



News Release

December 17, 2009

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Students Succeeding After Tragedy

Sometimes the struggles that students face just to stay in college are almost beyond belief. But their resiliency is truly inspirational.

For example - Century students Kristal Vang, 17, and her brother Kevin, 19.

Kristal is a senior at Harding High School and is also enrolled in [Century's Preparing to Achieve a College Education program](#). She earns college credit in classes that meet on Saturdays at Century, and she recently received two college scholarships - one from the Optimist Club of St. Paul's Friend of Youth Foundation and one from the Beat the Odds program of the Children's Defense Fund.

Kevin is a first-year Century student, a husband and the father of an infant boy.

On the face of it, the siblings appear to be doing fine. They are both involved in school, motivated and personable. But it is what these young people have overcome that gives you pause.

Two years ago, Kristal and her three younger sisters were living in Fresno, Calif., when her father shot and killed her mother and then killed himself. Her father had been living in White Bear Lake with Kevin, and he had driven to California to try and reunite with his daughters.

The murder-suicide rocked the family, and the five Vang children are still struggling with the emotional aftermath. But they are also moving on.

“My parents were adults who had their own problems,” said Kristal. “But we are their kids. And we have lives to lead. Really, everyone has to lead their own life. No one can do that for you.”

Kristal, Kevin and their sisters are currently living with their dad’s sister in St. Paul.

Kristal said there is some tension among the siblings. For example, Kristal was really close to her mom and Kevin, the only boy in the family, was closer to their dad.

Kristal and Kevin, both teenagers, have been thrust into the roles of mother and father for their younger siblings. Kristal makes meals and cooks for her sisters and Kevin goes to Century and also supports a wife and child.

Kristal shares a room with her three sisters and gets them ready for school every day before leaving herself at 7:15 a.m. Back home at 2:30 p.m., she prepares dinner and does domestic chores until her sisters get home from school. After dinner, she supervises homework.

Kristal said her 12-year-old sister is struggling and is probably angry at the world. “I don’t really know what to do sometimes,” said Kristal. “I am supposed to be a sister, not a mom. I have a lot of responsibility that others do not. I jumped right into reality.”

Kristal said she brought her sister to the dinner that honored her for the Optimist scholarship. “I wanted to be a good role model for my sister,” she said.

Kristal has made friends through the PACE program, and she really likes the PACE instructors. “They have given me the courage to go to college,” said Kristal.

Kristal loves her Century science class and her high school chemistry class. She is thinking about becoming a medical laboratory technician.

What does she dream of for the future? “I want a house with my sisters so that we do not have to share a room,” she said. “I want a happy family – like how we used to be. You have to push yourself through life. You have to hang on to your dreams.”

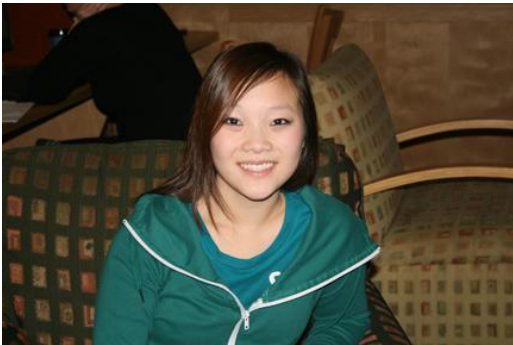
Kevin, a 2008 graduate of White Bear Lake High School, also dreams of a big house, a college degree and a decent job that will help him support his family. He said expressing his feelings through essays in the Century English class taught by Prof. Cheryl Gfrerer has helped heal him emotionally, and classmates have been supportive. But remembering his parents is still very hard.

“I want to help other kids not take their parents for granted,” said Kevin. “I want them to know that their parents may not always be there for them. Thinking back, there are things I wish I would have done differently. I wish I had paid more attention to them, for example. Being a teenager, I was always mad at them for yelling at me. I never appreciated what they had done for me.”

Individuals who wish to help students stay in college can contact the [Century College Foundation](#). Please call 651-779-3356 for more information.



Kevin Vang



Kristal Vang