

# A Lesson in Perseverance

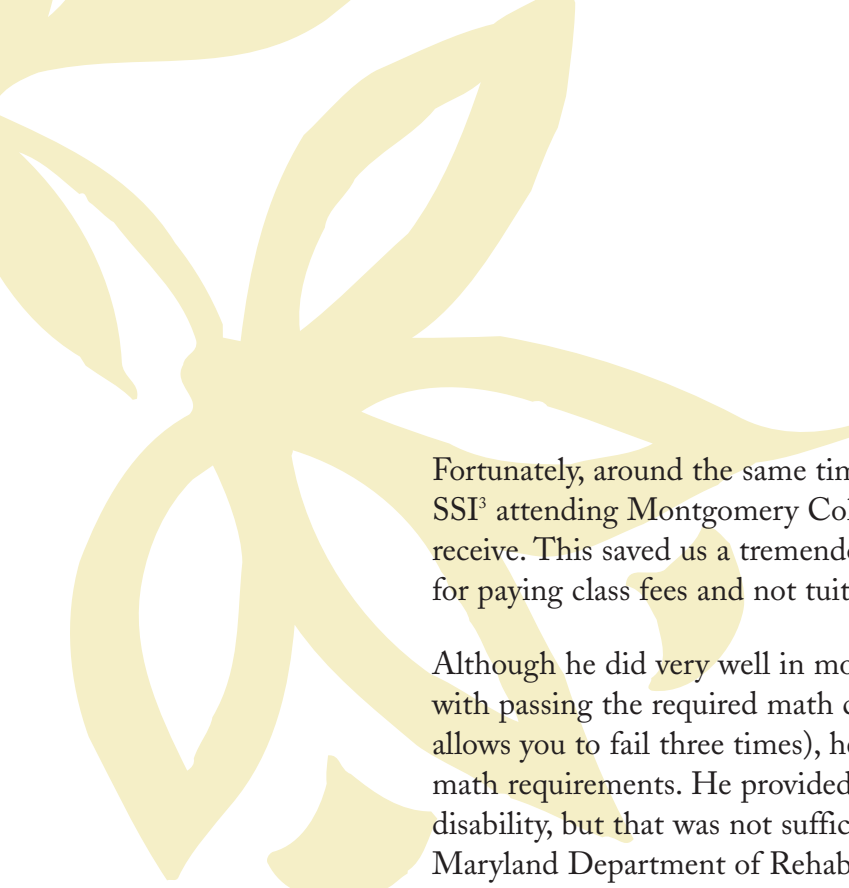
**S**EVERAL WEEKS AGO, I PROUDLY CORRALLED MY FAMILY, including a grandmother and two close family friends, to Rockville, Maryland to happily witness my son's graduation from community college after six years of hard work. Although he has significant learning disabilities, he has learned more about determination and perseverance in his short life than many of us ever will.

When he transferred to a high school in Montgomery County in the 10th grade, the special education coordinator held his initial IEP<sup>1</sup> that he and I attended and proceeded to suggest that he pursue a "certificate of completion," rather than a high school diploma. The certificate of completion is given to students who are not likely to complete the Carnegie requirements for a high school diploma. My son calmly said "no way" and proceeded to prove the coordinator wrong. He endured mathematics and a geometry teacher who referred to his class as "slow" and a principal who wasn't bothered by that statement when I complained. He took advantage of the after school and Saturday tutoring that was available to help students pass the Maryland State competency tests, and he passed.

When he finished school, he enrolled in Montgomery College, but not in the Student Support Services Program (SSS).<sup>2</sup> His first year grades were mediocre at best, and by spring semester, he decided he needed Student Support Services. Once he enrolled in that program, he was advised that he needed to start over with several remedial classes. He really didn't want to repeat classes that he had already passed because he was in a hurry to finish. I really didn't want to pay the tuition either. However, I encouraged him to take advantage of the program.

<sup>1</sup>An IEP is the Individualized Education Program for students with disabilities who receive services pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

<sup>2</sup>The Student Support Services Program provides opportunities for academic development, assists students with basic college requirements and motivates students toward the successful completion of their college education. To be eligible for SSS a person must be a first generation, low income college student or a student with a disability. The U.S. Department of Education provides grants to selected colleges and universities for this service. The U.S. Department of Education website provides a list of participating institutions of higher learning. <http://www.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp>



Fortunately, around the same time we learned about tuition waivers that recipients of SSI<sup>3</sup> attending Montgomery College, as well as many other schools, are eligible to receive. This saved us a tremendous amount of money since we were only responsible for paying class fees and not tuition.

Although he did very well in most of his classes, my son consistently had problems with passing the required math courses. After failing math twice (the school only allows you to fail three times), he finally decided to petition for a waiver from the math requirements. He provided past high school records to demonstrate his learning disability, but that was not sufficient. Then, he enlisted the help of DORS (the Maryland Department of Rehabilitation Services) for further testing to demonstrate his learning disability. It worked. He was granted a waiver from the math requirements. Unfortunately he still had to pass several science courses including the labs, in lieu of the math. Science classes were a challenge for him also. For instance, he had great difficulties with biology, and did not pass it the first time.

Unfortunately, just when we thought there was clear sailing, he learned that his GPA was not high enough to graduate. He had to make a decision: throw away five years worth of hard work or take the courses over that he had failed. My son is a fantastic young man who is kind, intelligent and intent on doing the right thing. As a parent, my heart ached because he was so close to his goal, and I didn't want him to feel pressure from me to finish. I tried to make him understand that college wasn't necessarily for everyone and that it didn't define success. He had already succeeded in my eyes. Nevertheless, he decided to get over it, literally, and take these courses over. As always, he worked very hard, but I noticed something different. He was talking about his classes in a more positive manner and seemed to be actually enjoying them. He said that he felt much more relaxed and was interested in learning, not just making a grade. He felt that his professors "clicked" better with him than previous instructors. At the end of the semester, he felt confident that he would pass and improve his GPA enough to graduate. And he did, with two A's and a B.

He has now been accepted into a four year college program, and I have learned my lesson about being doubtful and overprotective. My son has shown me that what it really takes to succeed is clarity of goals, patience and perseverance, and that no amount of setbacks can stop you, unless you let them.

<sup>3</sup>SSI or Supplemental Security Income is a means-tested Social Security program, based on an individual's income and resources that persons with significant disabilities can receive. Children from families of moderate to high incomes are generally not eligible because a portion of the parents' income is deemed to the child. However, when a child turns 18, his/her income and resources are independently evaluated to determine whether he meets the financial eligibility test.