

Aerospace student soars with lofty goals

Tyler Edwards thrives despite health issues.

By **Beth Anspach**
Contributing Writer

Centerville resident and proud grandmother Nancy Tapia calls her grandson, Tyler Edwards, her hero. But Tyler, at 21 years old, is not only living an extraordinary life in the eyes of his family, but he has defied the odds and done well despite being born with a recessive gene that will likely cause him to lose the ability to walk and use his extremities at some point.

"Tyler was diagnosed at the age of 5 years with Duchenne muscular dystrophy," said Tapia.

Duchenne, which affects about 1 out of every 3,600 boys born, typically results in such severe muscle degeneration that most boys begin showing symptoms before the age of 5, and almost all are seriously disabled by the time they are in their teens.

Tyler said he doesn't remember much from the time before he was officially diagnosed.

"We moved into a tri-level house when I was 5, and by the time I was 6, we moved out because I got too tired when I tried to go up and down the stairs," he said.

By the time Tyler started kindergarten at Miami Valley School in Washington Twp., he was already struggling to walk but he did so on his own through fourth grade, when he started using a scooter to help him.

"I used that for a few years and was in a wheelchair full time in sixth-grade," he said. "It's really hard to notice changes with this disease until after something happens. I just remember I walked until it just got too hard to do it anymore."

Tyler's parents decided that the small, private setting of Miami Valley School was perfect for their son since they knew the disease was progressive and he would gradually lose the ability to walk and possibly function over the years. "It was important that he be in a safe environment," said his dad, Rob Edwards. "MVS was just fabulous for Tyler."

But learning that your child has a serious illness was a huge blow, according to Edwards.



Though Tyler Edwards, 21, has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a serious genetic disease, he is studying aerospace engineering at the University of Dayton. Edwards enjoys hanging out in his backyard with Daisy, his toy poodle. **TY GREENLEES / STAFF**

"We were just blown away and didn't know much about it," he said. "We didn't know if it was going to go fast or slow so we just researched and did the best we could."

One of the things they did was work on stretching with Tyler, which helps keep the muscles from stiffening and wasting. "We've seen a lot of kids Tyler's age and younger with hands and feet totally curved and they have no use of them at all," Edwards said. "They can't use computers or do anything with their hands."

Tyler, on the other hand, did very well in high school and decided upon graduation to attend the University of Dayton and study mechanical engineering with a concentration in aerospace engineering. He will be a senior there this fall and he maintains an impressive 3.15 GPA. He still maintains use of his hands and fingers today.

"From the beginning I wanted to be an astronaut and a fighter pilot but that's impossible with my disease," Tyler said. "So I was thinking of bio-engineering so I could design pacemakers and prostheses, but when I visited UD something just felt right for me there.

It's gone a lot better than I could have hoped and I lived in the dorm there for several years."

Tyler said he has enjoyed the dorm experience and has even had some time living in houses on the UD campus. "My roommates there have turned out to be some of my best friends."

Upon graduation Tyler has decided to pursue his master's degree at UD and then pursue a career in the field of scientific research.

Though Duchenne is progressive and there is no cure, Tyler continues to look ahead and has hopes for his future. "Medications today help keep hearts and lungs healthy," he said. "This is important because the disease affects everything in the body that is a muscle. I go down to Cincinnati Children's every six months for a checkup and the doctors monitor everything."

Of his grandmother, the woman who steadfastly supports him and is proud of every milestone, Tyler said, "She's really a great grandmother, and I'm so thankful to her for being there for me."

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