

2016 Worthy Women's Professional Studies Scholarship

By Samantha Murphy

My best friend, Heather, is like my sister. We lived together for four years and during that time I struggled to keep my finances in order and take care of my health. One day she told me she was going to take over making my doctors' appointments and paying my bills on time until I was able to manage it myself. She did this while attending graduate school full time and working part time as a research assistant. She does not judge those around her and accepts everyone from a place of empathy. Due to her calm approach to tense situations, her willingness to listen, and her ability to see a whole person, she became a wonderful and needed support without making me feel like failure. The deep relationships she forges, willingness to always listen before lecturing, and calm way she moves through the world make her the person I most often try to emulate.

At work, Heather is an Administrative Director of a social service organization and it's her job to keep the agency running. However, she often finds colleagues in her office when they need a non-judgmental, direct, and compassionate ear. Although she doesn't supervise many of them, her colleagues find a refuge with her; an island in a storm where they can tie in and reorient. Her willingness to make time in her day for others, along with her regular duties, makes her a worthy woman.

I tell people a lot about my best friend but one thing I typically don't mention until it comes up in conversation is that she has a C-5 spinal cord injury and has used a wheelchair for over twenty years. Every day, caregivers come to help her get dressed and undressed, make meals, do exercises, get ready for work, shower, and get in and out of bed. Things that most of take for granted, things that most of us do in half the time it takes her, and things we are able to do without the stress of relying on other people. Heather goes to work, is a supportive colleague, and compassionate friend regardless of the additional challenges her disability create. My friend is a worthy woman because she moves through life putting other people first and nurturing relationships all the while not feeling remotely sorry for herself and maintaining a peacefulness that is calming to everyone she encounters. I tell people a lot about my

best friend but I don't often mention the wheelchair. The only reason it's ever worth mentioning is to create understanding of what she has to do every day in order to get ready to be her amazing self.