

Once rebellious teen on track to Graduate

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Gothenburg High School senior was in danger of flunking school.

Not too long ago, Katelynn Koubeck was on a dark path.

Sassing teachers. Skipping school. Drinking. Telling lies.

“I started hanging out with the wrong kids who didn’t really care about school,” said the Gothenburg High School senior.

During her eighth-grade year, she faked illness. Once her mother had left for work, she’d go to the homes of friends—who had also skipped school—to watch television or listen to music. Sometimes the friends showed up at her house.

Homework took a nosedive and Koubek found herself in summer school after her eighth-, ninth- and 10th-grade years to makeup homework she never turned in during the regular school year.

She also found herself fighting more with her mother, who didn’t understand her daughter’s declining interest in school.

Several of the friends, whose behavior influenced Koubek in a negative way, had graduated or dropped out of school.

“I became tired of fighting with my mom about grades and became depressed so I hung out a

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lot in my room," she said.

Although school officials tried several ways to help Koubek, she said she wasn't ready to listen.

"I couldn't get over a mental block that I could succeed," she said.

Until one day when English teacher Mary Clark told Koubek she had cried after reading one of Koubek's poems.

"She said it was amazing," Koubek said. "It made me feel better about myself."

Another turning point was when Koubek became friends with an honor roll student from Cozad.

"She smoked and drank but she had to be responsible at home because her mother was gone a lot," Koubek said. "She'd also have to get her homework done before we had fun."

Koubek describes the friend as someone who made Koubek smile and laugh and feel good about herself.

"Mrs. Clark was more of a positive academic influence," she said.

The teen started turning in homework on time and she and her mother didn't fight as much. They started having "Mom and Me" days again and would go to movies or shop.

"We forgot about the times we didn't want to be around each other," Koubek said. "It feels good to be close to Mom again."

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At the end of her junior year, she didn't need summer school.

These days, Koubek said carries a 3.5 grade-point average and has an afternoon job answering phones and filing papers and invoice books at Pony Express Chevrolet.

That has been a self-esteem booster as well.

"When I didn't have a job, I felt like a bum and felt like I was disappointing my mom," Koubek said.

Once she receives her high school diploma in May, Koubek plans to major in photography at Central Community College in Hastings. She said she's always liked taking photographs and wants to open her own studio.

As far as advice for other struggling students, Koubek suggests staying active by joining organizations and/or going out for sports or other activities.

She's also learned how to deal with her emotions by journaling, writing poems or drawing.

"Rather than taking it out on other people," Koubek said.

Another suggestion is to "know who your real friends are."

Perhaps most importantly is to not burn bridges with parents.

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“They do know what they’re talking about and they are the people who’ve been there your whole life,” Koubek said. “Friends are good for a laugh but family is there for love.”

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Editor’s note: Last in a two-part series about graduation rates and interventions by teachers and school officials.