



CenturyCollege

News Release

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Century College Student Crowned “Ms You Can Do It”

Century College student Alexandra Schmitt of New Brighton this summer was crowned Ms. You Can Do It (YCDI), a title given to the winner of a national pageant open to girls and young women with special needs and challenges. Now in its 5th year, the event was founded by Abbey Curran, Iowa’s 2008 Miss USA titleholder, who has been challenged by cerebral palsy since birth.

Schmitt competed against 38 other young women from across the country for this national title at the pageant held July 26 in Kewanee, Illinois. While Schmitt won the Ms YCDI crown, all the girls won prizes. And the biggest prize of all was the soaring self-confidence that accrued to every single contestant when she was treated like a princess for one splendid night.

Schmitt’s road to this title started 20 years ago when she was born three months prematurely by emergency C-section. Due to a brain hemorrhage, Schmitt had to be resuscitated immediately and was given a 50 percent chance of survival. Her APGAR score (the numeric measure of how healthy a baby is at birth) was zero.

“They didn’t know what kind of vegetative state I would be in,” said Schmitt in a recent interview. “I wasn’t supposed to walk or breathe on my own. It was a miracle I survived. Maddie, too.”

Maddie is Schmitt's twin sister, Madelynn, a student at Butler University. Maddie ended up with some respiratory problems. Alexandra suffered mild cerebral palsy.

A 2006 graduate of Irondale High School, Schmitt played percussion in the marching band, took dancing lessons and had many friends. While she was teased some in elementary school for her speech and her gait, her social problems mostly evaporated when she got a bit older and gained poise and confidence. By most measures, she was a happy, well-rounded teenager.

Now a third-year student at Century College, Schmitt takes advantage of the extra student services available to her through the federally-funded SSS/TRIO program and accommodations through the Access Center. She has warm things to say about the SSS/TRIO personnel who help her with tutoring, study skills and planning for her future. This semester, Schmitt is taking Century courses in English and math, plus a child development class from Intermediate School District 916.

Schmitt heard about the Ms YCDI pageant this year from another student in her dance class, and she decided to pursue it because it sounded like fun. "I told myself that I am Ms YCDI," said Schmitt. "I wasn't supposed to walk or even live, and here I am going to college. I look at life as a positive thing. It is so great to be here and to be able to live my life."

Schmitt worked with a pageant coach last summer for a week or so before going to Illinois. She practiced walking on stage in high heels, improving her posture and responding to interview questions.

"I wanted to show the judges that I can stand up straight and speak clearly," said Schmitt, who once wore leg braces.

When the big Saturday night event finally rolled around, Schmitt did the whole beauty pageant routine, first appearing in a T-shirt and shorts, followed by casual wear and then formal wear. Wearing her pink, glittery silk gown, she was asked the question, "If you had one wish come true, what would it be and why?"

Schmitt answered, “I would wish for no child to go to bed hungry because I have learned through working with Feed My Starving Children that there is enough food in the world, but not the political will to accomplish the task.”

After intermission, she discovered that she not only won “best interview,” but she also won the Ms You Can Do It crown. “It was amazing,” she said.

Schmitt’s goal is to work with young children in either a daycare or kindergarten setting. A documentary film about the Ms YCDI pageant is expected to be aired on HBO next summer.

For more information about the pageant, you are welcome to contact Abbey Curran at missyoucandoit@yahoo.com, or Alexandra Schmitt at alschmitt2002@yahoo.com. Schmitt also has a website, www.2008myyoucandoit.org/



Photo: Alex Schmitt