



SECOND CHANCES

Amid the beehive-like buzz of the Biomedical Science Tower Lobby, Meghan Wilson explained recently what led her to enroll in the University of Pittsburgh/Carnegie Mellon University Medical Scientist Training Program—aka the MD/PhD program.

She had wanted a career in medicine since she was a kid in Florida, but “after my accident, I didn’t think that was still a realistic option for me,” she said. A skiing accident during her senior year of high school rendered her quadriplegic 11 years ago.

As an undergraduate at the University of Florida, she discovered an interest in neuroscience research and, with the encouragement of one of her professors, decided to pursue a combined degree. “I wanted to study human disease and help translate basic research findings into improvements in clinical medicine” she said.

Since then, Wilson has graduated with a degree in neurobiology and completed two years of medical school. She is now in the third year of her PhD training in neuroscience, focusing on ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease).

The work, as you might expect, is challenging and time consuming. So was getting the opportunity to do it. Wilson didn’t get accepted to med

school on her first try (despite a soaring MCAT score and GPA, plus strong letters of recommendation). “Then I sent out letters to medical schools all around the country explaining my situation. I wanted to gauge who was willing to give me a chance and work with me to develop appropriate accommodations.”

Only one school was. Pitt.

“They talk about the importance of diversity at many schools, but here at Pitt they actually put in the extra effort to support it.”

She works with a technician in the lab and plans to hire a physician’s assistant when she returns to med school for her third- and fourth-year clerkships.

Then residency. Then a postdoc. Then a faculty position at an academic medical center.

“I’m working toward a career where I’ll be able to do intellectually fulfilling work and help improve the quality of other people’s lives. That is something I wasn’t sure would be a possibility for me,” Wilson said. “I’m grateful for the opportunity.”

—Joe Miksch

Photograph by Cami Mesa