

Tolly recovers from battle for life to be inspiration for others

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Edwardsville High School senior Willow Tolly battled for her life in recent years after numerous pancreatic problems, but with caring medical support and an outpouring of help from students and faculty she is shining.

The first pancreatic attack occurred in December of her freshman year and she struggled to eat anything. Her problems continued into her sophomore year and she missed school in the process, but was able to make up the time.

She was a member of the cross country team since she was a young girl, but her junior year she became the manager of both cross country and track teams. In March of last year, her pancreas, spleen and gallbladder were removed at the University of Minnesota. Because of the stress on her body, she almost had liver failure, which became life threatening.

“After the surgery I was in the ICU for a week and a regular floor for a month and a half, then lived in Minnesota for three weeks before returning home,” Tolly said.

Tolly had auto islet cells transplanted into her liver. She now goes for checkups every six months.

She is also running again, something she said she has always loved to do.

Tolly said the Edwardsville School District 7 administration and Principal Dennis Cramsey worked with her and enabled her to make up the work she missed in order to stay on track and graduate on time. Cramsey described Tolly as an exceptional student.

When people ask her would she like to trade what happened to her, she replies, “I always tell them I wouldn’t change anything. I have been blessed with my surgeons and blessed with my surgery. It has opened doors for me.”

Tolly now wants to pursue a medical career because of the positives she has witnessed and what she endured. She said the cards that came to her in the mail while she was gone and support from her friends meant more to her than she could ever describe.

“It is amazing that I have so many people support me,” Tolly said. “They even had a benefit concert for me and so many people prayed for me.”

Tolly said she feels that the reason she is still alive is help from above.

“God is the reason I am here,” she said.

“It is awesome going to school in the Edwardsville District,” she continued. “I am blessed for all the opportunities I have. I love Edwardsville. I don’t think people understand how phenomenal our faculty and staff is and what their visits and cards meant to me.”