

Elizabeth Regan
The Kelly Cortesi Scholarship Application

Kelly Cortesi will forever be remembered as the smiling, happy girl that walked the halls of Putnam Valley. Kelly has touched the lives of countless people through many ways including her unforgettable laugh. Three of Kelly's most important characteristics include courage, integrity, and compassion. Kelly should certainly be considered a role model in the lives of both adults and children. Her character and personality will never be forgotten.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, courage is "mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty." In October of my sophomore year, I was about twenty yards away from scoring my first ever junior varsity soccer goal when I felt a strong object hit the side of my head and everything faded to black. I woke up with my teammates hovered in a circle looking at me with concerned expressions. As they tried to lift me to my feet, I fell back to the ground, unable to stand up. Apparently, one of my opponents had head butted the side of my head and since I was already unconscious before I hit the ground, I had no way of stopping my head from slamming the turf. That night after three hours at the hospital, I was told I had a grade three concussion. Since a level three is the worst degree on the concussion scale, it meant I was not going to be allowed to play sports, dance, or go to school for awhile. Over the course of the next couple of months, I suffered from dizziness, nausea, tiredness, but worst of all, short-term memory loss. I would literally be in the middle of a sentence and have no idea as to what I was talking about. Weeks went by before I could play entire songs in Wind Ensemble because the more air I used for the flute, the dizzier I

became. Not only were activities that I had been most passionate about being taken away from me, but my grades also started suffering. Teachers doubted my memory problems and even friends questioned if I was exaggerating the injury. My parents took me to every doctor that could potentially help me but they all said two things. First, I would never be able to play sports again unless I wanted to be severely damaged for the rest of my life, and secondly, no medicine could cure my memory loss or physical symptoms. After many nights of crying myself to sleep when I felt I was never going to be able to enjoy sports or dancing, I realized the only one who would ever be able to help me recover better was myself. I worked doubly hard in my classes and took hours more each night to review the material to ensure that I would not forget it come test day. I knew in my heart that if I gave up or continued feeling sorry for myself, I was never going to reach my goals. To demonstrate my courage, I would take Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and remove some of the words so it read "mental strength to persevere difficulty." That definition exemplified everyday from October of tenth grade till about January of eleventh grade. It was not until the middle of junior year did I see consistency in my grades. During the fall of my junior year, I even started playing soccer again. Even though my parents sat in the stands nerve racked whenever I was in, I knew it was what I wanted to be doing. If I did not have the courage to ignore the questioning remarks said to me, or the courage to fight back for things that I wanted, I would not be attending my top choice college, SUNY Geneseo, this coming fall. My mother continuously pushed me to believe in myself and it finally paid off.

Integrity is defined as a firm adherence to a code of moral values. This attribute is especially important as an individual grows older. As a junior, I applied for the position

of Student Representative for the Board of Education. The application was comprised of an essay explaining why I want to serve my community and school in this manner and then a formal interview with three guidance counselors, the principal, and the current student representative. As I sat waiting to be called in for my interview, I was so nervous that I began wondering why I had applied for it. I had never experienced an interview where more than one individual asked me questions. The five interviewers asked me their own individual questions and I found myself speaking from the heart and not from what my previous answers I had mentally prepared. Putnam Valley High School has provided me with an amazing education that many other schools in the area would be hard pressed to compete with. The teachers are excellent, the environment is safe, and the atmosphere encourages learning. By being the student representative, I knew that I could continue my personal opinions and ideas to the Board to further develop Putnam Valley. The next week, Mr. Hurlihay, the current principal announced the two representatives in the morning announcements and I was one of them! I was proud that I could accomplish something of this magnitude but I was also weary of the possible problems that could be associated with this position. The Board deals with business matters and financial circumstances on alternating meetings. Business matters range from the Pride in Putnam Valley Award, to angry parents and students. Luckily, I did not have any extremely controversial topics that have occurred in past years. However, when I accepted the position, I agreed to honestly portray both the students view, and the view that I saw as morally correct. There had been times when I disagreed with some of the student body, and even the other student representative. While I easily could have ignored what the students were saying or dismissed my partner, my integrity helped me to keep my actions

truthful. The Board of Education has taught me how important integrity really is in real life. When individuals are put into power citizens can only hope that their elected leader will have the sense of honesty in both their actions and their words with whatever they are trying to accomplish.

Compassion can be explained as a sympathetic consciousness to others' concerns. Having respect and concern for another person's well-being or opinion is a large part of an individual's success. Community service is a perfect example of someone demonstrating compassion. As a junior, I had been asked to tutor middle school children in all subject areas as a volunteer position. The children that I tutored were not necessarily the most focused or enthusiastic about learning. Several times after the session with eight or nine students, I walked out feeling that I was not making a large enough impact on the children in their studies. I respected that they had learning disabilities and I began to care a lot more for each individual as the weeks progressed. Mentoring was one of the many service projects that I was involved with in Putnam Valley High School. I mentored middle and elementary school children so they felt as if they had an older sister to talk to and have fun with. I participated in the Make A Difference Club for four years which is a service based organization aimed to assist people of all ages, races, and abilities. One of the most important community service projects I worked on this year was the Peers Influence Peers Partnership National Broadcast Project. This year the topic was natural highs. Our broadcast aimed to show teenagers the fun that can be found in activities other than drug and alcohol. Even though I will never personally meet the teens that watched our show, I am confident that I did my part to contribute in educating my peers. My various community service contributions over many years have taught me to treat

everyone with the same respect and concern that I would want. Community service inspired my senior year quote to be “Be kinder than necessary for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle” (Anonymous). I try to live my daily life through this quote because it is so inspirational.

Courage, integrity, and compassion are three attributes that Kelly Cortesi consistently demonstrated throughout her life. She serves as a personal role model because I envied her ability to find happiness in every situation. I am proud to know that I share some characteristics with such an amazing girl.