

PILOTING YOUR DREAMS

A BYUH student works to becoming a pilot despite the challenge of living with a learning disability

BY NICHOLE WHITELEY

Brenton Collet said dyslexia is like continually running up a sand dune but never making any progress. Collet, a senior from Idaho majoring in HTM, said he was diagnosed with dyslexia his freshman year of high school. He explained it feels as if you are sweaty and exhausted looking above at the immense hill you are trying to conquer, then looking behind to realize you have made little to no progress. He said it is frustrating, “but if you love what you want to study and you love what you do, I think that makes all the difference.”

Collet added having a strong support system is like having a rope thrown to you, and someone slowly pulling you up. He said, “You’re still having to put your effort in, and it still [is hard] because you’re going up a sand dune. But you’re also kind of being helped at the same time if you have the right people with you along the way.”

He said his wife has been the person at the top of his sand dune while at BYU–Hawaii. “She keeps me motivated. She keeps me focused,” Collet said.

What is dyslexia?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines dyslexia as a “learning disability involving difficulties in acquiring and processing language that is typically manifested by a lack of proficiency in reading, spelling and writing.”

While the media often depicts dyslexia as simply switching letters like the “b” and “d” in the word bed, Collet said it is much more complex. He explained his dyslexia affects

his “cognitive ability to retain information.” Dyslexia is not memory loss, he said, rather, he explained he recalls information different from what he learned.

Taylor Collet, Brenton Collet’s wife and a BYU Provo alumna, said she understands her husband’s dyslexia as having “some kind of gate between the information going in and his understanding in his brain. In that gate, sometimes stuff can get through, but a lot of times it’s going through a bunch of different fun house mirrors.”

She continued, “The stuff that’s actually getting through is distorted, and so he’s getting part of it but maybe not all of it.” She explained because of this, he can read something several times and understand a new meaning each time “because it’s getting bounced off of different mirrors. He’s seeing it in a different light.”


Taylor Collet explained her husband learns more effectively and retains information better using his hands instead of just his eyes because it “bypasses” those mirrors in his brain.

Striving for flight school

Brenton Collet said he thrives when his classes are based in hands-on application and presentations - a key reason why he said he chose flight school. He explained although there is heavy reading, he will quickly be able to apply the practical skills that will help him retain the information.

He said because it is something he enjoys learning about, the extra time spent studying and reading for flight school will go by faster and will be worth it.

He said he has enjoyed the idea of flying planes since he was 4 years old. “I grew up with [my grandfather’s] stories about flying, and ... working in the aviation industry [as an aviation mechanic for the U.S. Navy], and I was just captivated.” He continued, “My grandfather’s my hero. I owe a lot to him.”



He said he never thought of being a pilot until he took the project-based HTM course Customer Experience Optimization with Jeff Christiansen. Brenton Collet said he noticed after the class, he had subconsciously tied each project to aviation.

With graduation around the corner, he said he and his wife had been discussing his future plans, and she jokingly suggested becoming a pilot. After an entire winter break spent researching, he said he decided that was the path he should take.

Brenton Collet explained his decision was confirmed through prayer and temple visits. He said he continues to receive guidance and assistance from God to persevere through his learning disability as he prepares for flight school and shared his wife is one of the blessings God sent to help him.

*Taylor Collet comforting Brenton Collet.
Photos by Marwin Jay Villegas.
Graphics by Sugarmaa Bataa (Kendra).*



Brenton Collet's grandfather working as an aviation mechanic in the Navy.

“but if you love what you want to study and you love what you do, I think that makes all the difference.”

He said the place he feels the closest to his Heavenly Father and can feel his love is in the cockpit of an airplane.

Amongst the roaring engines and the voices in his headset, “It is the most awe-inspiring place for me. And I feel like I can see God’s creation of the Earth in a different light. . . . You’re looking down and you see the vast spread of God’s creation. There’s nothing like it. . . . And when the light peeks through those clouds at a certain point and you’re flying right in the middle of them, it is an unbelievable experience.”

A companions support

Brenton Collet said his wife has helped him navigate college with his learning disability by sharing her writing strengths. He said she understands his thoughts, which can sometimes be jumbled, and helps him articulate what is in his mind onto paper.

Taylor Collet said she enjoys helping him because she loves him, but she did not want to become a crutch for him. So she tells him, “I know it’s tough, but I want you to push yourself.”

She said it is like balancing on a tightrope. Sometimes she said she pushes him too far, and sometimes he relies on her too much. But over the years, she said, “He’s finally gotten to a point where he is able to balance it a little bit better like he’s helping me on that tightrope” and understands he needs to expend his efforts before relying on her for help.

He said when he first got to BYUH, he would get frustrated and upset at the time it took him to do an assignment that took his classmates half of the time. But recently, he said having his goal in sight makes all of the extra time, headaches and frustration worth it.

Brenton Collet said having a learning disability made him feel like he would never accomplish anything “major and grand,” but is now on the pathway to do so. “I know I can make it there. I know I can, even though I have learning disabilities. . . . I didn’t think that before [attending college].”

Dealing with depression and bullies

Brenton Collet attended high school in Tokyo at The American School in Japan. This school, he said, was geared towards sending the students to Ivy League schools, which meant it was a “fast-paced, lecture-based, test-heavy style of learning,” which is not the environment he said he thrives in, so he quickly fell behind.

“I got bullied extremely hard for being a member [of The Church], for being different, for being, I guess, not bright or like not as not as quick paced as the other students.”



Brenton Collet's intro flight with ATP flight school that he will attend after graduation.

person after realizing what my end goal [flight school] is and where I want to be.”

Strength through optimism

Although he does not suffer from clinical depression, Brenton Collet said he has depressive episodes. He has found what works well for him is “choosing to be positive. Choosing to have an optimistic outlook on things has greatly improved the way I’ve just taken on my day,” and helped him to recognize feelings of depression and address them right away.

He said he understands this is not the case for everyone, that they can choose to be happy on a specific day, and he sympathizes with them.

Taylor Collet said when he feels down and compares himself to other students and feels he is not smart because of his learning disability, it is difficult for her to watch

because she loves him and cares about him. She said she sees his qualities that are often overlooked and notices his intelligence.

She said what helps him the most is to distract him by going out to eat, going for a hike, or watching a movie – just trying to make him happy. When they do this, he can come back to the situation with a clear mind and work through the struggle.

“I try to keep him grounded and try to remind him it is a learning disability. ...It’s one of the cards you’ve been dealt in this life. It’s not going to go away, but that doesn’t mean that you’re not still amazing and smart.” •

After dealing with bullies for several years growing up, Brenton Collet said midway through his senior year, he decided he just did not care anymore what other people thought or what they did. He said it was probably the wrong way to deal with the issue, but he “essentially just shut that part of [his] brain down.”

From this time he said, “I’ve realized the value and the power of my optimism and positivity. And if you find something that you love, you can be positive. And I think I’ve become a more positive and more optimistic