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Student Profiles: Mark Crehan, Canisius College

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Student Profile

Mark's Doctors Were Wrong

By Kathy Liebner

wenty-two year old Mark Crehan '05 waves to a college workman walking by. He is sitting in the cafeteria wearing a bright, welcoming smile. Before I know it, I am describing to him my own college plans and goals. Not so long ago all this would have seemed impossible. But Mark beat the odds.

Diagnosed at age one with cerebral palsy, doctors told his parents that he would be non-verbal and have little chance of walking. "I get around and, as you can see," he laughs, "I don't shut up."

After undergoing physical therapy for many years, Mark was able to overcome these difficult physical barriers. He began attending Clarence High School in suburban Buffalo in 1997 where he was introduced to history, which he became interested in through a close friend and teacher. During his junior year of high school, when Mark was going through a particularly difficult time, his 1960s American History teacher gave him encouragement and support. In 2001, he graduated from high school and embarked on his college career. Now a senior at Canisius College, Mark is pursuing a history major with a minor in religious studies. He plans a career in counseling or broadcasting.

For Mark, choosing the right college did not only depend on his interests, but also on his physical limitations. One of the factors which led him to choose Canisius was the fact that its campus is relatively small and flat, which makes it easier for him to walk throughout the campus. If he needs to go distances, the Office of Disability Support Services or the college's public safety officers are always available for transportation. Most important, Mark says that when he visited Canisius' Open House, the school "felt



Mark Crehan

like home right away." As a freshman, he soon found himself working in the Disability Services Office, helping with photocopying, answering the phone and filing.

Throughout his life, Mark has had to deal with the limitations of his disability, but he doesn't allow it to affect his positive outlook. "I'm just a normal guy," he says. "That's the way I look at it. This is just the hand God dealt me." In many ways, however, his disability continues to affect him. As often as possible, Mark must undergo physical therapy to prevent spasticity in his legs. There are also many activities in which Mark cannot participate, like soccer. But that doesn't stop him from getting involved.

"Once people know me, they forget about it [his disability]." For example, he mentioned a time when his friends wondered why he was not coming camping with them. They had

forgotten. Despite these restrictions, Mark states "I'm never left out. I always find a way to involve myself."

Without a doubt, Mark remains an active individual. He maintains his job in Disability Support Services, where he loves his boss and "where I've made some of my best friends." He enjoys playing all sorts of pick-up sports such as basketball, hockey, football, and baseball. He loves adding to his Beatles collection, playing video games, going to Bills games with his father and "just hanging out."

It is obvious when talking to Mark that his family and friends are the most important elements in his life. Mark says that his father is one of his greatest role models. Then smiles and says, "And he always says I'm his, because of everything I've gone through." The Crehan family has always been very close. Mark's parents visit him on campus during the weekends when school is in session. His oldest sister is attending George Washington University, but when she comes home, "the four of us just have a blast." His friends seem to be wherever he is. "I just have the natural ability to talk to people and make friends wherever I go."

Mark says that he doesn't plan to move out of Western New York. He intends to remain in Buffalo, a city he considers full of opportunity. He also plans to pursue his graduate degree at Canisius. "There's so much to do here, you just have to find it."

And, that is what Mark has done his entire life.

Kathy Liebner, a sophomore, majors in political science and history.