



## Victoria M. Whalen Memorial Scholarship

Victoria M. Whalen was born on July 11, 1996. She was the youngest child of Daniel and Eva Whalen and beloved sister of Samantha and Douglas. Victoria was a beautiful and incredibly photogenic child. Her mother enjoyed taking hundreds of photos of her. Victoria would pose patiently for each photo, delighting her doting parents with her dark gleaming eyes and radiant smile. Victoria was the youngest child in her neighborhood and was often relegated to the role of substitute during backyard sporting contests. Vickie rarely complained, watched patiently, and made the most of her opportunities. Ad-hoc coaching and cajoling by older players and siblings would serve Vickie well when she entered organized sports.

Vickie attended Juniper Park Elementary School and South Middle School. Vickie was a hardworking student and with her infectious smile she made dozens of friends. Vickie was practically a “maintenance free” child. Her homework was done before being asked and she seemed to know times and dates for everything, from tee-ball sign-ups to teachers’ conferences. Vickie loved to visit her friends’ homes. She would thrust herself into a friend’s family structure befriending siblings, parents, grandparents, and pets. All loved her.

Vickie thrived in Westfield’s youth sports programs. Vickie was six years old when Westfield’s first youth lacrosse league was formed. The fledgling league had limited players and Vickie was asked to play-up with the eight year-olds. Any doubts regarding Vickie’s abilities to compete with older players were put to rest soon after she stepped on the field. Within seconds Vickie’s screams, of “ball, ball, ball” could be heard through her muffled mouth-guard. She directed her older, startled, teammates to various positions on the field, often calling them by name, although they had no idea who this screaming six year-old was. In her youth and early teens Vickie made the most of her leisure time. Vickie loved shopping with her mom, Six Flags New England, and the Rhode Island beaches. She loved traveling New England with her AAU basketball teams, languishing in motel rooms before and after games, while eating pizza and fast food.

At Westfield High Vickie served as a class officer and played three varsity sports. Her passion was lacrosse and she was a four-year varsity starter. In her senior year Vickie was a co-captain and an All-Western Mass selection. Despite being a prolific scorer, the statistic Vickie was most proud of was her “assists.” She delighted in setting up fellow teammates to score. She loved the synchronicity of lacrosse, the “sixth sense” which would develop amongst teammates. Conversely, in field hockey, Vickie enjoyed disturbing the rhythm of opposing offenses and was the Lady Bombers Defensive MVP in her senior year.

After graduating in 2014 Vickie attended Keene State College in New Hampshire. Vickie lettered in lacrosse and her Lady Owls competed for a spot in the NCAA Finals. Vickie’s natural sense of empathy and ease of manner once again allowed her to make friends quickly. She thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie of her classmates and teammates on Keene’s idyllic campus.

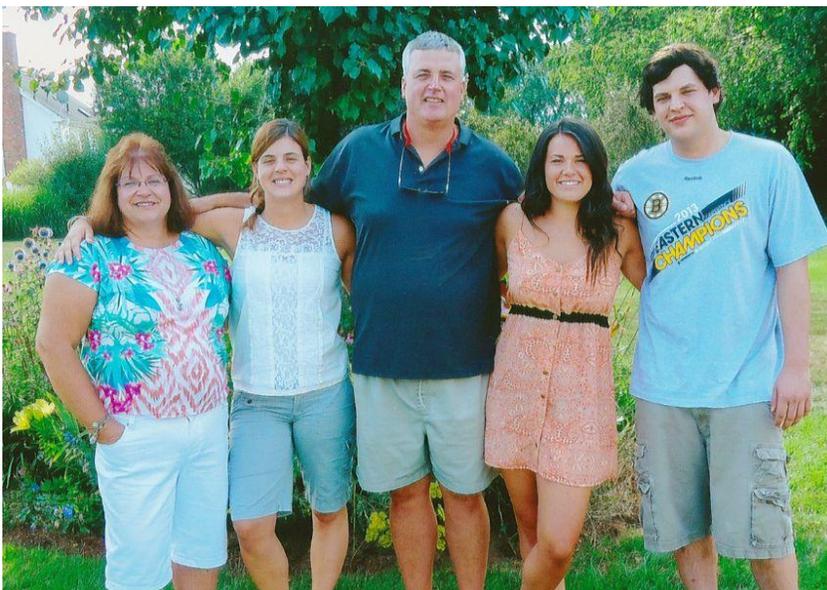


At the mid-point of her sophomore year Vickie began to struggle. A persistent knee injury and an unexpected hospitalization for a serious illness, requiring multiple medical procedures and blood transfusions, forced her from the Keene State and the sport she loved. Vickie returned to Westfield to recuperate and shortly thereafter, entered therapy to deal with the onset of depression. After months of help, Vickie had seemingly rebounded nicely. Hiking, kayaking, and travel filled the gap that high-volume athletics had left in her life. Vickie enjoyed lazy summer afternoons at the Granville Gorge swimming and sunning with close friends. She maintained a loving relationship with her boyfriend and close relationships with many friends and co-workers. She enrolled in Westfield State and became a 2017 Dean's List Selection.

By all appearances Vickie was thriving once again. Unfortunately depression is an insidious and frequently misunderstood illness. We believe Vickie suffered from a particularly devastating form of depression referred to as "smiling depression" or "high functioning depression." Victims of this form of depression appear outwardly happy and lead lives others may envy. Ironically, those afflicted often internalize their fears, suffering silently. This form of depression incrementally invades a person's psyche, robs them of self-esteem, and creates a degree of hopelessness undetected by those closest to them. Tragically, undetected high functioning depression can overwhelm the most seemingly well-adjusted persons. Overachievers seem especially vulnerable given their previous successes in life, as well as their sense of self-reliance and unwillingness to burden others. In short, they opt to believe if they can't beat it, nobody can, thus no help is sought.

On a dreary March morning in 2018 Vickie awoke, sent a loving message to her boyfriend, exchanged a morning greeting with her best friend and drove to campus. She never made it to class. Vickie left campus and later that day and succumbed to her silent struggle with depression by taking by her own life. Over four-hundred people mourned Vickie's loss, but nobody would have guessed her intention that day.

This scholarship was established in remembrance of Vickie by all those who loved her unconditionally. We honor her memory. We hope this scholarship might also serve to educate young people about depression, which is a disease that typically manifests during early adulthood. We also want to alert you that suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst 15-25 year-olds, the very demographic these scholarships serve. Furthermore, we would like this scholarship to serve as a reminder to those suffering in silence, with persistent sadness, anxiety, a sense of worthlessness, or undisclosed thoughts of suicide, that they are not beyond help. Perhaps our efforts here today, or in years to come, might convince a person to seek help. Perhaps that individual might reveal to someone the isolation and despondency they are feeling. And perhaps, if help is



sought, and received, the lethal arc of this horrible disease might be somehow interrupted. Should that come to pass, our efforts here — in Vickie's name — will not have been in vain. Vickie was a caring, accomplished, and beautiful woman. We loved her dearly and she will be forever missed.

Written by: Daniel, Eva, Samantha, and Douglas Whalen - April 12, 2018