Dear Ms. Squire,

My name is Cynthia Brandon and I was a recipient of the Acts of Kindness Award in 2014. I would like to acknowledge an extraordinary woman and the facility she works for. I am nominating Ms. Becky Keller for this award for her empathy, compassion and support of her students while working. Ms. Keller works at the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired. When I suffered sudden vision loss, my family referred me to the center. Prior to my attendance there, I had only been blind for two months and I was still very angry and bitter and had not accepted my diagnosis.

Ms. Keller was my orientation and mobility instructor. Her job was to help me to travel independently. This skill is imperative for blind individuals who want to continue their lives after vision loss because it facilitates both independence and confidence. Being able to properly travel with a white cane or guide dog fosters the confidence to no longer look at travel through a fearful lens. Ms. Keller exceeded expectations of her position with her actions and patience she had with me upon my arrival and duration of the program. I felt like I was the worst student she could have had because when I became blind I felt like my life was over.

Ms. Keller had such a passion for her work. She went above her duty to teach me the skills needed to retain my orientation and feel comfortable enough in a public setting to travel. Her kindness was very refreshing because she did not know me, yet she saw my inner strength that I thought was gone. Some days she just talked with me but I still was having a hard time working with my cane and using cardinal directions (north, south, east and west). She never quit on me but instead she challenged me more. Ms. Keller has a very special gift of getting you to do things you never thought you could do, such as crossing streets and walking blocks to a destination to find addresses independently. Even during times where we were not working, she helped us by sending us quotes of hope and strength and how fears can make us or break us. All of these actions are coupled with the fact that I have never witnessed a moment when her persistence to see me succeed broke. Her demeanor is always professional, genuine, and caring, which puts me at ease any time we work together.

Ms. Keller works full time and is working on her second Master’s degree, while still putting her students first. She always says you have to start with baby steps for you are battling to accept your grieving process to make a life for yourself. I appreciate these words because it details the transformation I have made from bitterness to empowerment. Truthfully, Ms. Keller saved me. She helps my fellow students and me to remember who we were, where we came from, and what we are capable of accomplishing. I was a nurse for over 38 years and have not seen this kind of determination and passion in a long time.

In conclusion, I was so scared to do anything for myself. I had never been a quitter but felt I had nothing left in life. I am now traveling with a white cane, crossing streets, finding addresses, using public transportation, taking a cab and going out to eat and shop, all independently. I also went to Baltimore to the National Federation of the Blind and the Jernigan Institute on a train. Finally, with my training, I am now looking for a job. I never thought I would be able to do any of these things much less go back to work. As a result of my family, Ms. Keller, the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and God’s faith in me, I am able to live my life again. Ms. Keller is a deserving recipient of this award and many more blessings.

Sincerely

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