

BC3 single mom could receive \$17K in Soroptimist scholarships

Social work major awarded \$7,500 for essay, in running for \$10K

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Alyssa Mainhart, 31, of Butler, is shown Monday, March 15, 2021, on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township. Mainhart is pursuing an associate degree in social work and a 33-credit addiction recovery certificate at BC3, and has received \$7,500 in scholarships for an essay she wrote through the Soroptimist International of the Americas' "Live Your Dream" program.

(Butler, PA) A 31-year-old Butler County Community College student's essay about overcoming a past of physical abuse, of witnessing and blaming herself at 10 for her cousin's accidental death, of a crash that left her partially paralyzed and ultimately of drug use "in hopes that I would die" could receive \$17,500 in scholarships from an organization that supports and empowers women.

Alyssa Mainhart's 719-word "Live Your Dream" essay also celebrates her present and her future. It has been awarded \$7,500 in scholarships from the Soroptimist International of the

Americas at the local, district then regional levels, and is being considered for an international \$10,000 award.

Mainhart today is serving her fourth semester as president of Rho Phi, BC3's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an international academic honor society for two-year colleges and programs.

Since enrolling at BC3 in January 2018 as a sober single mother raising a 5-year-old son, Mainhart has received nothing other than 13 A's and 4 B's and has been named to BC3's president's list twice.

The Butler resident who once lived in Armstrong County is pursuing an associate degree in BC3's 62-credit social work program. She also expects to be among the first six graduates of the college's 33-credit addiction recovery certificate program in August.

Her essay was awarded a \$1,500 scholarship Jan. 15 by the Soroptimist International of Butler County and a \$1,000 scholarship Feb. 9 by the organization's District 4. The district includes nine Soroptimist International clubs from Harrisburg to Wheeling, W.Va.

Her essay was then awarded a \$5,000 scholarship March 14 by the organization's North Atlantic Region. The region includes 50 Soroptimist International clubs from 11 states from Maine to West Virginia.

“I had absolutely hit rock-bottom”

The scholarships, Mainhart said, will help her toward her goal of earning a master's degree and serving as a drug and alcohol counselor for women or for geriatric patients.

Her essay also recounts emotional abuse and references her 10-year-old cousin Joshua Frampton's death in go-kart accident on private property in Sarver in August 2000 – “I was supposed to be on his go-kart but he ran ahead of me to jump on it,” she said.

The go-kart hit another at the crest of hill, Mainhart said, killing her cousin whom she considered to be her best friend.

“I felt like I was at fault for his death,” she said, “because I was supposed to be in that go-kart.”

Mainhart was involved in a New Kensington car crash at 16 that left her with only 40 percent mobility in her left arm. She later became addicted to opioids – “I was a shell of a person who did drugs in hopes that I would die” – and eventually serving in jail for stealing a prescription pad from her physician.

“I would say her past was extremely challenging, and troubled,” Becky Plymale said.

“Simply put, chaotic,” Dr. Karen Stubenbort said.

“A dark place,” Morgan Rizzardi said. “All these things were spiraling.”

To where, Mainhart said, “I had absolutely hit rock-bottom.”

Her outlook changed, she said, when she learned she was pregnant with Gunner. She vowed seven years ago to remain sober – a promise to herself that she has kept, having attended Narcotics Anonymous meetings up to three times daily. Despite her partially paralyzed left arm, she earned a cosmetology license in 2014.

“I still felt like I wanted more,” she wrote.

In January 2018, she enrolled at BC3 – “The faculty at BC3 have just been so helpful. They care,” she said – and by May had earned her first two A’s.

“That was huge for me,” she said. “It gave me self-esteem. It was a confidence-booster.”

“This woman is determined to make it”

Mainhart has volunteered in the community by providing free haircuts to homeless veterans as part of the Veterans Administration’s Stand Down Events, and with Community Partnership Inc. addressing food insecurity in Butler County.

She recently began a full-time position as a residential aide at the Ellen O’Brien Gaiser Center, a drug and alcohol treatment facility for women in Butler County.

“I am,” Mainhart wrote, “a new person.”

“A butterfly,” said Rizzardi, a co-adviser to BC3’s Rho Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa and the college’s associate director of admissions. “She was in this cocoon and felt like there wasn’t light at the end of the tunnel. I think she started to realize how much she could overcome, that she had a son to work for. I think Gunner is the center of her life.”

“Live Your Dream” education and training awards are presented to women who provide the primary financial support for their families and give women the resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects, according to the organization’s website.

Mainhart expects to earn an associate degree in social work in May 2022, and transfer to Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, where she intends to pursue bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work.

“This woman is determined to make it,” said Stubenbort, an associate professor of humanities and social science at BC3 who has instructed Mainhart and whose nomination letter accompanied Mainhart’s essay. “And she will. She’ll go to grad school. She’ll do everything she needs to do.”

Because Mainhart, said Plymale, chair of the Soroptimist International of Butler County's "Live Your Dream" committee, is "just amazing. Her future is full of opportunity and exciting."

"It feels like it was a different life"

In addition to Mainhart receiving \$7,500 from the "Live Your Dream" program, she has also received a \$535 Soroptimist International of Butler County scholarship, which has been awarded annually through the BC3 Education Foundation since the 1989-1990 academic year, said Lynn Ismail, interim assistant director of the foundation.

Among its criteria, the Soroptimist International of Butler County scholarship requires its female recipients to be older than 24, residents of Butler County and to be full-time BC3 students with a minimum grade-point average of 3.0.

"I feel very blessed that a club like this exists," Mainhart said. "As I go further in my education, I feel very strongly about empowering other women. I had a difficult background, and now I'm sitting here as the president of the honor society at my college."

"I look back and it doesn't even feel like it was me. It feels like it was a different life."

Members of Rho Phi, BC3's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, must have at least a 3.0 grade-point average to remain in good standing.

Students who achieve president's list honors at BC3 have attained a cumulative grade-point average of 3.75 or higher during a semester in which they have earned at least 12 credits.

The recipient of the Soroptimist International of the Americas' international scholarship could be announced in May, Plymale said.