

Alum Credits Confidence to Family—at Home and at Clarke



Clarke alum Christine Halvorsen at her college graduation.

Advocacy through Education

Throughout childhood, adolescence and now in her professional life, Clarke alum Christine Halvorsen has learned to be a good teacher.

“Not everybody knows how to communicate with deaf people, and... each deaf person is different,” says the 25-year-old, who is deaf and lives in Marion, Iowa, with her boyfriend, Akash.

Christine built and honed self-advocacy skills early and used them to teach others about hearing loss and listening and spoken language. She taught teammates when she joined various sports teams in high school and college. She helped educate peers and colleagues when she enrolled at Millsaps College and then landed her first job in advertising and marketing at Clickstop, a multi-brand merchant and manufacturer, in June 2019.

She speaks up for her needs regularly, makes sure that she hears others accurately and creates expectations in new environments—saying to a supervisor, for example, “Can you make sure I can ask questions?”

“That’s half the challenge,” she adds, noting that most people are receptive to her needs. Fortunately, Christine learned to advocate for herself early, and she received support from several sources.

A Diagnosis and Devoted Family Lead Christine to Clarke

When she was 14 months old, one of Christine’s two older brothers slammed the front door while Christine was playing nearby. “I didn’t react to it,” Christine says, explaining that the incident led her parents, Dana and John Halvorsen, to discover their daughter was born deaf due to a syndrome that causes the cochlea to stop developing.

Christine began to wear a hearing aid in each ear, and the family moved from Mississippi to Florida, where Christine could attend Clarke. Around age nine, Christine received a cochlear implant on the right side, and around the same time, she transitioned into a mainstream school.

“Clarke helped me with hearing and building confidence—tremendously,” Christine says. “Because of their trust in me and the confidence they built in me, I was able to go to a mainstream school with hearing people and be around all people—deaf and hearing.”

She adds, “If I had to describe Clarke in one word, I’d say ‘impactful.’”

A Clarke teacher of the deaf and speech-language pathologist advocated for Christine as she transitioned to school with hearing peers, and more importantly, they taught her to advocate for herself. Her other lifelong supports have been her parents and her two older brothers, Ben and Daniel.

“Whenever I had trouble hearing something, or when I needed advice on how to transition or adapt, they’ve always helped me through that,” says Christine.

When Christine was a child, Ben helped her recognize the alphabet by reading books and creating booklets and photo albums. In middle and high school, Christine’s parents were key. “If I had trouble with teachers because maybe they didn’t understand me, my mom would open my mind that not everybody is going to understand, but if you have a conversation, that helps them understand,” she says. “She pushed me out of my comfort zone to have those tough conversations.”

Daniel taught Christine about dedication and perseverance and how to stand her ground. Now a mortgage banker in Jacksonville, Florida, Daniel was so inspired by his sister’s experience at Clarke that he supports the organization in several ways, including as a member of the Clarke Leadership Council. Each year, Daniel helps with the Kilwins Ice Cream Run, and he organizes an annual school supply drive for Clarke.

“I’ve always had a huge bubble of support,” Christine says. “I feel like I have two families to be quite honest. I have my family and my Clarke family.”

In her work at Clickstop, where she leverages her bachelor’s in business administration, Christine is involved with digital marketing, from data analysis and SEO (search engine optimization) to writing blogs and social media posts. She recently engaged in a market research project to find new product opportunities for Amazon and the Clickstop retailers’ websites.

She firmly believes that young adults who are deaf or hard of hearing can have exciting careers like hers. “A door may open, and you’ll get to find something you love doing,” she says.