



The Middlebury Campus

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Kelly Brush recuperates in Colo.

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Following a severe spinal cord injury during a ski race in February, sophomore Kelly Brush, a member of the alpine ski team, has been undergoing extensive rehabilitation at Craig Hospital, a rehabilitation center designed specifically for people with spinal cord injuries, in Englewood, Colo. On Feb. 18, Brush sustained severe injuries to her spinal column, a punctured lung and four cracked ribs from a fall during the women's giant slalom race at the Williams College Carnival. While her spinal column had to be aligned during a 10-hour surgery shortly after the accident, she has the use of her arms and feeling at the chest level and above.

After being treated initially at Berkshire Medical Center in Pittsfield, Mass., Brush was transferred to Colorado on March 6 for more intensive and specialized rehabilitation. While her expected release date from Craig was originally May 11, she and her family decided to extend their stay until she is fully independent and confident to return home.

Brush and her family made the decision to remain in Colorado following a bout with nausea over the past week due in large part to antibiotics that she is taking to prevent infections. On a Web site designed to keep friends, family and community members informed of Brush's progress, Mary Brush, her mother, wrote, "Kelly is the first to agree that staying here a little longer will allow her to go home better prepared for her immediate future there. Having taken the fast track course in living with spinal cord injury, we have all learned that it is much more than just losing the use of your legs ... Eventually this will be second nature for Kelly."

Despite this temporary setback, Brush has made substantial progress since being transferred to Craig Hospital. Moving from the hospital in Pittsfield to Craig has allowed her to focus on developing skills such as dressing herself, swimming on her own, riding in and driving a car and transferring herself from bed to chair and back on her own, all in less than two months. These capabilities will facilitate her transition from the hospital to the real world and will enable her to be independent while still in a wheelchair.

"It seems crazy that such things could be so difficult, and yet daily activities that we take for granted have suddenly become a challenge for Kelly," said her sister Lindsay Brush '07, also a member of the alpine ski team.

Brush has remained active in spite of being mostly confined to a wheelchair. In addition to physical therapy and rehabilitation activities all day, she swims twice a week and plays a game similar to rugby on wheels once a week with other patients in the hospital. "She has been able to get out of the hospital more and more though," Lindsay added. "Her most recent outings include a few Avalanche games, a Rockies game, the zoo, out to dinner for sushi and to a friend's pool for a little relaxing."

Brush has confounded both friends and doctors with her determination to remain positive and active while adapting her lifestyle to her current situation. In an update on her Web site on April 18, her father, Charlie Brush '69 who also skied for Middlebury and later served as both a ski and football coach, wrote, "Kelly seems better every day, although progress comes in small increments. Her ability to focus on the task at hand, whether physical or mental, is more than I can comprehend." Her Web site - <http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/kellybrush> - has received approximately 30,000 visits, and nearly 800 messages have been posted, all noting her enthusiasm and extraordinary strength throughout her rehabilitation.

A recent event sponsored by the Sherwood Society, which is made up of Middlebury students and organizes two fundraisers each year in order to benefit a local organization or charity, was dedicated to Brush. The event raised \$1,676, which was more than the fundraiser made in the fall for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. All proceeds went to the Kelly Brush Foundation, created by Brush and her family to aid athletes who find themselves in a situation similar to Kelly's by giving them the financial means to take care of any other expenses they may encounter.

J.P. Coviello '06, co-head of the Sherwood Society, remarked, "The event went very smoothly and was a tremendous success in our eyes. Everyone donned their finest semi-formal attire and brought their charitable hearts to Mister Up's, enabling us to raise a solid sum for the Kelly Brush Foundation. We were very fortunate for a great turnout last Wednesday and feel fortunate to be able to assist a fellow student with her remarkable initiative."

Brush hopes to leave Colorado and return to Vermont before the first of June. "Her spirits remain very high, and every time I talk to her, she is the same old Kelly I have always known - cheerful and happy!" said Lindsay. "She is determined and she knows what she has to do to get back to where she wants to be in life, whether it be at Midd or at home."