

CRI Essay Contest
Second-Place Winner
Kristen Barnes

Have you ever sat back and wondered how you became the person you are today? As a junior at MUW, all of my most vivid dreams in the back of my imagination have come true. I attend my dream college, I live away from home serving as the president of a prestigious organization, and I drive my dream car. Each of these goals, have thought to be unattainable for those with disabilities. Despite this, each day I live my dream. By living out this dream, I also live out my mother's dream to see me succeed. My mother is one who has positively affected my life by challenging me to never give up or think anything is impossible.

The word "can't" was regarded as a forbidden word in my house. In fact, it didn't exist. There were many occasions during my childhood where it would have been easier to give up rather than persevere. Tasks weren't as easy as I expected, and as a result I would scream, "I can't do this!" My mother would sternly but lovingly look into my big brown eyes and say with calmness, "Try again." Those two words had so much meaning in my house, mainly because of the repetition. I heard it so much, my brother used to mockingly tell me that one day the neighbors would actually think my first name was, "Try."

At the age of three, I was diagnosed with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, a brittle bone disease that affects the production of collagen. Along the period of five years, I had broken my limbs more than six times, and it became apparent my mother had to do something. I can still intensely remember sitting in that cold, dreary, and awful hospital room, surrounded by white walls and the pungent smells of disinfectant. After running tests, it became apparent what the problem was. My doctor came up with a solution. He told my mother, "Kristen has a brittle bone disorder. The slightest bruise could cause a fracture in

her small frame. To ease this, we recommend putting her in a wheelchair with the aid of braces to help her walk. Prior falls have resulted fractures, and consequently, she can't fall."

Imagine telling a five-year-old to never fall. It should serve as an oxymoron for a kindergartener's vocabulary. Like the hyper young tot I was, I learned to succeed, explore, and grow by falling. Surprisingly, my doctor didn't receive that stern look I got each time I used the word. Subsequently, I didn't say anything. Calmly, my mother picked up her stuff, placed me into my stroller, and took me home.

The next afternoon, after school was over, I was in for a surprise. A big box with a pink bow was in the driveway waiting on me as I arrived. My mother helped me open it up, and inside was the most unexpected gift ever, a bike! It was an oceanic shade of blue with pink streamers with Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* stickers attached. As soon as I received it I thought quietly, "Doesn't she know I'm not supposed fall?" and "This wouldn't be a good idea." Nevertheless, I kept quiet for I had learned to never question the actions of my mother.

Over the next few months, I learned how to ride a bike. I could ride up and down the driveway without any assistance. The extra exercise I received caused my bones to grow stronger, and as I grew older, my fractures ceased. It has been four years since my last experience with a fracture, but the experience of learning to ride my bike lingers on.

Even though, I lack the ability to ride a bike now, the principle behind it still remains as a constant reminder in everything I do. In order to succeed, you must fall. I've "fallen" many times in my life. I haven't always been at the top of my class, I've never won a pageant, and I'm still not any good at kickball. The importance of these experiences is that I tried, and I never gave up because it never crossed my mind that, "I couldn't." At the brink of failing, I always heard my mother's voice in the back of mind, urging me to try again, just in another way.

This ability of persistence has helped me in many areas of life. Without my mother, as a child with a disability, I would have heard the word "can't" many times. In fact, I still hear it. But because of her dedication and persistence to raise an emotionally strong and well-balanced child, she has taught me that things are always what you make of it. Anything is attainable under the sun if a person stays dedicated, persistent, and flexible. Her attempt to mold my vocabulary, in turn modified my perspective on life. Over the years, my mother has influenced me to understand, "Can't is never in a wise man's vocabulary." "Can't" is such a small word. Through dedication, if you take out the n't, this word will be transformed to can, and the range of things a person can do is broad.

Can is one of the smallest words my mother ever taught me. It is made up of exactly three letters of the alphabet. Even though it is small, it makes up many chapters of success in the story of my life. Without her presence in my life, I would not be the person I am today, and the dream I live might have been regarded as a "can't." Through believing in myself, and thinking the world is accomplishable, I have inspired many others to think the same. Through my mother's teachings, she has inspired myself as well as many others to make their own vocabulary and through persistence and dedication live their dreams.