

American Dreaming: Katie Basford Candee Basford

May, 1999



Katie and Candee celebrate Katie's high school graduation, June, 1998 (photo by Marty Oppenheimer)

Katie Basford

In 1998 Katie Basford graduated from high school in rural Adams County, in southwest Ohio near the Ohio river, and enrolled as a college student at Southern State Community College. In her first college term she took basic math and drama classes.

"College is doing fine. College is where you learn and follow directions. In drama, I like to be an actress in plays, stuff like that. In basic math, it's kind of hard. I need to work on it, catch up with my grades. First you've got to keep your grades up. You can't get bad grades. I need a chance to learn. I can do this. I can do math and drama."

"College is a very fun thing. I work in the child care center on campus. I went on my field trip. We went to the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Boathouse and Cincinnati Pops. I meet lots of new friends there in college."

School experiences

"Two of my friends in 5th grade were Cheyenne and Shirley. We went to the Cincinnati Zoo and the gift shop. I liked the field trip and I liked it in 6th grade with Mr. Bennington. In junior high I had Mr. Young for science and Mr. Shupert for math. He taught me to do math. In biology we went outside to study animals. We saw a snake in the water. In math class my teacher was Mrs. Semple. She let me use a calculator in math. I like math."

"In high school I went to two proms with T.J. The background for the prom was Cinderella. I liked it. In the swing-a-thon I stayed all night in the school building."

"In my senior year, I was voted most flirtatious. I wanted to be most outgoing. On my graduation, my friends wrote inside my senior yearbook."

Friends

"People think I'm nice, smart and sweet. When people call me names, I'm upset, sad, lonely. Then I go in a different room and start crying. It's a bad thing when people call me names. I feel kind of grumpy and tell people to leave me alone and behave yourself."

The Future

"I'm thinking about living on my own, not by myself. I need to grow up a little. Then get married and have a house. Freedom means that you've got to go on, like going on to college."

Candee Basford

For all of Katie Basford's 20 years her mother Candee Basford has had dreams for her future and has been organizing efforts to move toward those dreams.

"When Katie was young, I worried about everything. I was having to find all the answers. If there was a problem, I was the researcher. I faked my way through it. I got my support through newsletters from advocacy organizations and going to conferences to hear other people talk about their children going to public school in regular classrooms. If it wasn't for that, I probably wouldn't have held out. I saw that other people had some success, and somehow what I wanted made some sense."

Katie was included in regular classes in her neighborhood school, offering her many opportunities.

"The vision early on was that Katie would have friends and would live in the community. Another part of my vision when she was in school was that she would be able to say whatever she had to say. For an assignment in high school she had to pick a murder trial in history, be either prosecutor or defendant and argue an opening statement. What an opportunity to learn about advocacy, by choosing a side and stating an opinion!"

"Another time in the fifth grade she got to write a paper along with all the rest of the kids about 'How I would run the school if I were the principal.'"

Despite being in regular classes in her local high school and having many friends, not being able to drive made coordination with friends and activities difficult.

"In high school Katie went to basketball games. She watched and cheered the team on. She had all the games in her calendar. She would stay after the games. That was important to her. But she needed to be able to pick up the phone and say, 'I need a ride,' instead of depending on me."

"We had a planning meeting after school one day to talk about things Katie wanted to do, because she was saying she didn't get to go out with her friends enough. The kids were saying, 'Sure, Katie, what do you want to do? Let's go to a concert. Let's go to a movie.' They went out one time, and then it fell apart. There was no plan and no support, and it wasn't formalized in any way. Everybody got busy."

Just when you think you've got it,
you have to start
selling the idea again.

Preparing for college

The road to college was not straight or smooth. Many people had doubts about whether someone with Down syndrome could attend college, just as some had doubted that she could succeed in public school.

"When we first talked about college in an IEP meeting, I can't say school people were supportive. I think they've learned there's no point in arguing with me, which frankly is a very nice place to be. I told them if there was a college fair going on, I wanted to make sure that Katie knew about it. If they didn't agree with me about inclusive education, I was glad to talk to them about it, but I really didn't care if they agreed or not, as long as they were willing to do what they needed to do."

