

Katrina Tagget Fellowship
By Sara Tagget, mother of Katrina Tagget

First on behalf of Katrina's family, we want to thank the RCPD organization and especially Mike Hudson, Ann Marie Lindley and Val Nilson. For establishing the Katrina Tagget Fellowship as a living memory of our daughter Katrina and for the support from RCPD she received while a student at MSU. Without the RCPD, she would not have enjoyed the success she had at MSU. At the time of her death in September she had earned a 4.0 in her major and 3.74 overall GPA. She was to graduate in May *summa cum laude* and pursue law school. She would have been a third generation woman to graduate from MSU. She will be granted an honorary degree in May.

I'd like to take a few minutes to tell you about Katrina and show you her life.

Katrina had to work twice as hard or harder than the average student. She was diagnosed dyslexic in 4th grade. In her own words from her personal statement for her application to MSU,

"As a child, I thought I was stupid. I couldn't read even a simple street sign. I memorized books according to the pictures on the page. I continue to have trouble remembering things. I have to really concentrate to read, and sometimes I have to read a paragraph several times to understand the meaning. I can read the same sentence several times without finding any grammatical errors, but someone else may find several errors. I am not dumb, and I am not lazy. I am dyslexic. I can't learn the way other kids learn. At seventeen, I am functioning well, but it has been a long struggle to get to where I am today. "

No IEP, no 504. She worked at negotiating accommodations for her learning disability, class by class, teacher by teacher. As she wrote about her learning disability,

"Everyday I must live with my dyslexia. It is frustrating having to always read and reread parts of books or my own work in order to seek perfection, but I refuse to give up. I feel that learning can be very enjoyable. Learning has become all the more precious to me because of the hard work and concentration I must use as a result of my dyslexia. The challenge of living with dyslexia will be with me forever, but I see being dyslexic as a positive challenge that can bring me much success and happiness."

When she got to MSU, the RCPD was instrumental in helping level the playing ground for her. She learned her freshman year that she was also ADHD. She became a mentor for RCPD, helping other students with disabilities navigate the challenges of college life. Initially she was mentoring to do some community service. But by helping others she helped herself. As she said when interviewed for an article last year after earning Samaritan Scholar award,

"Being involved in the RCPD has opened my mind to the realization that people have all sorts of disabilities. It's enlightening to see how people struggle to overcome them."

A year ago, she was standing here recipient of the Samaritan Scholarship. She was thrilled to receive the scholarship and other scholarships. Her plans to pursue law school after graduation reflected her love of learning.

It's no secret that Katrina took her life. She had serious depression issues that she hid from us. But her death and how she died does not define all the hard work and success she earned during her 21 years with us. She would have loved to see a scholarship in her name, to see other students receiving financial rewards for their success. The Delapa's generosity inspired us to establish this

scholarship, the Katrina Tagget Fellowship” in her memory. We have also established the Katrina Tagget Foundation whose mission is scholarship and suicide prevention and awareness.

It’s a testament to the impact Katrina had on her family and friends, that the endowment was fully endowed within one month of her death. Our plans are to continue to support efforts to give to the legacy so that the endowment can grow to give larger scholarships and multiple scholarships.

Could Katrina’s family and friends please stand.....

In the words of her brother Blake, she was awesome. A brilliant scholar, a giver to others.

A daughter, sister, grand daughter, niece, cousin and loyal and fun friend. We hope that the Katrina Tagget Fellowship will be a way to rekindle her memory every year. To encourage other MSU students with disabilities to excel academically and through service to others.