My parents never liked me to run. They wouldn't let me run at all in high school. In college I started running anyway. I broke my leg twice. Seven years ago I ran my first 5K. Two weeks ago I ran 26.2 miles in the marathon. It took me 5 hours 56 1/2 minutes. I sprinted that last mile--tears coming down my face--because I did it. I finished the Chicago Marathon.

In this game of living, I have learned the more people you interact with the more opportunities you will get. Do not be afraid to try things. You may not know how they might help you now, but down the road it could be monumental. With this being said don't wait for things to happen, make them happen. If you really want something GO FOR IT!! As we know life is short so we must embrace it. In conclusion follow your

dreams and make the most of it. Never underestimate yourself. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain!