

BECKWITH News

Fall 2020



Embracing a “New Normal”



College of Applied Health Sciences | Disability Resources & Educational Services

Nugent Hall | University Housing

Welcome from Interim DRES Director

Dr. Kim Collins, Ph.D., CRC



The “new normal” has so many connotations. Typically, this article would focus on the fear and trepidation experienced by incoming residents and their parents questioning the viability of living independent of family support, while diving into the fast and deep academic waters of one of the nation’s top public universities. I would emphasize transformations to your “new normal” college experience: feeling empowered, making decisions, developing skills, managing personal assistants independently, academic and residential life opportunities, and attaining social support from peers.

However, in March of this year, that phrase took an entirely different turn as the “new normal” included living, working, and studying from home, being isolated from family and friends, having important events cancelled, concerns for health and safety, and wearing a mask in public. This has been such a scary and trying time especially as the pandemic continues without an end in sight. To get through it, we should listen to Dr. Harpham’s advice and “Create your best new normal for now, with hope of making life the best it can be today, tomorrow and every day.” For some, this may be accepting good and bad days, and celebrating the act of getting out of bed daily. For others, adapting to losing your autonomy and privacy as a college student, accepting new expectations and supporting family members contracting COVID-19.

Recently I saw this quote by Leslie Dwight and it resonated with me —

*“What if 2020 isn’t cancelled?
What if 2020 is the year we’ve been waiting for?
A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw—that it finally forces us to grow.
A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us from our ignorant slumber.
A year we finally accept the need for change.
Declare change. Work for change. Become the change.
A year we finally band together, instead of pushing each other further apart.
What if 2020 isn’t cancelled, but rather, the most important year of them all.”*

How has 2020 pushed you to grow? Is it embracing your time with family or time alone? Is it having the time to appreciate the small things instead of always being on the go? Is it pushing aside fear to protest injustices or work for change to better our society? Is it helping you value people or things you might not have before? Is it causing you to examine yourself to make changes or work on self-improvement tasks?

Whatever growth and change have occurred, I hope you embrace it and hold it dear as your “new normal”!

Welcome from Beckwith Director

Susann Sears, M.Ed.



“Belonging so fully to yourself that you’re willing to stand alone is a wilderness – an untamed, unpredictable place of solitude and searching. It is a place as dangerous as it is breathtaking, a place as sought after as it is feared. The wilderness can often feel unholy because we can’t control it, or what people think about our choice of whether to venture into that vastness or not. But it turns out to be the place of true belonging, and it’s the bravest and most sacred place you will ever stand.” ~Brené Brown

What has always been central of Beckwith Residential Support Services (BRSS) is the sense of community that is cultivated from year to year. This annual publication consistently reflects the importance and role of community and this issue is no different. Our “new normal” amidst the pandemic requires us to continuously redefine how we conceptualize sense of community and human connection in a time where social distancing is imperative, yet the desire for physical proximity and contact remains.

Brené Brown’s quote may resonate with you at this time. Navigating this unprecedented time can foster a greater sense of isolation, but the experience of learning to “stand alone” develops a greater sense of self. Presently, we are facing challenging situations requiring

“Navigating this unprecedented time can foster a greater sense of isolation, but the experience of learning to ‘stand alone’ develops a greater sense of self.”

difficult decisions to be made to circumvent unpredictable conditions which may evoke several emotions that need to be managed constantly. Knowing and seeking out appropriate support and resources is important for students’ success and available among numerous campus partners. The discovery of identifying the tools necessary to cope leads to productive and positive outcomes which empowers us to now learn to “stand alone.”

A “new normal” means we will require intentionality towards the act of patience, demonstrating grace and courtesy, and thoughtful consideration of our chosen words. Viewing the bigger picture is necessary on why and how we can proceed forward in the best productive way at this time. The things that are important to us will require commitment, re-evaluation, confronting the unexpected, and patience. Being part of a university community, its members naturally have a sparked curiosity for learning. I hope that you enjoy reading how the BRSS community has responded to their “new normal.” Self-reflecting and processing how discomfort and uncertainty contributes to one’s growth and accomplishment, ensures forward momentum for being stronger and more resilient than where we began.

