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Able to overcome

June 25, 2008 ¦ Carmen Fleischauer

Looking at Amber Kaufman, you see a beautiful young woman who is highly motivated and heavily involved in impacting the world around her. Her confidence and agility would never lead you to suspect anything about her is different.

But sit down and talk to her for just a few minutes, and you will realize this senior's experience is nothing less than extraordinary.

Born prematurely with a cleft lip and palate, Kaufman has undergone 17 corrective surgeries, the last of which occurred just over a year ago. Shortly after birth, she and her twin sister were given standard vaccinations, including one for polio. Instead of becoming immune, Kaufman contracted a strain of the disease that wreaked havoc throughout her body, weakening her immune system, throwing offer her equilibrium and severely altering her vision. Diagnosed as legally blind, Kaufman's central vision is very weak, and her peripheral vision is non-existent.

Despite her limitations, Kaufman was raised without the knowledge that she was different.

"My parents never treated me like I was handicapped. There were never any excuses like, 'I can't do this because of my eyes.' Instead it was, 'Find a way around it,' or 'Find a way to adapt.' I really appreciated that because it has given me the strength to not be handicapped by my handicap."

Kaufman encountered the first effects of her handicap when she began school. Influenced by the cruelty of some of the children around her, she became withdrawn and insecure, taking her frustration out on her family and on God. The reasoning of a little girl could not understand why God would not heal her eyes if he was able to do so.

During high school things got a little better. Kaufman's parents sent her to a public high school, and accepting a dare by a friend, Kaufman joined ROTC.

“I couldn’t compete, or do much, but my colonel and my sergeant saw leadership potential in me and forced me outside of my shell. My parents had taught me that nothing was an excuse within the home. I could achieve whatever I wanted to – my eyesight didn’t matter. Colonel and Sergeant took it beyond that and said ‘You can do whatever you want to; you don’t have to be handicapped.’”

Kaufman heeded her ROTC leaders’ advice and put it into action. She decided she wanted to be an author, and to do so she needed to attend college.

It was after she went away to college, at Word of Life Bible Institute in New York, that Kaufman began to reconcile her bitterness and anger toward the Lord.

“I must have read the story in John 9, about Jesus healing the blind man with the clay, hundreds of times. Jesus says that it’s not anybody’s fault; it’s so that the will of God can be revealed – so that God can be glorified. It finally hit me and I broke down, and that was the beginning of a turning point with me.”

Kaufman says she still struggles with bitterness and frustration, but that moment in her life began a process of healing and repentance that has brought her to where she is today. Described by friends as “a unique mix of confidence and vulnerability,” Kaufman has experienced things that she would not have been able to with full use of her eyes.

“I feel that, to make up for my lack of physical sight, the Lord gave me large amounts of intuition and discernment.”

Kaufman, now an English literature major at Liberty, still has hopes of becoming an author. She is currently working on writing her first novel.

At Liberty she is part of the youth ministry team, Vision, where she serves through drama and lesson plan writing. She has a heart for high school girls and plans to co-author a book for high school teens about biblical womanhood and manhood.

“I’m not afraid to address issues like sexuality and modesty and insecurities – really deep issues I’m not afraid to address because I think they are really important.”

Her other goals include having a large family and home schooling her children to teach them how to be involved and have an impact on American society.

As encouragement to others with difficulties to overcome, Kaufman says, “Any limitation you have is an opportunity to serve, but it’s also an opportunity to overcome. Even though I haven’t overcome by solving the initial problem of my eyesight, I’ve overcome in different ways. I’ve overcome in my attitude, the way I view life. I am able to look at my handicap and see how God has used this. I see why I am where I am.”