

**T**hursdays, Silas comes to the offices of the Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP), a program at Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC), to work on his art. Silas does pencil drawings of creatures—half human/half rats, modified stegosaurus, and a tiger/lion/leopard hybrid, among others. He is known for his drawings and his rich imagination, but what he is doing now is something different. Something more.

The drawings Silas is working on today have been commissioned by local science fiction author Cathy Benedetto. In the process of creating her book series, she decided that she would hire an illustrator to depict her characters. She saw a few sketches by Silas and thought he would be perfect for the job. There were some skeptics, and understandably so. Drawing well from one's own imagination is a skill few possess, but bringing to life the imaginings of another person requires talents far beyond drawing. A collaboration of this sort demands, in addition to raw talent, patience, persistence, and what employers tend to call "excellent communication skills."

**His advice for students who are just starting college is straightforward. "It's important to keep a positive attitude, pursue your goals, and try to achieve them the best way you can. Be patient, and good things will come to you."**

As a child, Silas was diagnosed with a severe speech delay and mild intellectual disability. His mother was told not to set high expectations for him. She describes her efforts to access vocational services to prepare for Silas' future as a constant battle. "One person actually told me, 'He won't be able to work,'" she reported.

In his first meeting with PIP director Jeff Bradford, Silas didn't say much; his mother did most of the talking, along with Silas' brother, Gary. Jeff and the other PIP staff had no trouble understanding who Silas was and what he wanted, however. The portfolio he displayed told the story. Here were sketches of superheroes, some well-known and others inventions of Silas's imagination. Some were self-portraits, Silas as warrior and wizard. When asked what he wanted to learn in college, he replied that his goal was to be "the ultimate artist." Silas had begun drawing at the age of four and had won awards for his art at Lexington Traditional Magnet School.

From an early age, Silas wanted to go to college. With the support of the PIP, he enrolled at BCTC in spring 2009. His first class was in Photoshop design; he received an A. For his second semester, Silas enrolled in two classes, one in drawing and the other an experiential education course which allowed him to earn credit by working in a local business. His interest in art and comics led to his first internship with A Plus Comics in Lexington. There Silas worked on organizing



old stock, store and product maintenance, and customer relations; he also learned general business skills while enjoying connections with others who shared his interests. Silas never missed a day of work and received excellent ratings from his supervisor. During the same semester, Silas exhibited artwork at Lexington's Kentucky Theatre during a PIP promotional event which drew nearly 300 spectators.

At the beginning of his second year in college, Silas stepped out of his comfort zone to enroll in an academic skills course. He received tutoring services at school, and PIP staff assisted with extra tutoring help when needed. Silas faced a significant challenge at midterm when he was required to make an oral presentation about someone he admired. Silas had made strides in his reading and writing skills, but speaking in front of a class was an experience he dreaded. The day before the presentation, he practiced his speech many times with as many people as he could find to listen. His persistence paid off nicely—he earned a score of 98% for his presentation about PIP's director, Jeff Bradford.

Participation in PIP has helped Silas become more engaged with his peers. He enjoys spending time with

many friends who belong to the University of Kentucky's chapter of Best Buddies. He has over 600 friends on Facebook, and well-known bodybuilders are frequent visitors to his

Facebook fan page, where he displays his tributes to them. He has also started a new work experience at Hands On Originals, a Lexington business that makes custom-printed apparel. Most recently, Silas earned his

Kentucky driver's license. He looks forward to working and earning the money to buy his own car.

"The PIP program is a great inspiration to me and my success," Silas says. He most enjoys the confidence and academic freedom

he has found at

BCTC. His advice for students who are just starting college is straightforward. "It's important to keep a positive attitude, pursue your goals, and try to achieve them the best way you can. Be patient, and good things will come to you." He adds, "Family is the most important thing ... We'll break through any obstacles that stand in our way." With Silas as an example, this is not at all difficult to believe.

*Artwork by Silas Jones appears in the second volume of the Eyes of Sandala trilogy by Cathy Benedetto, published in 2011 by Bearhead Publishing, Louisville, Kentucky. Adapted with permission from Life After High School: The Next Chapter ([http://hdi.uky.edu/SF/Files/LifeAfterHS\\_web.pdf](http://hdi.uky.edu/SF/Files/LifeAfterHS_web.pdf)), Human Development Institute, 2011.*



*King Kong drawing by Silas*



*Silas at Barnes and Noble signing the book he illustrated*

The Kentucky State Developmental Disabilities Council funded the Postsecondary Inclusion Partnership (PIP) through June 2011. PIP laid a foundation for future funding. In October of 2010, University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute received a model demonstration award through the Office of Postsecondary Education's Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, or TPSIDs. The Kentucky TPSID project is referred to as SHEP (the Supported Higher Education Project). For more information on SHEP visit [www.shepky.org/](http://www.shepky.org/)