

A MOTHER'S LOVE

When Sumner Spence expressed his desire to attend college, most probably scoffed because he suffers from cerebral palsy; his eyes won't focus, and his hands are uncontrollably locked into clenched fists. It was impossible for him to hold a book, and taking notes in a classroom setting was out of the question. It would have been perfectly understandable if Sumner Spence never set a goal beyond learning how to operate his wheelchair. But that wasn't good enough for Sumner and his loyal mother Susan. They saw Sumner's circumstances in light of the possibilities instead of the impossibilities.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, Sumner Spence enrolled at the University of Delaware. His mother attended all his classes, faithfully taking his notes for him. Each evening she would enter the lecture notes into a special computer program whose digital voice read the notes back to Sumner as he studied. Over the course of 2½ years, Susan Spence scanned more than 5,000 pages of textbook material and edited the scanned text for accuracy so Sumner could effectively study. One particular class assignment called for Sumner's mother to go the extra mile. The students were asked to read Liam Callanan's first novel *The Cloud Atlas*. The famous author was going to be a special guest lecturer on the campus. Sumner's mom was not aware an electronic version of the novel existed, so she re-typed the entire book into their home computer.

When the class hosted an informal lunch to chat about Callanan's book, Sumner offered a number of insightful observations and questions. Later that evening, Callanan received a phone call from the professor of the class. Sumner's mom had just spoken with the professor, tearfully telling her how before that meal Sumner had never eaten in public with anyone other than a family member. He was always afraid he would repulse people who didn't understand. Since he loved reading, though, he wanted to talk about books, and the lunch that day had given him the opportunity.

On the evening of May 24, 2007, Susan Spence took a seat in the back of the auditorium, and she watched as Sumner wheeled himself across the platform to receive his Associate of Arts degree. After addressing his fellow graduates at the commencement ceremony, more than 300 students and family members in attendance erupted in a standing ovation for this determined boy and his loyal mother.