



Courtesy photo

## Annapolis, MD: College Student Triumphs Over Dyslexia Using Kurzweil 3000

Bill Vermillion of Lothian, MD has severe dyslexia, a learning disorder that keeps his brain from recognizing the written word properly.

Even though he is highly intelligent, in his early school years he confused letters and words and didn't even realize that you were suppose to read English from left to right. As he was about to enter fourth grade, he was barely reading at a kindergarten level. An overburdened and under-funded public school system was unable to provide the extra assistance he required to learn properly.

Then his parents found Summit School in Edgewater, an educational institution whose mission is to educate children with unique learning styles to their full potential. Bill attended Summit School from 1996 to 2002. The first year at Summit, he progressed to first-grade reading. The Vermillions credit Dr. Jane Snider, Summit School founder and then director, and her fabulous staff for the foundation that allowed Bill to progress in school.

Bill graduated from Summit School in 2002 and subsequently attended the Lab School of Washington, completing high school in 2006.

He then attended Anne Arundel Community College. He and his family met with Mimi Stoops, director of the Disability Office, and every accommodation promised was delivered.

Bill uses Kurzweil 3000, a software program that reads aloud any electronic document, and Dragon Naturally Speaking to keep up with volumes of reading and writing. AACC provided Bill with a CD containing PDFs of books for use with Kurzweil. Bill also had a note taker in every class and was able to take his tests at the testing center. This meant he could receive approved extra time with the use of a computer with Word, Kurzweil and Dragon software to be used in reading the test, or writing an essay.

It took Bill four years to complete his associate of science degree in engineering at AACC because he could only handle taking a limited number of classes at a time. He aspired to become a biomedical engineer and was accepted at the Catholic University of America. The accommodations and class sizes at CUA are identical to those at AACC.

Bill's senior project, which he is doing with teammates, was the creation of a mechanical device that produces prosthetics from a 3D image. He is looking forward to creating other devices to help improve health-related physical and mental limitations.

He will graduate with a bachelor of science degree in biomedical engineering on May 12. He will continue at CUA next year to complete his master's degree with a specialty of neuroscience because he is in an accelerated degree program.

Bill is proof that when the right amount of intervention is provided, a student then has the opportunity to succeed and excel. He is also an example that many students with disabilities are entering and succeeding in college.

Bill said, "As a child, there was a realization that I was not able to do what others could do. Having dyslexia is similar to having any other disability because it requires family and professional support. I was fortunate to have parents who sought the help I needed and made sacrifices on my behalf. Without all the educators and other professionals who intervened, the opportunities that lie ahead would never become a reality. I want each of them to know that I am eternally grateful. Someday I hope to be able to give something back. My advice to others is to seek the help needed and never give up."