

# Through Adversity

## Disabled students deal with life at Texas A&M

BY AMANDA PALM  
The Battalion

Sarah Whitlock, a senior psychology major, was born with cerebral palsy. It is a disorder of the central nervous system that causes spastic paralysis and defective motor ability. She has never had the privilege of being able to walk, to use the restroom alone or to even do something as simple as getting dressed by herself.

Whitlock has functioned in a wheelchair her entire life. She has a staff of eight people who assist her in everyday activities, such as getting out of bed and helping her get ready for the day.

"My staff helps me with normal things people do by themselves," she said. "To get out of bed, I have to use a hydraulic lift that must be pumped by hand. I can't pump it, so I need someone to do it for me."

"Just putting pants on in the morning and getting dressed is a chore for me. To use the restroom, I have to go back to my dorm. I can't go anytime or anywhere I want. I live on a schedule, and I have to stick to it."

Across campus, while Whitlock is making her way to class in her power chair, Kevin Richardson, a senior informational systems major, is walking to his next class. He does not use a wheelchair and he looks just like anyone else you pass while walking to class.

Richardson was born with cancer and had his right eye removed when he was 10 months old. He grew up with a prosthesis in his right eye and full use of his left eye. At 16, he was hit in his left eye with a dart and lost partial sight in that eye as well.

Richardson has been forced to adjust to his minimal sight. He has taken classes to learn braille and how to function with the loss of his sight. Richardson's life activities have become limited since he lost partial sight of his left eye.

"I have to be more cautious so I don't hurt what sight I have left," he said. "The sports I play are limited for me. I just started to play racquetball, but I have to wear special goggles. I can't go outside if it's really windy because I can't take the chance of getting something in my eye."

The Americans with Disabilities Act of

1990 defines a disability as a "mental or physical impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities."

A person with a disability would not be able to perform such things as manual tasks by themselves or be able to see, hear or speak without major difficulty.

Services for Students with Disabilities ensures that students who are disabled have access to all University programs.

According to Services for Students with Disabilities, there are 400 students at Texas A&M who are defined as disabled.

Though most people associate disabilities with something physical, such as being in a wheelchair or having to use crutches, the majority of those 400 students have invisible disabilities. These include blindness, deafness, dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

Whitlock and Richardson need special assistance from their professors when they are in class.

Because of his partial sight, Richardson must sit in the front of the class so he can see the professor.

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