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Free to be Me: A Closer Look at GWU Student Deanna Ramsey

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Office of University Communications

May 16, 2014

By: Alyssa Gutierrez, Communications Intern

Gardner-Webb University sophomore Deanna Ramsey stands only three-feet and six-inches tall. Yet, she is the living definition of the phrase, “Big things come in small packages.”

Although she lives a vibrant life now, it was not always bright for Ramsey who was born with a form of dwarfism called spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia congenital (SED). With her vivacious personality and wit, Ramsey does not let her condition define her and has found comfort in her own skin and the place she calls her second home, Gardner-Webb University.

Born in Shelby, N.C., to average-sized parents with no effects of dwarfism, Ramsey was raised to believe that she was not different at all. She did everything other children did growing up. “I had to use a lot of stools, but other than that my parents never made me feel like I needed anyone’s help or that I was different,” she added.

The rare disorder affects the bones of the spine and the end of the bones and required her to have over 25 different surgeries. With the majority of the procedures focusing on her knees, ankles, back and neck, her ability to walk and participate in life as normally as she does is nothing short of a miracle. Although the physical adversity she has overcome is something to be honored, she mostly received ridicule and cruel jokes from children growing up with her.

Once she was enrolled in elementary school, Ramsey fully understood how her SED would affect her both physically and emotionally.

“Everything was fine at the beginning of elementary school, but then everyone else started growing and I wasn’t,” said Ramsey.

She hoped that the teasing would stop when she began middle school, but it continued to increase until she became a high school student.

“There were times when I did not even want to leave my house because someone would point, someone would stare, someone would take a picture,” she said. “Then it just dawned on me that I wasn’t going to do that anymore. I finally was tired of feeling sorry for myself and I wasn’t going to wallow anymore in this self pity.”

Ramsey says that prayer and a strong relationship with God helped her find herself and become the confident person she is today.

“There were times that I would be so afraid to speak because I thought someone would say something back to me that was mean or just make fun of me,” she said. “Then I realized that I don’t care what those people think of me, and I am going to say or do whatever I want.”

While she says she found her self-confidence toward the end of high school, it was not until she enrolled at GWU (in the fall of 2012) when her personality really blossomed.

Ramsey has found a core group of friends on campus and has participated in several different activities like many college students. She competed in the Miss Gardner-Webb pageant and was voted the “People’s Choice” award winner. She also participated in the GWU Department of Theatre Arts production, “The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe,” where she portrayed a creature in the Narnia forest.

Ramsey has also made an impact on handicapped or disabled students who are in need of assistance navigating campus.

“As someone that needs a handicapped space or a shorter sink in the bathroom, I know how it feels to not have these things, so being able to work with the staff and get help is such a relief,” she said.

Since bullying is something that has impacted her life so much, Ramsey is dedicating her life’s work to try and stop it as much as she can. Through her education, she hopes one day to be able to teach young children about the importance of loving each other and that ridiculing or teasing is something that does not need to go on in the classroom.

“I want to be a teacher so that I can be able to help those children learn that it is not okay to make fun of other people,” she said. “Being able to teach tolerance and understanding to children while they are young is something that will stick with them for the rest of their lives.”

Ramsey also believes that her time at Gardner-Webb has profoundly changed her outlook on life and what her future holds.

“Once I stepped on campus I realized that this was a place where I could be me and not worry about judgment or ridicule,” she added. “I am really happy to be where I am right now.”

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