

I N T O the L I G H T



Imagine your world is void of light. Mind-numbing darkness presses on you from every side. It is as if weights have been placed on your mind and your chest. You struggle to breathe, to think. You are destined to flounder, and drown into darkness.

Suddenly, golden rays of sunlight break through the obscurity. The light reveals a world full of wonderful things the darkness had concealed. You breathe the air of this new world. Your mind is clear, and a lifetime of discovery awaits.

For Virginia Huffman, a junior agricultural communications major from San Angelo, Texas, the darkness was her reality.

Huffman said she had a difficult time learning in elementary school, especially when it came to spelling and reading.

"I felt like I was below my friends because I couldn't read the books that they were reading," Huffman said.

That feeling of inadequacy controlled Huffman's early years, until she discovered there was a reason the letters on the page seemed to rearrange every time she looked at them. There was also a reason she was unable to focus on her work.

"It wasn't until the sixth grade that I was diagnosed with dyslexia, and it completely changed my world," Huffman said.

Huffman was also diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder at the same time.

For herself, her parents and her teachers, Huffman's diagnoses came as a relief.

"It was almost encouraging to know there was a light at the end of the tunnel," Huffman said.

Having these learning complications meant Huffman had to spend more time communicating with her teachers if she wanted to do well in school. Fortunately, her instructors were willing to give her the help and support she needed.

From middle school through high school, Huffman said she continued to work closely with her instructors and managed to do well. However, the potential challenges of college were never far from her mind.

"I was terrified of college," Huffman said. "I was so scared, because I knew the strength and the support that I'd been given throughout high school from my teachers, my counselors, and my principals, and I was terrified about college and how that was going to happen."

The feelings of inadequacy that had once plagued her thoughts as a child were beginning to creep back



Huffman and her mother, Photo courtesy Virginia Huffman

into Huffman's mind. In addition, she was dealing with a situation that hit much closer to her heart. Her mother had been diagnosed with lung cancer.

Huffman said she was worried about her mother, but there was never a doubt in her mind that she would recover and be back to her normal, vivacious self.

Then, the unthinkable happened.

"My freshman year of college was probably—you know, everyone has their own struggles, and all sorts of terrible things happen to everyone," Huffman said, "but the worst thing in my life happened to me right before I came to college. My mom passed away."

Huffman said she was suddenly and completely lost. A new form of darkness had entered her life.

"I came to college without a mother's support and encouragement and that extra little 'umph' she gives you every day," Huffman said. "I don't think anyone realizes the light your mother brings to you every day until she's gone."

Though this time the darkness seemed overwhelming, a close family friend stepped in to bring light to the darkness. Huffman said the friend was a gift from God.

The friend told Huffman about the Texas Tech University TECHniques Center, a program that provides one-on-one counseling to students with learning disabilities.

"When students commit to what this program can do for them and open themselves to the possibility of change, they really can be successful ..."

Huffman said after hearing about the program, she knew Texas Tech was where she needed to be.

Initially, Huffman joined the TECHniques Center because of the tutoring services it offered. She found it offered so much more.

Located in West Hall, the TECHniques Center is a part of Texas Tech Student Disability Services. According to its website, the center provides a place where students can maintain their focus and accomplish their goals. The website also states the purpose of the center is to make education accessible for students who learn in a variety of ways.

Savannah Leonard, a senior agricultural communications major from Senora, Texas, has been a tutor for three semesters. She says TECHniques is a great resource for students who may be overwhelmed with the amount of work that comes with a college education.

Leonard also said she loves the feeling she gets when she sees a student succeed.

“Anytime one of my students feels like they have learned something, or gained something from one of my sessions, I walk away from that session feeling accomplished,” Leonard said.

Brandi Schreiber is the unit coordinator and an academic counselor for the Center. She said her workplace has a reputation that attracts students from all across the United States to Texas Tech. In fact, there is nothing like it found anywhere else in the state.

“I want people to know that beyond the fact that we are the only program of our kind in Texas, our program works,” Schreiber said. “When students commit to what this program can do for them and open themselves to the possibility of change, they really can be successful and make it in college.”

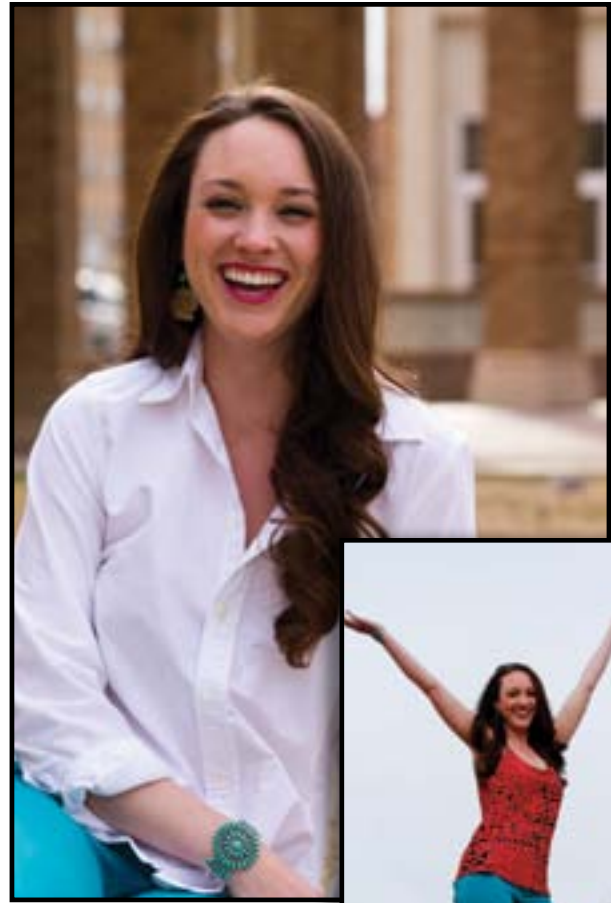
The support offered through TECHniques is what Huffman said helped her make it through her first year of college.

“Without the TECHniques Center, I don’t know where I would be right now,” Huffman said. “I mean, probably not here at Texas Tech. It’s made a huge difference.”

The loss of her mother, in addition to the difficulty in learning caused by her disabilities, put an enormous emotional strain on Huffman. With the continued guidance from her tutors and academic counselors she has thrived, and her future shines bright ahead.

Huffman’s family ranch, passed down from generation to generation from her mother’s side of the family, is something near and dear to her heart. It is also where she has found inspiration for her future career choices.

Huffman said watching her mother work so hard to maintain the ranch and see it prosper influenced her to make the choice to enter the agricultural industry.



Ultimately, Huffman said she chose her field of study so she will be equipped to improve her ranch in the future.

To further achieve this goal, Huffman is an active member of Pi Beta Phi and has participated in several internships.

As a young girl struggling to keep up with her peers and overcome her disabilities, and then as a college student grappling with the overwhelming grief that comes with the loss of a parent, Huffman had no idea the darkness surrounding her would eventually transform into a shining beacon of light.

In her short lifetime, the colors of Huffman’s existence have shifted from plunging blacks to soaring whites many times. As she continues to move with confidence towards her future, it appears the light is here to stay. **T**

MarLee Sargent

McLean, Texas

