



Morgan Campbell

South Lyon East High School

2020 Perseverance Award Winner

Morgan Campbell is a person of extraordinary courage and faith.

A dancer since the age of two, she was thrilled when she found out that she'd made the SLEHS Varsity Pom team as a freshman. It was her goal and her dream—besides for her family, dancing is what she loved most in the world. She couldn't wait for all the excitement in high school to begin.

Except after that, nothing went according to plan.

"I remember practicing on the football field and I just collapsed. At pom camp it happened, even at a pep assembly," Morgan said. "I've never experienced anything like that. We were outside. I was getting warm, my vision went blurry, there was a buzzing sound and then I was out. When I woke up, I didn't know what was going on."

The first doctor said she was just dehydrated, that she didn't have enough salt in her diet. When it kept happening and she went back to get it checked out again, the second doctor agreed. For months, she heard that she was safe, she was healthy, there wasn't anything seriously wrong—they just couldn't explain why she kept passing out, especially during physical activity. Finally, her mother took Morgan to a neurosurgeon at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. What she learned there changed her life.

"I had a tumor wrapped around my main artery at the base of my skull," Morgan said. "As soon as he told me, I asked, 'Am I still going to be able to dance? Am I still going to be able to do all the things I love?'"

Due to the position of the tumor, doctors couldn't perform a biopsy—they told her they needed to wait and see. So they hooked Morgan up to a heart monitor and sent her to pom practice—and it wasn't long before they discovered that she had a heart condition to go along with her tumor. Together, they made the tough decision that Morgan needed to stop dancing.

“My neurosurgeon told me it was best to stop the physical activity. He said there was a chance if you do collapse, you could really hurt yourself,” she said.

And just as she was coming to grips with the idea of this unknown growth in her brain, this irregularly-beating heart, her grandmother passed away, a woman she described as “my best friend.” Morgan was overwhelmed, it was all too hard and too much. Her grades started declining rapidly and she was struggling to find the strength to carry on. She said the generosity and support from her teachers, especially Mrs. Lindsey, helped tremendously during this time.

“Mrs. Lindsey was always there for me whenever I needed her most,” said Morgan. “I could always talk to her about anything and everything and it’s because of her constant love and help that I was able to overcome some pretty serious obstacles. ... I truly believe that I would not be the person I am today without everything Mrs. Lindsey has done for me.”

Morgan decided that since she couldn’t safely dance anymore, she’d try performing in a different way—she put her heart and soul into theater. She said it totally changed everything: “In a way, theater saved my life.”

Morgan’s tumor is still there, eroding her bones, though at her last MRI there was positive evidence that it was starting to shrink. It’s so close to her spinal cord that if doctors tried to remove it, they’d need to place steel rods and plates in her neck, severely limiting her range of motion. But she doesn’t worry about it like she used to, and instead looks to the future.

“I’m a strong believer in my faith. I prayed a lot and I knew that I was given this for a reason, and that maybe I can help somebody else,” she said.

And that’s exactly what she’s planning to do. After experiencing the caring and generosity of so many teachers in South Lyon, Morgan has been inspired to become a teacher herself. She’ll be studying elementary education at Oakland University in the fall.

“I am stronger than I think I am,” said Morgan. “I want to become a teacher and I want to teach kids that they are capable of anything.”

The South Lyon Educational Foundation is proud to recognize Morgan’s incredible strength and perseverance through the most difficult of circumstances, and is honored to present her with our 2020 Perseverance Award. Congratulations, Morgan!