

Appalachian Teen Challenge News

2017 Kent State University Graduate Crystin Walker Found Freedom From Her Addiction at Appalachian Teen Challenge



At the Training Center not a day goes by that we don't see a miracle. Such was the case a few weeks back when we received an article published by The Repository Newspaper in Canton, Ohio. We instantly recognized the sweet face pictured as that of our own Crystin Grindle Walker. We well remember the day that Crystin came to the Training Center. She was broken and had many obstacles in her life to overcome. There were days when she wondered if she would make it and if change was really possible. Her kind and bubbly personality won the hearts of the staff and other students. We began encouraging and believing in Crystin because we knew that God could heal her. Now eight years later, she has achieved what we knew was possible all along. We would like to share the article with you so that you may also see just one of the many miracles taking place at Teen Challenge. Here is Crystin's story as told by Repository Staff Writer Kelli Weir.

Medics didn't immediately see Crystin Grindle in the heap of twisted metal that had been a Ford Explorer. It was nighttime and the vehicle was cloaked by some trees near a curve off of Whinnery Road, an unlit country street just west of Guildford Lake in Columbiana County. Crystin also was no longer sitting in the passenger seat. When the SUV struck the tree, the force knocked her seat back and sent her upper body to the driver's side. Her head was lodged behind the driver's seat, while her foot was stuck in the passenger side dashboard. One of the medics stepped on Crystin when they entered the vehicle. Emergency crews needed the Jaws of Life to cut through the vehicle and pry Crystin from the wreckage. She was taken by helicopter to Summa Akron City Hospital after medics determined she wouldn't survive the longer flight to a Cleveland hospital. Medics performed four blood transfusions along the way.

At the hospital, Crystin remained in a coma. Doctors determined that she stopped breathing for 14 minutes and suffered a severe brain injury. The orbital bones around her right eye was crushed and would require five surgeries to repair. Doctors inserted a chest tube to support her collapsed lung and determined she would need surgery to repair her broken back. By 3 a.m., Crystin's condition deteriorated to the point the medical staff brought in her parents to say their final goodbyes. A few days later, Crystin's condition still hadn't improved. She still wasn't responding to any stimulation. Doctors asked June Grindle whether she wanted to take her daughter off the ventilator. They said even if she did come out of the coma, she likely would remain in a vegetative state. June wasn't ready to give up. Crystin was the youngest of her three children and only a junior at United High School. She ranked third in her class academically and was on track to possibly be valedictorian her senior year. She wanted to be a doctor, a brain surgeon no less. She had too much to live for.

Crystin woke up from her coma two and a half weeks after the crash. She underwent nine surgeries to repair her right eye, her back and her vocal cords that had been cut accidentally during one of her first surgeries. Yet doctors could do little to heal her brain. It would take months of in-patient and out-patient therapy for her to relearn the basics, including how to walk. When she returned home, she still had the mentality of a 2-year-old. While the therapy helped her to walk and talk, it was her mother who had to reteach her how to make good decisions and about morals and values. As the new school year approached, Crystin pleaded with her mom to allow her to go back to school. Her doctors warned against it, but Crystin was determined to graduate with her class. "I loved school and school was such a big thing to me," Crystin said. "I got there, and it was horrible."

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She forgot how to multiply. She couldn't divide. On some days, she struggled to remember where her classroom was located. Her brain no longer could filter sounds, so the noise of a student turning the page in a textbook sounded as loud to her as the teacher's voice. All the sounds became a cacophony that quickly overloaded her brain, leaving her confused and frustrated. School officials developed a learning plan to reintroduce Crystin back to the school environment one class at a time. Thanks to her previous high grades, she still was able to graduate with her high school peers and be accepted into college. But Crystin quickly found that college wasn't any easier. She became highly anxious to new environments and still struggled with her short-term memory and her concentration, which made it difficult for her to follow the lecture-style courses. She received her first failing grades in her educational career. Devastated, the former high school honor student quit.

Adrift without a goal, Crystin fell into back-to-back bad relationships. Soon, she turned to drugs to escape, first smoking marijuana daily and then using crack cocaine every day for a roughly nine-month span. Crystin's addiction to cocaine became so severe that she couldn't make herself quit. It wasn't until police officers came to her mobile home to arrest her then-boyfriend that she told her mom she wanted to get help. Even then, she wasn't fully committed. The day her mother and a friend came to take her to the addiction treatment center, they found Crystin high and still not packed. At age 27, Crystin remained at the Christian-based *Appalachian Teen Challenge* center in West Virginia for more than a year to combat her addiction. As she began to piece her life back together without drugs, Crystin met Brent, a native of Trinidad who attended college on a full athletic scholarship. The two were married Jan. 5, 2011. It was Brent, who convinced Crystin to try college again. College, even though it was part time, was just as difficult as Crystin remembered. But this time, she received some extra help. Crystin was linked with a reading tutor and had an in-class note taker. She also was given extended time for her tests and could take her tests in a less noisy environment. Through a grant for students who have suffered a traumatic brain injury, Crystin also received electronic textbooks so her laptop could read the text aloud while she read it on the screen. Crystin has served as a supplemental instruction specialist, where she helps tutor students, and as a peer advocate, where she helps students at risk of dropping out, get the resources they need to be successful. Crystin said she will share the story about the crash in 1999 and her brain injury with students when it seems appropriate.

Crystin, now 35, graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. The ever-smiling Crystin beamed as she crossed the Umstattd Hall stage to receive her diploma and shake the hands of the university's dignitaries. She flashed an even bigger smile as she headed back to her seat and could see her mother sitting with her husband, Brent; daughters, Shyla, 11, and Eliana, 5; and other family and friends in the audience. She wiped a tear from under her glasses as she sat down. Graduating from college was an achievement that seemed nearly impossible in the months following the car crash in April 1999 and one that was nearly derailed by drugs. She wants to become a substance abuse counselor and hopes to find a job in the field before returning to Kent State to pursue her master's degree.

We pray you have been as touched by Crystin's story as we were. As we watch the miracles taking place at the Training Center, we know that only God can do such incredible things! Like Crystin, there are hundreds of our graduates who have achieved unimaginable success after their journey at Appalachian Teen Challenge. These stories keep us moving forward and striving with everything in us to reach as many people like Crystin as possible. Together, with God's direction and our faithful supporters, we are changing the world one life at a time!