Change is Hard

Katy Hoyer, MSW, LSW, Visiting Disability Advisor



Planning. Routine. Schedules. As an individual with a disability who, literally, must plan every aspect of my life, these words are ones that bring me a great deal of comfort. Knowing what to expect and when to expect it was the way that I moved through life. I felt comfortable and safe. This year, life decided to throw me a curveball when I was offered a position with Beckwith Residential Support Services. Like all baseball players who spent hours watching game tapes, I was planning for what I thought my professional future looked like. However, like curveballs typically do, this opportunity came at me without much warning and quickly. I had a choice to make – I decided to swing.

Change is hard. This past year is certainly no exception. Not only did I begin a new job where I had to learn my roles and responsibilities, but I moved hours away from my family and other supports I had spent years putting into place. I had to embrace this opportunity because it was presenting itself as a “can’t-miss” sign of personal and professional growth. I have had the chance to meet and work with a wonderful group of students and staff and redefine independent living for myself. In the past I would not have embraced new opportunities because of the fear of change.



Susann & Katy “cooking up a storm” while also learning about Campus Recreation’s student wellness programs.

Keeping this in mind, I am by no means, suddenly, best friends with change. I am more comfortable with embracing it, however. All too often, I believe that we want to “strike out” what is new. We want to do this in order to get rid of what is uncomfortable and unfamiliar – we rush to create a “new normal” because it feels better than sitting with the unknown. I have found that the key to becoming comfortable with change is calling a “timeout” on life. Pause to ask yourself, “What is this unexpected thing here to show me”? As you work to answer this question you will see curveballs are not as frightening anymore and may even bring some excitement to the game of life.

Appreciate the Small Things

Hafsa Habib

What a year 2020 has already been. While many of us started this decade in self-reflection, we've all been forced into a state of reflection due to the coronavirus-related lockdown. This year brings a lot of change for me as I'm engaged, graduating from the University of Illinois, and beginning my graduate studies in the fall. Before I even had a chance to process what my new normal was going to be, however, the world was thrown a curveball no one saw coming. Soon it wasn't just myself that needed to process change, but everyone around me had to adjust to new realities. Any upcoming change that I was nervous about has been put into perspective. I realized that I should be excited to embrace them, not scared. Even the unexpected changes because of COVID-19 are opportunities for me to grow.



As a community health intern for BRSS, I went from in-person learning opportunities and project-oriented tasks to hoping to gain the same experiences from home. I quickly saw how administration and students adapt to unexpected challenges. The admin/DAs tried to provide opportunities for students to learn and grow as a community through Zoom chats. The students taught me to stay motivated and take every opportunity that comes your way. I am proud of my contributions to the BRSS program and the relationships I have established, and although it wasn't what I expected, I learned so much through this experience.

Simply, self-isolation helped me realize that change can be good, and I'm looking forward to my "new normal." Transitioning from what we're used to into these new situations is how growth truly occurs as our self-reflection goes into overdrive. For me, I really began to appreciate all the small things. My days are no longer taken for granted because I realize how unpredictable life is. Moving forward, I've decided to not put off any challenges. Anything I want to accomplish I'll start working on right away. So, when the lockdown is lifted, I'll have a new energy for life. I'll be ready to embrace my next "new normal," no matter where it takes me.



An opportunity to recruit personal assistants at the Career Center's Part-Time Student Job Fair.

A Family Adjusts to the “New Normal”

Ethan, Kathy, and Mike Olson



Never Give Up

Ethan Olson

As I wrap up my freshman year at the University of Illinois, I reflect on the shortened year I had due to the coronavirus breakout. I’m just very thankful I have been blessed with this opportunity that I knew I could do, but didn’t think it would happen this fast. Going into freshman year, I wasn’t sure what to think. I was very excited to be part of a Big Ten school, and thankful for the Parkland Pathways program that helps students that need to start at a little lower level for certain subjects.



At first, I was worried about living on my own and feeling comfortable with my PA’s. I’m used to having my parents around and have depended on them all my life. I was skeptical about living on my own while having the stress of being a full-time student commuting between two colleges and navigating two campuses. I’ve always been

raised with a “never give up” attitude and that attitude is what helped me power through the first few weeks. I worked through the unknowns and figured out my “new normal.” After a few weeks, I was thriving and loved living the independent college life. I was now going to sporting events independently and hanging out with friends while making sure I got my school work done with good grades.

Looking back, I can see growth in myself from that first day of joining Beckwith Residential Support Services. It is hard to put into words what the University of Illinois and the BRSS community has done for me in the short semester and a half that I was there. I met countless numbers of new friends and made so many memories that I will hang onto forever. I was fortunate enough to know people from home that went to U of I my freshman year, and that made a big difference for me especially at the beginning of the semester. Finding my new normal took some getting used to, with some adjustments, but now it feels like it has been my “normal” all along.

