

ECHO ECHO ECHO ECHO

Despite handicap,

Nazareth senior seeks independence

By Debbie Cragg
Nazareth Academy

Paralyzed from the waist down and dependent upon leg braces, senior Colleen Gullen navigates the halls of Nazareth Academy in a wheelchair. At home Colleen can get around on crutches, but to go any distance, she must use the chair. Increasingly she is able to maneuver the chair by herself, but she still depends upon friends to help her get through the crowded school halls and to get to class on time.

Colleen has spina bifida, a disease whose victims are born with malformed spines and are frequently confined to wheelchairs.

Colleen starts her day at 6 a.m. With her mother's help, she boards the BOCES wheelchair bus at 6:45. When she arrives at Nazareth, janitors help her onto a lift and lower her into the basement boiler room. Colleen then takes the school's small elevator

to the second floor and proceeds to her homeroom on the other wing of the building.

Her trips to class are often ascending or descending spirals — around to the elevator, up or down, then around again to the next classroom. Yet Colleen has little difficulty getting to class. "I never have any trouble finding a friend to help me," she says.

Taking class notes, however, can be a problem because she has to leave class a few minutes early to get to the next class on time. She says it's difficult for her to keep up with the pace, and she frequently has to borrow friends' notebooks to copy missed information. To get the jumbled notes in order, she uses a personal computer which she carries on the back of her wheelchair.

Despite the constraints of the wheelchair, Colleen has always been involved in activities at Nazareth. She participated in the school's chorus during her freshman and sophomore years, and has sung with the Perosian Choir

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Colleen Gullen manages her papers and other paraphernalia at the end of the day. She's waiting to be met by a custodian who will help her to the bus.

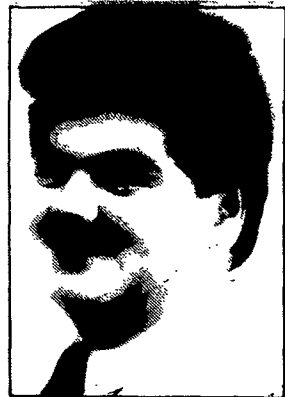


Senior Colleen Gullen organizes herself for class, retrieving material from the back of her wheelchair, where she hangs a book bag during the day.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Introducing the ECHO staff:

Aquinas



Mark Simonelli

Bishop Kearney



Marilou Halstead



Deana Manuse

Cardinal Mooney



Tim Flynn



Jolie Pizzi



Andrew (A.J.) Rogers

DeSales



Matthew Carty

Mercy



Rebecca Boyle

McQuaid



Peter Huggins

Nazareth



Debbie Cragg

Notre-Dame



Ellen Conroy