



# Cristina Graduates

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Cristina has finished high school, and naturally, we marked the joyous occasion with a party. In fact, we did a lot of celebrating throughout her senior year. The highlight of Cristina's high school years was being the manager of the cheerleading team. Of course, like most girls who tryout but don't make the squad, she would have been even happier being a full-fledged cheerleader. But year after year, she went through tryouts unsuccessfully.

Although it was disappointing to Cristina, I consider it a fine example of inclusion: she was given the chance to participate in a normal high school ritual (cheer tryouts), and she was given no special treatment or consideration. When she didn't meet the objective standards, she suffered the disappointment of not making the squad just like numerous other girls who do not have disabilities. She was welcomed with open arms, however, in the role of cheer manager, and the coach even provided her with a previous year's cheerleading uniform for free.

Thus, it was no surprise that our first celebration of her senior year involved cheerleading. Cheer tryouts happen in the spring for the following school year. When Cristina tried out at the end of last year, she was named cheer manager for the junior varsity (rather than varsity) squad for the upcoming fall football season.

An exciting thing happened over the summer, however. Cristina matured a great deal, and her cheer coach noticed. Showing the coach's characteristic flexibility, she began inviting Cristina to cheer for the varsity football games and to attend some varsity cheerleading team dinners. Cristina even traveled with the varsity squad to the playoff football games, and she was thrilled!

This year also saw Cristina getting her first paid job. She works 6 hours a week, and it has been a good introduction for her to the world of work.

Perhaps the most momentous event occurred when Cristina, without consulting us, invited a young man from her Special Education class to prom. He said yes, and his parents also gave their blessing. Cristina and her date were sufficiently mature that they dined alone on prom night. Indeed, I dropped them off at the front door of the restaurant, they went in and requested a table, perused their menus, placed their orders, and enjoyed their meal—without any supervision. They could not have been more proud to be so independent. (Unbeknownst to them, I indulged my protective instincts by sitting in the restaurant's bar while they dined.)

We also dropped them off at the front door of the prom, they got their fill of dancing, and when they'd had enough, Cristina texted us to let us know they were ready to be picked up. Witnessing how well she handled herself that night was for me the highlight of her senior year.

## Texas Parent to Parent

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As with any parent marking a milestone event, we can't help looking back with pride and some amusement. When our children are newborns, we tend to have dreams for them, worries about what their futures hold, and some preconceived ideas on who they might be. The amusement comes from realizing that our children have their own ideas on who they are, and so much of the joy of parenting comes not from micromanaging their paths but from witnessing (with immense pride) them forging their own paths.

The questions remain on what Cristina's future holds. Right now, we'll simply take things one year at a time. She will attend our school district's Plus-18 program (the program for students, ages 18-22, who have disabilities) which is housed at the community college nearby.

Cristina will continue her paid employment and will seek additional hours. If she decides to change jobs, the school district can assist her with job coaching.

She would dearly love to drive, but we don't think she will have the skills necessary to do so. She also very much wants to live on her own or with a roommate, and that is a goal that we think is more attainable, although at this point we're not sure what those living arrangements will ultimately look like.

What we do know is that it will continue to be a privilege to watch Cristina finding her own path. I'm sure we'll have much to celebrate.



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