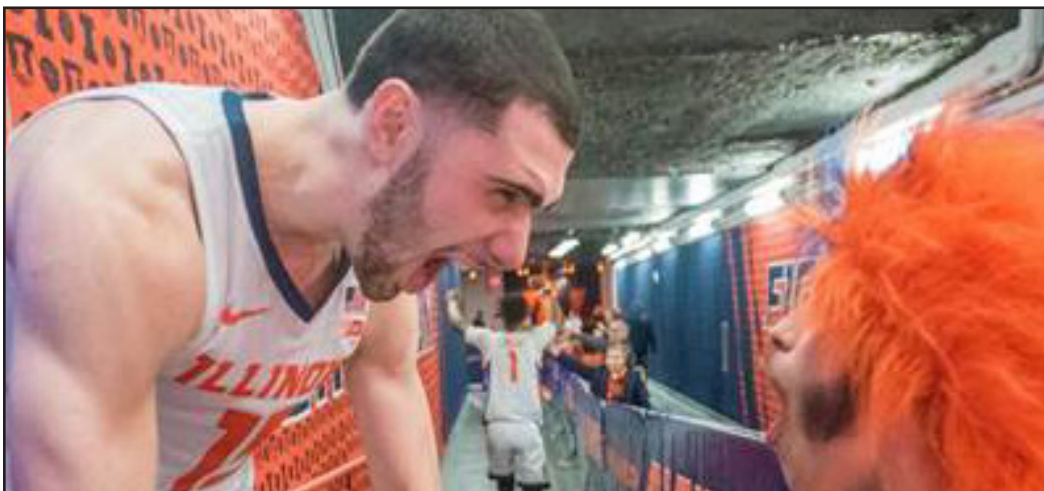
Taking a Leap of Faith

Kathy and Mike Olson

As parents of a BRSS student, we had to figure out our “new normal” as well. We had been to orientation, met with PAs, and asked so many questions, but how was this actually going to work out? We have been taking care of Ethan for 18 years, and now he was going to live independently, take college courses, navigate two campuses, and succeed? Those first few days were dicey. Ethan lost his confidence and wasn’t sure if he could do this. After a couple of days, we felt he was ready to work this out and felt it was time to rip the band-aid off. The longer we lingered, the worse it was going to be, so I said to Ethan, “You can do this, and I promise it WILL get better.” With that, we left, not looking back. This was our new normal: worried, stressed out, empty nesters! It did get better; Ethan wasn’t just surviving, he was thriving. It took us time to adjust too, but by week three, we could see Ethan continued to do well and thoroughly enjoyed the independent college life. Ethan made good friends on the floor and had friends from home around campus to provide him social outlets. He attended nearly every home game for football and basketball, eventually making the front page of the local paper capturing his post-game routine in the tunnel celebrating with Giorgi Bezhanishvili.

Now we face another “new normal” with the COVID-19 stay at home, remote study approach. Ethan is getting his work done and having periodic Skype calls with his friends from U of I, but it’s not the same by any means. Still, we are all super thankful for where he is in his life at this time. We are grateful for Tim Nugent and the tremendous foundation he laid for people with special needs. We are also grateful for the amazing Beckwith team and its dedicated PAs, and for the Parkland Pathways program that enabled Ethan to participate in all this right from the start of his freshman year.

It takes a leap of faith, as we all face another “new normal” with COVID-19 lingering, but Dr. Harpham’s words seem to put it all in perspective. “Create your best new normal for now, with hope of making life the best it can be today, tomorrow and every day.”



Ethan’s post-game routine in the tunnel celebrating with Giorgi Bezhanishvili.

A New Perspective on Curve Balls

Lauren Guth



What do I want my life to look like? That is such a complex question because over the year my answer has changed. When the school year began, I had everything mapped out for at least the next 5 years of my life. Planning things out so far in advance makes adapting to change difficult. I should be used to it, because my family makes plans from A-Z for everything. I have always struggled with change; it just puts me out of whack.

This past year and especially this past month, it's been difficult as curveballs have been thrown left and right figuring out the "new normal." I have also taken time to think about my life and see everything that has changed over the year, both good and bad. I have seen areas of growth in my life because curveballs aren't freaking me out as much. Being at home right now I have learned that baking is a great stress reducer. I've been learning how to make pies, trying out new flavors for my macarons, and using a bread maker. Luckily, my parents and friends are the tasters so I'm not eating it all myself.

