COM Student Editor Realizes Her Dream, Heads to Nation’s Capital

Christie Sullivan is one of this year’s COMs star graduates

KENTFIELD, Calif., May 23, 2006— When Christie Sullivan arrived at College of Marin, she lacked a clear vision for her future. She knew only that she didn’t want to end up immersed in the world of alcohol and drugs that had claimed several family members and she believed education was her best defense. With her little sister in tow, she worked to broaden their horizons.

Three years later, Sullivan, 20, has graduated with an associate arts degree and a full scholarship for a summer internship to study political journalism in Washington D.C. In the fall, she transfers to UC-Berkeley where she will continue to follow her new-found passion for politics and journalism in an interdisciplinary program.

“Christie has overcome significant obstacles and is one of COMs most recent great success stories” said Dr. Frances L. White, COM Superintendent/President. “We are very proud of her and all that she has achieved.”

“She’s overcome all odds,” said Alexandra Magallanes Rivera a COM academic counselor.

Sullivan, who tells the dramatic story of raising herself and her little sister to teens considering college, says her journey has been paved with hard work and the generosity of family, college instructors and strangers who have offered financial support through private scholarships. The mentorship she found at College of Marin has changed her life, she said.

As a teen living with a chemically dependent father, Sullivan juggled a myriad of low-paying jobs at taquerias and fast food restaurants. Sometimes she held down more than one job to help pay the family bills. In high school she was in honors classes, but struggled to get good grades.

“We were left to take care of ourselves and each other,” she said. “When I was in high school, because of my home situation and work, I didn’t excel.” Sullivan still applied to a four-year university but once she was accepted, she realized she didn’t have the resources – financial and emotional – to attend. At 17, she packed her things and moved with her little sister to Marin to live with an uncle. She enrolled at College of Marin and it was there, with the inspiration of new instructors, her fascination with politics and journalism blossomed.

She enrolled in every course taught by instructor Hank Fearnly who became a mentor and when she heard there was a new journalism instructor who was rejuvenating the college newspaper, she gave it a try.

Soon she was a staff writer for the Echo Times, and then managing editor of the campus paper.
“I liked the excitement of it.” said Sullivan who continued working part-time to support herself while studying, managing the school newspaper and helping her family. “There was always a new story you could report on. You set the agenda about what people should pay attention to. I had no social life for two years.”

But she loved the work. With the guidance of Instructor Michael Dougan, a seasoned journalist, Sullivan developed her reporting and newsroom leadership skills and found she had a gift. She combined her passions as a political columnist and was nominated for a scholarship from the Fund for American Studies which promised to take her to Washington D.C. for the summer to study politics and journalism. It was a wonderful gesture but Sullivan couldn’t possibly cover the trip expenses and resigned to not going.

When she found out she had received a private donation that completely covered travel expenses and the cost of her summer stay, she said she just cried.

“I was excited to be nominated but I never pictured myself going,” she said. “I felt almost pessimistic because I was thinking, ‘how am I going to go?’”

The internship means she will have the opportunity to network with other people in the journalism field and get some clips of published articles. She and her sister Kimberly have moved are living on their own and Kimberly has finished her first year at College of Marin.

“When I was younger a lot of my teachers expected me to follow in the path of my dad,” Sullivan said. “I didn’t want to become what he had become. I wanted to be able to take care of my sister and have an education. I didn’t have this idealistic career in mind, it was like I was trying to stay away from what I didn’t want to become and I just translated that to school.”

Sullivan hopes to work as a professional journalist and then return to the community college system to teach. “Just because of the teachers I’ve had at the college level, I really want to become a community college teacher.”

COMs 79th Annual Commencement will take place Friday, May 26 starting at 7pm at the Kentfield Campus Diamond Physical Education Center.

About College of Marin
College of Marin has been providing exceptional educational opportunities for students of all ages since 1926. Each semester, nearly 8,000 students are enrolled in over 1,100 credit classes. An additional 6,000 students take advantage of the College's many outstanding community education and community services classes. The College administration is located in Kentfield, CA. The College also operates the Indian Valley campus in Novato, CA. College of Marin is fully accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges