Survivor Turned Raider

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Oklahoma State University

Adetoyeke Adedipe

A 16-year old, blue-eyed brunette walks into the dance studio for the last of her bi-weekly rehearsals. After approaching the barre to warm up with a few plies, she moves into the beginning pose, with one toe tapped behind her and her arms arching above her head. She takes a deep breath and starts her well choreographed routine with a dramatic flair and passion in her fluid movements.

Days later, on Nov. 22, 1997, she was driving to Wellston Okla., suddenly she was broadsided at 60 mph on the driver’s side. The impact broke three of her lower ribs, and slammed her brain to one side of her skull.

She was rushed to the ICU where she remained in a coma for a month. Doctors predicted that she would either die soon, or be a vegetable for the rest of her life, but Alicia Payne awoke three days before Christmas and recovered.

Today, Alicia is an OSU Junior, who has dedicated her life to being an advocate for people who have suffered traumatic brain injuries and individual with disabilities.

According to the Caregiver.org Web site, “traumatic brain injury, also called brain injury or head injury, occurs when a blow or jolt to the head results in damage to the brain. TBIs range in severity from mild to severe.”

Alicia said her road to recovery was long hard and uncomfortable, but her friends for the dance studio gave her a reason to live.

“I wanted to go back to the dance studio and be with my friends, because I heard them in my coma and they gave me the encouragement to fight for my life. They literally scared me out of my pants,” Alicia said.

Although at dance studio Alicia said she was happy, her transition to school was a little weird.

“To me, it felt like they were treating me like a mentally retarded freak.” Alicia said.

Joyce Montgomery, coordinator of the Service-Learning Volunteer Center, said it has been a very interesting time getting to know Alicia Payne, as she begins the process to organize her outreach to students and the community.

“She organizes her mission through a logistics model that focuses on building a non-profit organization that will be energized by student organizations,” Joyce said.

While Alicia was a student at Rose State College, she started doing more research about Traumatic Brain Injuries where she discovered the numerous mistakes legislators had made. Since then, she has met with numerous legislators from Oklahoma, to get resources for individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves.

Also while at Rose State, she was a representative for Oklahoma Association on Higher Education and Disability (OK-AHEAD), during which she had opportunity to talk to students with disabilities and hear how they felt.

In the spring of 2002, she created TBI Raiders, as an online club only. Then, in summer 2004, when she travelled to Washington, she met with people who had worked with the former presidents. She told them what she was trying to do in Oklahoma, and they gave her encouragement and tips.

After that trip, she started working with the Service-Learning Volunteer Center, where she asked for volunteers to update her Web site, and clear the misunderstandings between people with disabilities and those without disabilities.

So far, Alicia has had one meeting on campus to get more students involved with her movement. That meeting although successful did not have a good enough turn out, as there was only a handful of people at the meeting. Alicia said she is trying her best to communicate effectively with the students to get them interested.

In 2006, Alicia was recognized in the Oklahoma State House of Representatives as a volunteer who helped TBI survivors in their recovery.

In addition to TBI Raiders, Alicia plans to start a student club called ILEAD, which stands for Increasing Leadership Empowering Advocates with Disabilities. This student club will work mainly with TBI Raiders to educate students on campus.

Alicia is passionate about the ever increasing numbers related to traumatic brain injury.

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Web site, “recent data shows that on average, about 1.4 million people sustain a TBI each year in the United States and of those people, 50,000 die.

Cortney Hicks, Service-Learning Volunteer Center graduate assistant, said she met Alicia through the SLVC.

“Alicia is a very passionate person, and she is very unforgettable,” Cortney said.

Alicia wants to bridge the gap that has been created between those who have disabilities and those who don’t. In doing that, she wants to make people know that not all who suffer a TBI will die, by using herself as an example.

Sources

Joyce Montgomery—Service-Learning Volunteer Center coordinator

Cortney Hicks—SLVC Graduate Assistant

Alicia Payne

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/tbi.htm>

<http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=579>