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Deaf Rangerette overcomes disability, finds winning edge
By AARON MAY
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Taylor Greer, a 20-year-old Garland sophomore and Rangerette at Kilgore College, gives an interview to Real Winning Edge TV series producer Diane Preston-Reilly. NEWS HERALD photo by AARON MAY

If Kilgore College Rangerette Taylor Greer could give one piece of advice to people with disabilities, it would be "you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. Just go for it."

The 20-year-old Kilgore College sophomore is an accomplished dancer with an unusual twist. She's deaf.

Greer was born with limited hearing abilities that completely faded away by the age of 12. She now depends on an internal device called a cochlear implant to hear.

However, her lifelong passion for dancing earned her a coveted spot on the Rangerettes dance and drill team despite her disability.

Greer was filmed Wednesday for a segment on a new television series called The Real Winning Edge, which features high school and college age individuals who have overcome numerous obstacles to achieve success and accomplish goals.

Never one to seek attention for her disability, Taylor said she was shocked when her mother, Nancy Greer, told her the show's producer wanted to meet her.

"I was really shocked. I didn't know what was going on so I called my mom and she said, 'Sorry sweetheart. I applied for you because I saw the show. I didn't know that you would get accepted,'" Taylor said. "At first I didn't know if this was going to be a good thing or a bad thing, but it turned out to be a great thing. I'm glad I did it."

With cameras rolling, Taylor sat with producer Diane Preston-Reilly on the patio at the Rangerettes house as they discussed her life and passion for dancing.

"The camera crew was really nice and great to work with. The producer was a sweetheart," Greer said. "It was great to get to work with them even though it was such a long day."

Taylor, the daughter of Dave and Nancy Greer, from Garland, said her passion for dancing began to develop after her mother enrolled her in a dance class at 3 years old.

"My mom put me in dance classes and randomly, a dance instructor told my mom that he wanted me to do dance competitions. So ever since, I've been doing competition dancing," Greer said. "Dance became a really big passion of mine. Also, with the cochlear implant, dance was one of those things that gave me confidence. It helped me grow up in my life and helped me deal with my hearing impairment.

"It was difficult at times. I've actually had a lot of difficult times, but overall, dancing has been an accomplishment. I've learned to deal with things. "

Greer was born hearing impaired. But with the use of hearing aids, she was able to make out certain sounds that enabled her to function normally and speak.

"The hearing aids helped me but it was not great. They just amplified the sounds, but I couldn't always make things out."

The hearing aids worked until Greer entered the sixth grade. She remembers the day her hearing completely faded away.



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"I went to school one day and the bell rang and I didn't hear it," she said. "People were walking in the hallways and I didn't hear any of that. That's when I realized something was wrong."

Over the next several weeks, Greer visited several specialists who tried to discover why her hearing stopped so suddenly.

"I cannot tell you how many hearing tests I went to, how many doctors I went to, how many times I got my blood taken out. They were trying to figure out all these things and they still don't know to this day why I lost it."

Taylor's mother said her ability to speak and desire to lead a normal life without depending on sign language made Taylor an ideal candidate for the cochlear implant, a device which is imbedded in the ear that uses wire to produce the sound instead of the fine hairs of the cochlear

Sound is transmitted through a device – similar to a hearing aid – that connects to the internal component through magnets.

"I'm kind of glad I lost my hearing," Taylor said. "Even though the hearing aids did help me, the cochlear implant made a tremendous difference."

Taylor said the sound she heard on the day her implant was activated was indescribable.

"When they turned it on, it was like I didn't hear things ever before," she said. "For example, I never heard wrappers before – like candy or paper wrappers or anything crumbly. I had never heard it before now I can and it's the most annoying thing."

Greer said the implant now allows her to hear higher pitched sounds, including musical melodies. She said she used to love bass tones because that was all she could hear.

Having the implant also improved her speech and other areas of her life as well. Dream Despite Disability Even when her ability to hear ceased entirely, Taylor never gave up the dream of dancing. She just knew the task would be more difficult.

"I wasn't concerned with whether I would dance again, but more with whether I would hear again," she said. "It scared me to death. I remember before I got the implant, when I my mom would play music for me I would ask her to turn it up because I couldn't hear it. That's when it was real emotional for me because I loved music so much."

Now, Taylor can hear the music clearly when her cochlear device is attached to her ear. But the occasional bump or jarring dance motion has the tendency to knock the device loose, causing Taylor's music to stop – sometimes in the middle of a routine.

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“There have been times during practices that my implant would break and I would have to go through practice without it,” she said. “But having dealt with it for so long, I’m able to adapt to it. I could function for a whole day without my implant because I’ve learned how to read lips and I’m very visual. If I see something happening I can adapt and know that’s what we’re doing.”

Taylor remembered the first time her cochlear implant failed during a dance competition.

“In that moment, my heart and my stomach start to get really sick because I can’t hear the music. It’s easier in a group performance because I can easily pick up what count we’re on by watching others. Then I’ll just count from there and not listen to the music,” Greer said. “But it’s much harder when you’re doing a solo because I’m by myself. But I kept going. Luckily I’ve been able to get through it when my implant fell off.

“The first time it fell off, I was 16,” she said. “I was so upset because had performed my solo routine and they liked it so I made it to the final round,” She said. “There were a lot of people in the crowd. When I was doing my solo, my implant fell off at the beginning of it. I was so upset.

“The feeling of not being able to hear was so hard. But this was my moment to shine because I really wanted to win this,” Greer continued. “After I was finished, I went off stage and went to the hallway and started crying. My sister came and found me. I told her I just did the whole dance without my implant.”

Taylor said her sister was amazed that she performed the whole routine in silence while maintaining the beat with the music. Taylor’s performance impressed the judges enough to win her the championship title that night.

Becoming a Rangerette

Greer said the biggest concern she had about becoming a Rangerette was not whether she could hear the music, but whether she could hear instructions from her sisters or band instructors.

“I knew there were a lot of things expected of a freshman Rangerette. When I first got here, I told my ‘big sister’ that if any of the sophomore Rangerettes were talking to me and I didn’t respond it was not because I am being rude. It’s just that I didn’t hear her,” she said. “I tell them just to get my attention and look at me when they’re talking. Sometimes I can hear a sound – even my name – and not understand it.”

Greer’s parents were so proud of her accomplishments that they contacted Preston-Reilly about her new television program and arranged for the interview.

Taylor said she does not like to draw attention to her disability because she doesn’t want special treatment, especially when it comes to dancing.

“When I do a solo routine, I always wear my hair down to hide my implant because I don’t want the judges to know I can’t hear,” Taylor said. “I’ve had some judges find out afterwards that I couldn’t hear, but it’s great to know they respect me and that I win entirely because of my dancing ability.”

Taylor said she likes to be a role model for others who are struggling with obstacles in their lives.

“I have girls all the time that will tell me, ‘You motivate me to do better.’ It’s really touching and really cool that I can do that for some people. Then they get to know me and realize I’m such a big loser,” she said jokingly. “It’s great to be able to motivate people with disabilities that they can accomplish things. They just have to get out there and do it.”

Taylor’s best advice is to “live as if there is nothing wrong” and “if you want something in life, go for it.”

“Growing up, my parents were worried about if I would be accepted. A lot of people with disabilities worry about that,” she said. “But I went out there as if I didn’t have a disability. I think if you think that way, then you’ll do great.”



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