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May McDonald laughs in her home.

Blindness doesn't slow woman down

In the spring of 1990, May McDonald experienced what many people could imagine as their worst nightmare – a playground dare gone horribly wrong, robbing her of her sight.

McDonald was pushed by another child from the top of a slide onto the concrete below.

"I remember the dare; I remember the fall; I remember waking up and freaking out because I couldn't see a thing," she said.

The Houston, Texas native, now 37, said the transition was incredibly challenging for her 12-year-old self. She went through a period of depression, relying on friends and family to help her adjust.

According to McDonald, her friends stepped up to form her core support system, and encouraged her to not let her disability limit her.

"I had friends more than family who were a big help in getting me through it. They showed me, 'Yeah, you can still do this even though you can't see.'

"They stuck up for me if their friends teased me. They'd tell their friends, 'If you don't like that she's around and that we're going to help her out, then you can go.'"

However, her family was not quite as helpful. Despite their good intentions, McDonald said she found them to be smothering rather than helpful.

"For me, that's annoying. It's like, 'Hey, I lost my sight, I didn't lose a limb or something!'"

McDonald was determined to not let her disability stop her from being independent and happy.

Twenty-five years later, McDonald, now living

in Ottawa, has adjusted to life without sight. She is independent as ever and armed with the attitude that people with disabilities can do anything to which they set their minds.

She said the key is the determination and willingness to adapt.

"You have to find different ways to do things to adapt to the sighted world, because 9 times out of 10, the sighted world doesn't adapt to you."

McDonald is involved in her community, including singing in her local Shout Sister! choir, and attending school full-time at two universities.

She is working on massage therapy and nutrition counselling degrees at the International Academy of Natural Health Sciences, and is also studying at Carleton University, hoping to work with children with disabilities after graduation.

McDonald already volunteers with Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre, accompanying workers in the homes of children with disabilities. She is also in the process of applying to work with the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa as a tutor and mentor.

She hopes to instill independence and determination in the children she works with – something that took years for her to build on her own.

"I want to let them know that you can do this. I want to teach them how to advocate for themselves and let them know, you can still get out there and ride a bike, you can go jump on a horse, you can go jump out of a plane.

"You can do anything you want to do, you've just got to have the willingness to do so, and don't let anyone stop you."



(Above) May sings in the Ottawa branch of the Shout Sister choir. Choir members are not required to read music, but sighted members often read lyrics and watch the conductor.

Right) May throws a toy for her guide dog, Luna, while her boyfriend, James Homuth, stands by.



(Above) Luna sits patiently with May during a break in choir rehearsal.

(Bottom) May McDonald puts her iPhone against her ear to find the app she needs.

