

The

Spotlight*

Sophia Horvath



It's mid-afternoon on a Saturday in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. Sophia Horvath is in her bedroom, doing what many American high school juniors would do at this time of the day, while her mother is on the phone.

"She's Facetimeing her friends right now," says Sophia's mom, Lori Horvath. "She loves her friends. She's so social. We can't go anywhere outside of this house without someone knowing her."

Sophia's friends love her, too. That's why they elected her to Mount Juliet High School's homecoming court in September.

"Millie Ford texted me and asked if she could nominate Sophia. I was so thrilled and excited. They only picked one junior."

"That was almost a fantasy," says Jay Horvath, Sophia's dad. "I saw the true friendships she has with the rest of her classmates, her independence."

Sophia's parents say her high school experience is very different from how schooling started out. Elementary school consisted mostly of playing and coloring. Sophia wasn't

learning much because of an exclusionary style of special education, and this created emotional hardship.

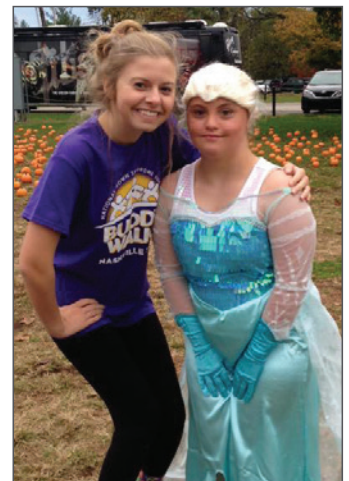
"We should have just put her in a regular kindergarten class," says Lori. "She was just so pretty. Everyone wanted to play with her, like a doll. She was misbehaving because she wasn't being challenged."

After a few years of that, the Horvaths moved Sophia to Mount Juliet Middle School. Her new teacher, Lisa Haskell (now DSAMT's Program Manager), gave her more opportunities and interactions with typical peers. The Horvaths credit the new, more active, more inclusive environment with a positive change in Sophia's skills, mood, and quality of life.

"It was a total transformation," says Jay. "She reached out to her peers, did more things, and was very outgoing."

Lori adds, "She always does better in a typical peer setting."

Since her more inclusive middle school experience, Sophia has continued to develop much like other teens, with her own interests, goals, and hobbies. She has many pets and might work at an animal shelter next year. She has a journal, where she likes to write about



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places she's been. She goes through a lot of notepads. Sometimes she gets in trouble for writing notes, such as "Sophia loves Spock," on her school work. She loves action movies and music, and has been to see One Direction in concert multiple times. Sophia and Lori sat so close once that Harry Styles threw water on them.

Homecoming is more than a typical teen experience, though. It's above what most teens get to experience, extra chromosome or not.

"That whole day was just a dream for her," says Lori. "She was very happy, and acted very mature. She smiled and loved being with Ryan (Sophia's escort). There was one moment when she was just standing there, and she just rested her head on his arm and looked up at him, and he looked down at her to make sure she was okay. That, to me, was what it was all about."

Lori offers words of encouragement for other families navigating life with Down syndrome. "I always asked my mom, 'Will we have those normal moments with her?'"

"Don't give up on those things. Don't give up on those dreams. You do get them. Sometimes they're different, but they're so much more special."



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DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE IN THE DSAMT SPOTLIGHT?

Sophia is receiving \$100 and a special gift for being our Spotlight focus! Do you know someone who wants to be our Spotlight of the Month?

Email a photo and a short explanation why to lisa@somethingextra.org.

Winning submissions will receive \$100 and a special gift!