I worked with individuals having physical or mental disabilities prior to joining the BRSS program, but they were young children and adults beyond the college years. Getting used



Lauren showing the rest of the BRSS Admin team the "proper" way to bowl during DA training.

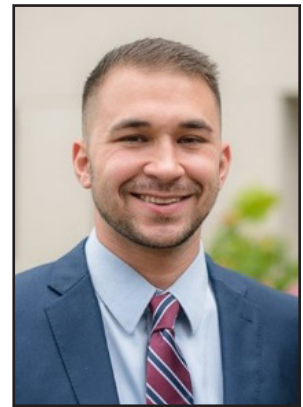
to working with college students as a Disability Advocate (DA) was a change that I adapted to, but building relationships led to an experience I would never have gotten anywhere else. Working at Beckwith taught me more about perspective, helping me realize that until now I perceived curveballs negatively. It's always stressful handling unknown crises or having to address a situation in the moment. Looking back, I know that I wouldn't be the same person or be able to handle future curveballs without my experiences as a DA.

Going back to the original question, I want my life to look erratic. I know it's weird to say, but if life were easy, opportunities for growth and excitement wouldn't exist. I want a challenge that will make me stronger and help me develop into the person I'm supposed to be.

When Change Occurs

Zach Naylor

If you can't change it, change your attitude. A few months ago, I was asked to begin working on a Beckwith article to explore the idea of how we adapt to the "new normal" when change occurs. At first, I had a hard time figuring out how this idea resonated with me in terms of my experience at Beckwith, and composing a message that hopefully you could identify with. Time passed and suddenly this message materialized in a way I was not ready for or expected.



I came to Beckwith in the Fall of 2019 and was excited, nervous, and a little terrified to be a Disability Advocate. As the semester began, I settled into my new position and almost immediately those feelings of nervousness and fear disappeared and were replaced with excitement, hope, and pride. As I had the opportunity to develop a unique relationship with each student, the pride I felt for playing some small role in a community whose roots run so deep swelled. As the semester progressed, everyone settled into their routine and I learned something new daily. From seeing the deep friendships students had formed with personal assistants, to seeing upperclassmen step up and provide guidance and support to underclassmen, I was able to witness firsthand what makes Beckwith such a close-knit community. From Friendsgiving to ice skating, as each program came it served as a sort of marker to reflect on the semester and see the growth not only in each student individually, but also in the whole Beckwith community. Everyone faced their challenges but persevered with determination and resilience.

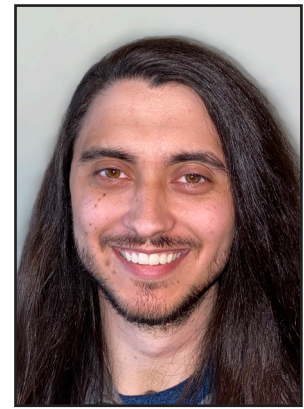
As we transitioned into the second semester, it served as a significant milestone for each individual unique to them. Like something out of a movie though, COVID-19 spread and suddenly all the plans and ideas we had for ourselves were greatly changed. In adjusting to the new normal and stay-at-home orders I was worried about staying connected with students and what the "new normal" would look like. Since those first few days, I've seen members from every aspect of the Beckwith community connect through Zoom, phone calls, and social media. Witnessing this firsthand reinforced the idea that Beckwith truly is a community and even in times of uncertainty and fear, the members have adjusted and found new ways to still support, encourage, and advocate for one another.



The BRSS community enjoying another successful Friendsgiving.

Adjusting to Changing Circumstances

Matt Ludolph



When going through life changes, the hardest part – at least for me – is always the unknown variables surrounding my new circumstances. It never fails that when I enter a new situation, no matter how familiar I might be, I come in with some trepidation. This goes from new semesters with new classes and PAs all the way to more abstract, future concepts like potential careers. Adaptability, patience, and ingenuity are three qualities that disability can help foster that are especially effective in creating a “new normal” after life changes.

For many years, I struggled with change and was immobilized by it. Even today, the fear and apprehension that surrounds the concept of change can be hard to overcome. Ultimately, everyone adjusts differently to change, but I try to confront it by learning as much as I possibly can and keeping an open mind. In learning as much as possible about changing circumstances, I feel I have more control over the situation, as opposed to being completely in the dark.

