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Blindness no handicap, just way of life

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Choose your battles and fight your wars. Eighteen-year-old William "Will" Smith has followed that advice for as long as he can remember, thanks to his mother.

He describes her as the main influence in his life—a role model for facing adversity.

"My mom went through a lot," says Will, who is blind. He lost his eyesight to congenital glaucoma at age 3. That same year, his mother gave birth to a daughter and then lost her husband in a grain bin accident. "That was tough."

The Wayne, Neb., teen has taken the losses in stride and says that his age at the time helped him cope with the changes in their household.

"It's something that I grew up with, so I never knew any different," he said.

Smith will be using his Ak-Sar-Ben Horatio Alger Scholarship to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln this fall. He plans to study agricultural engineering.

"I guess as I got into high school, as I grew, matured, gained responsibility and figured life out, I came to value the small town values and the rural area," he said.

Valedictorian, he graduated first in his class with a 4.0 grade point average. He jokes that sitting in the front row under the constant watch of teachers forced him to be a good student. "I always enjoyed school. School always came easy to me."

He lettered four years in cross-country and was active in band.

He prides himself on his communication skills. "A lot of people don't know that I (am blind) because of the way I have adapted. It's a huge responsibility on my part that they do know. When I was younger, the teachers were made aware of it. Going into college, it's not the same ballgame."

He's eager for a new experience.

"I'm looking forward to studying the things I'm more interested in. I guess I have the normal jitters, but I don't get as nervous as other people."



Will Smith sits on an antique tractor that he helped restore and now drives in parades. The Wayne, Neb., teen is starting his freshman year at UNL.

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