



One of Anjelina's brail books.



Anjelina is a 27-year-old blind SU student.



Above is Anjelina's slate which she uses to take notes.

*Photos by Leslie Douglas*

# TRUE LIFE: THE LIFE OF A BLIND SU STUDENT...

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*Photography Editor*

Blindness: A world surrounded by darkness or merely a means to see and interact with the world differently.

To Anjelina R. Cruz, 27, a blind Shippensburg University student, her blindness is not a disability or a tragedy, but simply a characteristic of herself.

Cruz is just like anyone else; she is busy balancing life with her 2-year-old daughter and her studies in social work, which she hopes to use to become a rehab counselor for blind adults.

As a rehab counselor, she hopes to better serve the blind community. It is her opinion that while

sighted rehab counselors mean well, they often underestimate or have misconceptions of life as a blind person.

It is her hope that she can use her experiences, including two programs that she attended that were catered to blind teens and adults, to help others.

Cruz said that these camps taught alternative skills on how to cook, clean, travel, rock climb and work in a wood shop. Their most important message was that "being blind is not an excuse to not do something."

These experiences have left Cruz a strong and confident woman who is accepting of her blindness, but who also strives to overcome obstacles that she encounters.

The only twinge of remorse that Cruz holds is

that she will never see her daughter's face, although she is comforted to know her daughter's personality.

Cruz was not born with a genetic type of blindness. In fact, she had a limited range of sight from birth; it was not until she developed glaucoma in high school that she became totally blind.

The cause of Cruz's eventual blindness was due to her being a premature baby that received too much oxygen in the womb.

Cruz said that even though she had some usable vision growing up, she was still strongly encouraged to use alternative techniques such as a cane.

Cruz admitted that she did not always use these guides early on.

"It was difficult especially as a kid to find a balance

between wanting to fit in — but then knowing that I had to do things differently," Cruz said.

By the second grade, Cruz's teachers really pushed her to learn Braille so that she could keep up with her sighted classmates.

What this meant was that all the worksheets and books that Cruz needed for classes from second grade all the way up until high school needed to be translated into Braille.

One book translated into Braille had to be separated out into nearly 30 – 40 volumes each sized roughly 12-by-12 inches or larger.

Cruz said that the school would often have to dedicate an entire shelf to her books and to do homework assignments, she would usually need to take at least two

volumes home at a time.

Cruz says that the improvement in technology "has made a world of difference to her."

Programs that have made the biggest difference to her are ones like JAWS, a screen-reading program for computers that allows blind users to check e-mail, Facebook or anything a sighted person could do on a computer.

Another is VoiceOver, which is a screen-reading program made especially for the iPhone. Since college textbooks are not printed in Braille, she requires electronic textbooks. Programs like these make Cruz's time at school a lot easier.

Cruz feels that growing up in a school with sighted people and interacting with them has greatly benefited her in that she was held to

the same standards as any other student and it helped to build her confidence and increase a sense of normacy.

There are special schools for the blind, in which blind students learn necessary skills including how to perform their daily routines, use a cane and read Braille.

However, when Cruz was asked about her opinion on such schools, she said that she was not a fan. She realizes that they have good intentions but believes that blind and sighted people would be much better educated if they learned and interacted together as early as possible.

Cruz would like to emphasize the point that blind people are not that different from sighted people. They may have to alter how a task gets done, but that task can and will get done.

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