As we’ve been going through this global COVID-19 crisis, staying up to date with current statistics and research (not to an unhealthy degree) has allowed me to adapt to constantly changing circumstances without being overwhelmed by them. Thinking outside the box is an equally important way that I maintain my ability to adjust to changing circumstances.

I am honored to be a recipient of the David S. Mundy Scholarship, which recognizes the pursuit of achieving independence and responsibility for oneself. Last fall, I was reflecting on the fact that I still wasn’t sure about my future career plan and I realized I was going about it the wrong way. Instead of following what I have been telling myself I wanted to do, I decided to keep an open mind and consider careers that would utilize my unique experiences and skills. With that in mind, I look forward to studying rehab counseling in the fall of 2021!



As an iHealth intern for DRES Career Services, I was thrilled to see Avi, a BRSS resident, benefiting from our networking event.

Change is a Great Thing

Zain Bando

I am incredibly grateful to receive the Matthew Allan Odelius Award for the 2019-2020 academic year. As a student, he did not let his disability define his college experience and demonstrated leadership in all aspects of his academic and co-curricular life. I commend him for advancing the involvement of students with disabilities, and I am thankful to be chosen for this honor.



As a sophomore, I learned a lot about how I adapt to life's challenges. I am currently pursuing a career in the journalism industry, with the goal of covering professional sports. I am also gaining independence by working with personal assistants, seeing friends, thriving in school, and maintaining a job as the scorebox operator for Fighting Illini Productions (FIP).

When I think about my “new normal,” I think about how stressful my freshman year was with adapting to a new environment, new classes, and new responsibilities. At one point, I was unsure where my journey would lead me. I finally adjusted to the college life that I had always dreamt of this year after establishing my role at FIP. I was thrilled to see what I could bring to a prominent organization. Balancing school, game shifts, and social obligations became my “new normal,” and I truly felt like I was embracing all that UIUC had to offer. The biggest takeaway that I learned was that nothing in life is perfect, but it's how you overcome your fears. So far, I don't have any regrets, and have come to the realization that everything happens for one reason or another. Life can throw curveballs at you, and sometimes, change is a great thing.



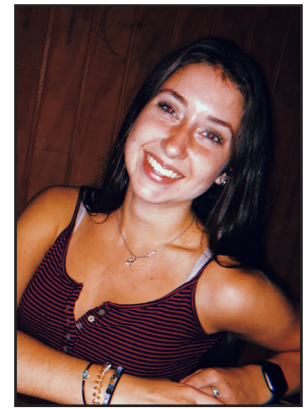
Zain in the broadcast booth.

Heading into junior year, I want to build on my “new normal” while gaining even more confidence that I can achieve anything that I set my mind to. The foundation that I have set for myself will lead me to bigger and better opportunities because of these endeavors. After college, I want to live independently with the support of my personal assistants and family members, while striving for success in the journalism industry. For now, my journey has just begun.

A Positive Impact

Brooke Gorski

A new normal – I find a new normal every semester, every school change, every achievement, every chapter – I grow into a new normal in order to evolve. Becoming a personal assistant within the Beckwith community was a new addition to my routine. I quickly realized the depth of connections I began to make with residents, and this new normal had such a positive impact on my life. Not every turn in life turns out as positively as this, as change brings challenges.



I push myself to look at each day as an opportunity, and when plans fail and what I thought my life would look like evaporates in front of me, I remember who I am and how much I have worked to get where I am. This applies to my relationships with those around me as well as academic goals and other achievements. I will admit, I do find myself overwhelmed with the unexpected changing of tides, but being overwhelmed means to me that my body and my mind are putting on their boosters to help me adjust to the new waves that head my way. The times when I feel that I won't be able to adjust, I look to my past. I acknowledge how much I have already done, that at one time I never thought I could do.

I structure my thoughts this way because I visualize my future in physical therapy and I know that in order to reach this, I will have years of growth. With each obstacle that I overcome, I build more confidence for the ones ahead. Joining the Beckwith community is one of the many “new normal” alterations I have experienced in the last year, and I truly did not know what would come of it. Here I am today – confident in my abilities in my position, but more than that – I have such fond memories and such deep, long-lasting relationships that I would have never built without adjusting to the new normal.



Enjoying a gorgeous day, students and staff learn about effective communication as part of the 2019 Summer Immersion Program.

