Young girl overcomes obstacles, inspires others

Written by By Melinda Sanchez Sun Correspondent
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She lights the room with her smile, but her first 14 years have been anything but sunny.

Kaela Gaulden has been battling Ewing Sarcoma bone cancer for the past seven years. She has endured 15 surgeries, the last of which was in December when most of her right leg was amputated. And she is determined to keep up with her friends, prosthetic leg or not.

Gaulden is in the eighth grade at Rehoboth Christian School. She said she likes Rehoboth because she is allowed to practice her faith without fear of judgment. She missed most of her second and third grade years because of the cancer, but since then, her grandparents, Scott and Rosa Armstrong, have been able to schedule appointments and surgeries during school breaks.

Though she has missed school and has been frequently, she is an “A” student and has plenty of friends.

Gaulden was able to attend Camp No Limits in Prescott, Arizona from March 19-22. Camp No Limits is a camp for kids with limb loss that offers therapeutic programs with specialized professionals, including physical and occupational therapists, prosthetists and adult amputee role models.

It is set up so young people can form a network with others experiencing similar obstacles in life. Gaulden participated in rock climbing and a high ropes course during the camp. She said she was able to try on a running leg and thinks she would like to run track some day soon.

Bryan Lott, certified prosthetist, built Gaulden's new leg. Lott comes to Gallup every Wednesday from Durango, Colo. When he read Kaela's story, he reached out to the family and asked them to let him help her with prosthetics. He encouraged her to attend Camp No Limits and helped secure a scholarship.

Rosa Armstrong said that Gaulden has been in a cast nearly all of the past seven years. By the time she was diagnosed, the tumor had grown so big, it broke her leg. The doctors did a complete bone replacement at that time and it worked for a while. The last effort to save her leg included putting plates in it and hoping the bones would regenerate.

Sadly, they did not, leaving amputation as the only alternative. Gaulden was able to start physical therapy here in Gallup this past Saturday. Rosa said this is the first time they have been able to get services locally. The family is pleased that they no longer have to drive to Albuquerque for Gaulden to receive treatment.

Next year, she will be in high school.

"I love volleyball. I really want to play next year, but I can't with this leg," she said.

The prosthetic leg she has is not made for athletics and her insurance doesn't cover anything different. Prosthetic legs cost more than $24,000. Gaulden set up a Go Fund Me page so she can start saving for another leg. She said she also wants to help her grandparents who have been taking care of her.

The people around Gaulden have been inspired by her. Her uncle, Scott Armstrong, Jr. said, "I wish I was half the person she is."

She said that she believes people are inspired by her because she isn't one to give up.

"I always kept going and tried to put a smile on my face," she said. "I'm only 14 and I've been

through more than others.”

But she keeps on smiling.

Readers can keep up with Gaulden and contribute to her efforts to raise money for medical and living expenses at: www.gofundme.com/qv8rg72t