

Photo by Eric Jackson



Theresa Dillon '02, gets playful during a visit to Antelope Island State Park in Utah.

Material Gains

LC gave **Theresa Dillon '02** a new perspective on her learning difference.

By Chris Lenois

Much like other children who grew up in military families, Theresa Dillon '02 has a long and diverse list of previous addresses.

That, of course, meant she had a wide variety of educational experiences depending on what part of the world her family was stationed at a given age. Sadly, one thing they all had in common was an inability to help Theresa understand her learning differences.

"School was not good," Theresa says before sharing the story of being at West Point in the fourth grade and having a psychologist there diagnose her with both dyslexia and ADHD, as well as a perceptual processing disorder known as Irlen Syndrome.

Her parents did what they could to help. Theresa's father tutored her in algebra, and her mother would type out papers as she dictated. Both were college-educated adults, so she always felt like college would be part of her life experience, too, despite the opinions of others.

"My English teachers repeatedly said that I was never going to go to college. My parents needed to get that through their heads. That was not going to happen for me," remembers Theresa.

Those educators may not have been aware of Landmark College, but Theresa was. Her aunt, Deborah Dugan, was part of the College's library staff. So Putney, Vermont, was next in the long line of places Theresa called home. It also turned out to be the first place she truly felt at home.

"Landmark has been such a huge part of me being able to be a functional member of society. I can't overstate what Landmark has been," says Theresa, who with the help of her tutor Jan Thompson and other LC faculty, finally began putting together the academic pieces. "Every single class I took has an aspect of the subject matter, but also how to overcome those challenges that each of us at Landmark has in our brains," she said.

Being among other neurodivergent students for the first time also helped Theresa reconcile her own thoughts and feelings about what it meant to have a learning difference. Growing up, Theresa said her LD felt like "a scarlet letter." At LC, however, she saw representation from all the same cliques that are part of the high school. "To know that the pretty girl who was the cheerleader and dated the quarterback still had to come to Landmark because she had dyslexia gave me a sense of unity, but also this different perspective that you can't just look at someone and know their diagnosis."

Theresa also appreciated the culture of openness about learning differences, citing a particular instance when her

equestrian team coach Beth Jankelson used the phrase “ADD Moment” during a practice. “Having somebody who was a mentor have that kind of candid acknowledgement of this, like, shameful thing—be not shameful, but just a thing—that was huge for me.”

While Theresa says her Landmark College experience has helped her deal with her learning differences, she wanted to also point out that she battles with clinical depression. Her goal in doing so draws on the lessons she learned at LC.

“I’ve built up a lot of scaffolding to deal with my learning difference, but depression has been the lingering challenge for me,” says Theresa. “With mental health and your own opinion of yourself, it’s important to remove the stigma.”

After earning her associate degree at LC, Theresa went to Hartwick College for her B.S. in Biochemistry. Since 2014,



she has been a materials engineer for Benét Laboratories, a research & development facility for the Department of Defense in Watervliet, New York.

Through her employer, she is working toward a master’s degree, and she owns a home with her partner, Mike, which they share with three dogs and two cats. She also owns a horse that she keeps in a nearby stable.

Even with all these other academic and professional experiences, Theresa’s closest friendships are with her fellow Landmark College alumni. “You don’t make friendships anywhere else like you do at Landmark,” she says. “At Hartwick, they said ‘take a look around, these are going to be your best friends.’ And I’m like, okay, these guys have never been to Landmark. You don’t know what those friendships are.” 🐾

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