“I don’t try to convince people much anymore, especially school folks. It took a lot of energy. For a long time I tried to convince them through my words. Now if there’s any convincing to be done, it will be through what they see.”

“Now I just want somebody to give me more of the how. It’s hard to find people who can support this and who know something about college. I really wish people would gather around and listen and say, ‘I can do this,’ or, ‘I can support this piece,’ instead of saying, ‘I can’t support this, because it’s not a vocational goal.’ I want them to come in ready and willing to listen and do what you need them to do when they hear a piece they are able to do. You can’t define what you’re going to do before you go into the meeting. Once you do that, you box yourself in.”

“One day Katie said, ‘I don’t have a clue where I’m going to college. I said, ‘What do you mean, you don’t have a clue? You have narrowed it down to five choices, haven’t you?’ I said, ‘Well, then, you do have a clue. You have five choices that you’ve talked about.’ At that time a lot of her friends were making those final decisions. It’s been interesting to see how she goes about deciding. She listens to her friends.”

Facing the unknown

“The experience of Katie graduating reminded me of what it was like, looking down the long path of public education when she was starting school. Now it’s happening again, facing this unknown. With school, it got to the point where nobody was going to mess with us. We had this thing down. Inclusion became the way it was going to be.”

“But just when you think you’ve got it, you have to start selling the idea again. I’m hearing the same old comments, getting the same stares from different faces. Now it’s Rehab folks.”

“At least this time I don’t have those ‘Am I nuts?’ thoughts like I had before. All those years of this battle raging in my head, it was a very painful, isolating experience. Now I’m not afraid of what anyone else thinks. We have this life to live, and we’re going to do it, by God.”

“I do think that one of my disadvantages is being in a rural area and not having people close by to provide me with support and say, ‘You’re on the right track,’ or ‘Look how great she’s doing.’ I’ve never had that many people locally I was on the same page with, so I had to look elsewhere.”

Living with tension

“I know that there’s emotional tension when you have a dream. Sometimes dealing with the tension means you risk lowering the vision. For me this means I know that there will be a certain amount of emotional tension, but I have no intention of lowering the dream for anybody. It’s important to support people through that tension, letting them know that it is part of the creative process.”

“I find so many times that families and individuals ride this roller coaster of reducing the tension and pulling it back. So often people bring the vision down to reduce the tension. That’s what I think leadership support is about. You can support people through the tension, helping them ride that tension through.”

How can you talk about her learning to speak for herself and then not listen?

Learning to Listen

“So now I have a daughter who has learned to say what she wants, and guess what my charge is? I get to listen. How can you talk about her learning to speak for herself and then not listen?”

“Katie’s able to say what she wants now. I’m excited and so proud of her for saying what she wants to do. We encouraged her to speak. Now what are we going to do with that? This is no time for me to say, ‘I’m sorry, you can’t go to college.’ Of course, I don’t believe that anyway. I do believe she should go. I know it’s a battle, but it’s a battle we’ll face together this time. It won’t be just me. It’ll be me and her.”

Katie and Candee

Candee: What keeps you going as you move towards your future?

Katie: Learning to go walking towards my future.

Candee: Tell me what people can do to help you reach your dreams.

Katie: You can dance.

Candee: What do you mean?

Katie: You can move, when you dance.

Candee: If I dance, how can that help you reach your dreams?

Katie: That tells me that I can dance too. I can follow the moves and steps. If you’re dancing, I can feel the motions.

Candee: Okay, I get you. If I dance and we all dance, then...

Katie: We dance together.

What is the tension between my dreams for myself (or for my son or daughter) and the way things are?

What makes it hard to maintain my vision of the future?

What support do I get that helps me live with the tension?

American Dreaming is published by a Self-Determination Project: Removing the Mask and developed through a Grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. Contact us at: Removing the Mask, Ohio Association of County Boards of MR/DD, 73 East Wilson Bridge Road #B-1, Worthington, OH 43085. All opinions are those of Removing the Mask and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.

