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Todd Tostado Beats The Odds In Many Ways; Now Graduates From CSULA

By Carlos Morales

Todd Tostado was born and diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) a neuro-muscular disease characterized as degeneration of motor neurons resulting in progressive muscular atrophy.

Most children who are born with this disease have a life expectancy between 3-5 years.

Todd's parents, Karen and Manuel Tostado were as surprised as Todd's doctors to see Todd beat the odds and are very proud of his latest accomplishment of earning

a Bachelor's degree in Graphic Design from Cal State University Los Angeles (CSULA), despite losing the use of his arms.

As a toddler, Todd's parents enrolled him in the CSULA Infant Stem Program over thirty years ago. This is an early intervention program that educates and gives patients as well as family members a better understanding of the disease.

Karen explained to THE VOICE, "Todd began to draw as a child, he never crawled or walked. As

an infant he never had any gross motor skills (movement of his limbs.) Todd would wear a helmet to protect himself and would only be able to slightly move his arms and legs. He loved getting into pens and pencils and over a short time he started to dive into markers," stated Karen.

Tostado attended several schools in very difficult times because most schools had not have developed programs to deal with this disability. It was very rare that anyone would even live long

enough to attend school. He graduated from Alhambra High School in 1994 with a 4.0 GPA.

He credits a life transformation that happened during his senior year at Alhambra High School when he received a referral to Rancho Los Amigos Hospital and got fitted for a custom made technology advanced apparatus that is "Wired" to his wheel chair.

Utilizing this state of the art assistive technology, it allowed Tostado to operate a computer with precise agility (he had no

way of doing so before because he lost the use of his arms at the age of 14 years old.)

Tostado pursued his education and attended Pasadena City College for six years and then transferred to CSULA in 2000.

Todd received additional assistance from a team of engineering faculty and students on campus that helped to dramatically increase his ability to operate a computer.

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Tostado Beating All Odds

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"They were able to take two adaptive computer switches and wire them together, so that the computer would read them as a single control."

The staff in the University's Office for Students with Disabilities also assisted in converting all his textbooks to digital format by scanning every page of each book he needed for his classes. "Being able to read my textbooks without the assistance of someone turning pages saved me countless hours of time, and enabled me to be more independent. Over the years, I've taken several classes with Professor Tony Longson at CSULA. He always goes above and beyond the confines of the curriculum, and encourages students to explore, develop, and express their own unique artistic talents through assigned class projects."

We contacted Estevan Diaz, an Alternative Media Specialist who assisted Tostado with converting his text-books into the electronic media using assistive technology, Diaz remarked. "It can take up to three to five days entire days to completely transfer each book digitally. We know how important it is for these students to have this material in a timely fashion so that they do not fall behind the rest of the class. I remember Tostado very well, he is a very bright, artistic and caring individual. He remembered me during Christmas and honoring me with a piece of his artwork as a gift and has also invited me to his various art shows. It is very rewarding to see our departments impact assisting the progress of students at this campus and is amazing what Tostado has ac-

complished", said Diaz.

Tostado also credits the entire CSULA faculty and staff and named Gonzalo Centeno, disability management specialist, in particular, for being an incredible help throughout his time at CSULA. Tostado said, "Gonzalo helped me to access all of the available and necessary resources needed for my successful completion of my degree, including nominating me for two scholarships. And, he has always been there to help me overcome all of the various obstacles and challenges that I encountered over the years at CSULA."

Todd became one the first students in the world with this disease not only to attend but to graduate from college as most campuses do not have the experience and expertise to address these type of disabilities. Due to that fact that most students will not live long enough to attend college.

We asked Todd, "How does it feel to graduate from CSULA?" Todd 35 year old responded, "I feel relieved after so many years of studying. I have seen many kids (fellow classmates) come and go, I would socialize with my classmates which were closer to my age when I started college and as time went by it made me feel like a father figure", stated the Tostatado.

Turning a childhood passion of drawing, into incredible pieces of digital art

We visited Tostado at his Alhambra home and he stated, "I also give much credit of my life accomplishments to my family; My parents and brother and sister who were always

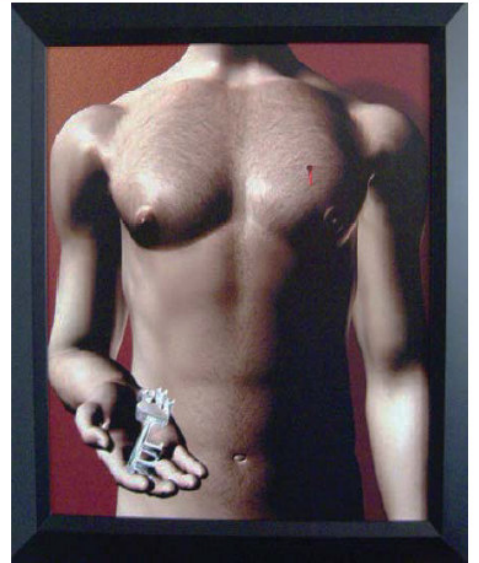
there to reinforce my passion" The Tostado family home showcases many of Tostado's artwork, beautifully framed and hung in every room of the house. Tostado showed us many more pieces in his portfolio that have yet to be framed.

Karen his mom said, "Todd has been an inspiration to his younger brother Luke and sister Teresa to go to college. They always said if Todd can do it so can we. Luke graduated from Cal State Long Beach and later pursued his master's degree in Marriage and Family Counseling in 2009. Teresa graduated from CSULA in 2004 Criminal Justice stated Karen.

Tostado utilizes a Mac Pro Computer and has mastered using Photoshop, Illustrator, In Design, After Effects, Dreamweaver, Flash, Lightwave, Poser and many more software applications. Tostado stated, "I like Surreal Art, Dark themes, Tattoo Art and what I call Art Piercing. Art is how I best express myself."

Tostado has created a couple of hundred pieces of art over the years and his art work has been displayed at several art galleries, including the Nanna Gallery in Boyle Heights, with the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art in the Artist District and has been featured at the DTLA Art Walk twice. His work has been displayed at the Christopher Reeves Foundation sponsored art show.

Todd is now searching for freelance work to design websites and continues to create more fine artwork, displaying his work at gallery shows. You can see more of Todd's work on www.facelessimages.com and www.spacialacademy.org



Todd named the above artwork "Key To My Heart"

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