

# **Kasey graduates with distinction today at Edinburgh Napier graduation**

**DETERMINED Kasey Johnson used a freak accident in which she lost a leg as inspiration to build a new career.**

The 27-year-old suffered life-changing injuries after being crushed when a storm brought down a 60ft tree on top of her at a music festival.

The impact buried her under a layer of rock and dirt, and left her with a fractured spine, broken leg, shattered ankle, broken ribs, a collapsed lung and severe head trauma.

However, Kasey developed a new perspective on life as she recovered from a series of gruelling operations and the amputation of her lower right leg, and made it her life's ambition to improve the experience of disabled fans at festivals.

She began an MSc in International Event and Festival Management at Edinburgh Napier – a course she felt was “made for her”.

Despite suffering a new devastating setback when her beloved mother Amy died in the course of her studies, Kasey strengthened her resolve and made it through her course, dedicating her dissertation to her mum.

Now, after graduating with distinction today (October 30) at a ceremony in Edinburgh's Usher Hall, AND winning her class medal, she will use her degree to continue developing her management career working with major venues in the USA.

Kasey, originally from Peoria, Illinois, said: "I love seeing people's eyes widen when I tell them about my academic programme and what I'm doing with it. I'm not aware of anything like it anywhere else, and I feel my professional future is bright.

"Caring about and understanding the event experience of those with disabilities is extremely important, and being a person with a disability but also an event industry professional, I have a unique viewpoint.

"There are many structural issues that are hard to work around or fix, but even paying attention to them is the first step to improvement."

Kasey's life changed forever at the Summer Camp Music Festival in her American home state of Illinois in 2013, when a storm brought down a rotten 60ft tall Black Locust tree on top of her.

She was forced a foot down into the muddy surface, cushioning the impact and ultimately saving her life, but she remained in hospital for a month.

The long and complicated programme of operations which followed saw metal rods and screws inserted in her leg and spine, but three years later she was still in so much pain that she chose to have her leg amputated.

By now, Kasey, who for months had been unable to feed or dress herself, had become extremely passionate about the events industry and the way disabled people were catered for. She completed her Bachelor's programme of study in America and was working for companies that specialised in guest services and disability accommodation at music festivals.

A work colleague tipped her off about the MSc International Event and Festival Management programme at Edinburgh Napier, and she successfully applied and moved to Edinburgh to take up

her place at the beginning of last year.

Renewed complications with her health eventually forced her to return to the USA to be closer to her doctors, but return visits to attend classes and use the library, and the use of video technology for presentations, saw Kasey complete her degree.

Before finishing her research project she also had to cope with the death in Illinois in May of her 49-year-old mother, to whom she dedicates her dissertation on disabled people and the music festival experience.



Kasey at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre

Kasey said: "Lecturer Joan McLatchie was a massive help; she gave me every resource and piece of information I needed to succeed at Edinburgh Napier. She met with me any time I needed

help, even if it was just to cry to her about being overwhelmed with schooling and my health. She was incredibly understanding and gave me all the help she could.”

Kasey, who walks with a prosthetic, will now use her degree to build her career in Colorado, working with the State’s showpiece Red Rocks Amphitheatre, as well as 1<sup>st</sup> Bank Center, Mission Ballroom, and many other music and festival venues across the US, Canada and Mexico.

She said: “My work so far has covered disability accommodation, event management, ticketing, security and guest services, and I am certain I want to keep going in this direction.

“I have already begun working on accessibility plans for different tours and venues. I’m so excited about sharing my passion with others to truly change the event experience for people who deserve to enjoy it as much as anyone else.”

Dr Joan McLatchie, senior lecturer in Edinburgh Napier’s Business School, said: “Kasey showed huge resilience in accepting and overcoming the many obstacles she had to face while studying for her Masters degree. She remained positive and upbeat throughout, and managed to maintain a high standard of achievement on her course.

“Her attitude was an inspiration both to staff and to her fellow students. I am delighted that she has achieved a Distinction level award, and she thoroughly deserves the class medal.”





Kasey walking after three weeks in hospital