



The Page Advantage

Helen Ma and her dog Ultra are an inspiration to us all

Everyday, at 2:45 in the afternoon, the front entrance of J. Percy Page looks the same: a grade twelve girl sits by the office, an educational assistant by her side making small talk - they are smiling, relaxed, as though they don't have a care in the world. A black lab with the physique and coat of a show dog trots around passersby, shamelessly looking for belly rubs. A mom walks through the front door, the dog greets her, tail wagging so hard you think it might fall off. The educational assistant meets the mom, the girl waves, and, if this is your first time at Page, you might be thinking "I'd like to be picked up at the front door twenty minutes before classes end. I'd like to bring my pet to school." Unbeknownst to this observer, however, is the fact that just twenty minutes earlier this student and dog were participating in one of the school's most academically demanding classes, Social Studies or English 30AP. Not only is this student a participant in these courses, she has earned among the top marks J Percy Page has ever seen, achieving near-perfect scores in her humanities and science classes and 100% in Calculus 30AP. This remarkable young woman's name is Helen Ma, her dog, Ultra, and they are an inspiration to us all.

Helen was diagnosed, at the age of one, with Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 2, a condition that limits her mobility and causes fatigue during the day. Moving throughout the school in her motorized wheelchair, Helen is accompanied by Ultra, who, when she has her working vest on, is as conscientious and attentive as any service dog could be: opening doors, picking up anything Helen has



dropped, and sensing any new changes in the environment. Throughout the day, Jenn Harkness and Laine Brown, educational assistants, work with Helen, ensuring that her materials are set up, her physical needs met, and arrangements are made with her teachers so

that all academic requirements are satisfied. Aspiring to work as a genetic counselor, Helen plans on using her personal experience with genetic disorders to help patients who require empathy and compassion, and given the list of scholarships she is qualifying for, she is well

on her way to fulfilling her career aspirations. When asked about the secret to her academic success, Helen said, "Plan out your time well. I'm a lot less stressed than my peers because I have to rest once in awhile, and I plan my time around that. I know what I have to do. Plan your time and don't make yourself too busy."

Helen was greeted at Page in grade ten by Krista Leddy, who was Helen's primary educational assistant at the time. In reflecting on her two years with Helen, Krista says, "Helen is incredibly resilient, has an impressive sense of humour, and is very humble for a young person of her intelligence and knowledge. I am a curious person, and our daily conversations, which would be about almost any topic, reignited my passion for asking questions and seeking new knowledge."

Now that Helen is in her grade twelve year, many of her initial challenges in the school have been overcome. Jenn Harkness commented, "I personally don't see too many challenges left for Helen within the school. Having Ultra has removed many of her obstacles. There are still a few doors that Ultra cannot open, as they are not handicap accessible (no buttons), and sometimes we need to move desks around in classrooms so that her chair can fit through, but those are the biggest issues I see."

Watching Helen in action is a reminder of all the best parts of public education: academic rigour, teamwork, inclusion, humility, goal setting, and kindness. We congratulate Helen, and her remarkable supports, in moving toward the completion of her studies at J. Percy Page.

Profile of a Teacher: Krista Leddy, First Nations, Meti and Inuit Liaison

What is your role on staff at J. Percy Page?

I am the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Liaison. I provide support for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families; I also provide educational and cultural opportunities for all J Percy Page students. I am happy and proud to add that I also support our new Aboriginal Studies 30 class here at Page. Additionally, I help run two community programs in Millwoods; the Regalia and Traditional Arts Program at Edith Rogers School and the Métis Jigging Program at TD Baker School.

How long have you been in education and in what schools have you worked?

I started working for Edmonton Public Schools around nine years ago, starting as a lunchroom aide

and then working as an Educational Assistant and Liaison. My schools have included Sakaw School, Harry Ainlay School, Strathcona School, and here at J Percy Page School.

What would those who do not know you find most interesting about you?

I am a lover of long trips, exploring new places and meeting the people here on Turtle Island. I like to spend my summers exploring this amazing land by canoe, foot, or car. One of my favourite phrases is "road trip!"

What is something you love about working at J. Percy Page?

I love the diversity of our students and how students and staff here are a community, not just a school.

What led you to a career in education?

Twenty years ago I would have laughed if you had suggested I would be working in a high school

in 2017. What got me started was needing a form of employment that worked with my children's school schedules. What I found was a passion for working with youth everyday.

What are your greatest challenges in working at Page?

I really want to help and sometimes I just can't. That can be quite difficult to accept.

Describe your perfect day at Page.

My perfect day always starts with a cup of tea. Give me some time to talk and bead with students around the big table in my office, followed by meaningful and insightful conversations in our talking circle, finished with knowing I helped a student that day and I would leave the building with a content smile on my face.



Krista Leddy

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