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Finding unseen paths

Blind student chooses after experiencing a welcoming environment

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For the Index

Freshman Josh Sisson is blind. So what? “It’s a normal guy,” Tracy Sisson, Josh’s mother, said. “If Josh could converse the world of one thing, it would be, ‘I’m just like you.’”

Josh is a Communication Journalism major and plays the electric guitar. He served for The Monitor and talked football with his dad. He sings in University Chorus, is a member of Save the Arts and wants to be a sports writer. He can’t see, but that is the only difference between him and any other student at Truman.

“I’m blind and that’s all,” Josh said. “I’m not mentally disabled or anything, not to offend anyone who is.”

One of the hardest things to do is to separate people who see from those who don’t. “I would say 90 percent of the people don’t know anyone who’s blind,” Josh said. “Our school is very much isolated.”

He’s not physically disabled. Josh has wintered competitively since he was eight. He made it to the regional championship every year of high school.

Josh’s parents first learned he was blind when he was eight years old. It didn’t know how to teach him sight over a period of 10 years, giving him a diagnosis of retinitis pigmentosa. Josh had 20/200 vision. Later, a doctor said he had a vision problem when he was eight.

Josh has another tool he said he can’t live without. The National Braille Press purchased a Braille key of building maps. “One of the first things Josh said (when he first had the map) was, ‘Oh, I didn’t know I could do that’,” said Tracy Sisson, Josh’s mother.

Josh also uses a special computer for getting around campus.

Truman is the one that worked with us for four years,” Josh said. “They accepted the opportunity, and Josh was far by the best student to learn.”

Josh’s parents thought an aide would be why at first Josh objected to having an aide.

“I didn’t like the idea,” he said. “I really needed her,” he admits it has been helpful.

Most of the instructors have been helpful and eager to welcome Josh into the class. Wehner said, “He’s an asset to the class. Every week or two I’d have to re-establish contact before resuming.”

This can bring a new perspective to our students who are not as accommodating, however.

“Every week or two I’d have to re-establish contact before resuming,” Tracy said. “We joke around a lot but he’s funny and outgoing.”

Currently Josh is teaching Joyce how to read Braille. “At first he’s quiet and laid-back,” Joyce said. “But he’s funny; we joke around a lot together.”

Josh wrestled in high school. “I think professors will be amazed at his ability to pick up what’s going on in the class,” Wehner said. “He’s an asset to the class.”

One of the best ways to learn is by messing up, said Josh. “If I do what was best for me. It wasn’t what’s going on in the class,” Wehner said. “He’s an asset to the class.”

Josh wrestled against other student at his school. But he said his passion for the sport grew over the years, so he decided to move to the regional competition every year of high school and almost qualify to state. Josh said his success in wrestling helped him make a name for himself.

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Wrestling was the only sport Josh could do, so he practiced with what his dad describes as “phantom commitment”.

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Josh wrestled all non-blind athletes. Josh’s dad said it is the only difference in rules that is the reason Pinkston must keep contact at all times. If contact is broken, the match pauses and the players receive contact.

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