From BRSS Bucket List to a New Normal

Paige Lewis, M.S., Associate Director



For the last several years we have tried different strategies for supporting our first-year students' transition. I was not satisfied, however, as I assessed the effectiveness of our June orientation training as well as other transition programming throughout the semester and academic year. I realized that restructuring our June orientation program into a residential program might address the disparities that I perceived. I envisioned encompassing a blended approach, utilizing both experiential and educational sessions to explore academic and nonacademic skills benefitting participants, PAs, and BRSS administration.

In my vision, this holistic approach would accommodate different learning styles and value everyone's input. BRSS PAs would share their knowledge about and experiences with working with non-family PAs, effective communication, and PA management and training. Students and parents would share how they learn and process information while adapting to their "new normal" and how they typically do things. BRSS admin and the PAs would learn about the students' abilities and how to support them more effectively. Additionally, the new PAs, trained the day before the students arrived, could practice the skills they learned and increase their confidence as members of the BRSS community.

Essentially, I envisioned demystifying the college transition by decreasing the unknowns through this brief experience. This opportunity would lay the foundation of a student's overall college experience and the BRSS program. Ideally, stress would be decreased (especially working with non-family PAs), important relationships would begin to form within the BRSS community, strategies to juggle academics and campus engagement would be explored, and parents would better understand how to support students in accomplishing their goals and vision while also adapting to their new normal. Families would leave with a transition readiness plan for summer completion and hopefully some confidence in the student's ability to succeed with their increased independence.

PA training went as planned on June 20th, 2019, triggering anxious anticipation for the next day. As with every inaugural program, there were some kinks, but they were easily resolved. As the three-and-a-half day program concluded on June 24th, 2020, the unanimous impression from parents, students, PAs, and BRSS administrators was that it was successful! I realized that there is a time and a place for everything, and I just needed to be patient for the right time. I not only was ecstatic to check this program off my BRSS bucket list, but also to have it adopted as the new normal for supporting BRSS first-year students' transition.

A Glimpse into our Year...



1. The Alma Mater welcomes a new class of students.
2. An adventurous group of ice skaters!
3. Lauren and Zach creating the ultimate bonfire with the community.

4. Zach knows how to celebrate his birthday! Surrounded by the newly formed first-year community during the Summer Immersion Program.
5. Lauren jumping into Katy's staff photo.

In Memoriam

We say goodbye to three former members of the Beckwith community: Mike Cafferty, who completed a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1996; Analiz (Ani) Magana, a psychology student who resided in Nugent Hall during the 2018-2019 academic year; and Laura Riermaier, who completed her bachelor's degree in geography in 2009.



They never met each other, but they shared common attributes – infectious smiles, perseverance, patience, and humor. Friends and acquaintances alike will attest that these qualities, along with determination and resiliency, enabled each of them to adapt to a “new normal,” regardless of what that might be. Each possessed creative talents as well, Ani and Laura as artists and Mike as a writer.

Mike, Ani, and Laura were guided by strong moral compasses and a passion for supporting individuals with disabilities. Ani was finding her voice as an advocate, educating students about healthy relationships. Laura was a longtime supporter of rideATAXIA, a nationwide program of bike rides sponsored by Friedrich's Ataxia Research Alliance (FARA). Through Team Hope, she had personally raised more than \$42,000 over the past seven years in support of research on this rare genetic disease. Although Laura passed away due to complications from Friedrich's Ataxia in June, friends and family continued Team Hope's efforts in her honor for this year's rideATAXIA Chicago Summer Challenge.

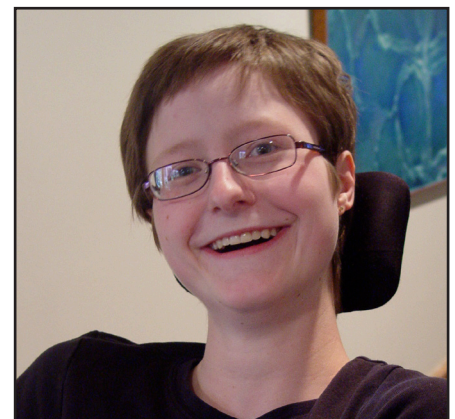
Mike Cafferty was an accomplished lawyer with the Cook County Office of the Public Guardian. He had been working on his autobiography since 2006 and was determined to finish it. *Driven: A Remarkable Story of Tragedy, Triumph and Faith* was published by Wayzgoose Press the day before cancer took his life on January 18, 2020. The book is available at www.drivenbycafferty.com as well as on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple Books, and GooglePlay.



Mike Cafferty



Analiz (Ani) Magana



Laura Riermaier

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