

Taylor Haugen Scholarship  
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Don't Quit...Never Give Up  
Julia A. Denney

"Don't quit" and "never give up" are perhaps the two statements that best portray my life. My name is Julia Denney, and my life did not begin under normal circumstances. I was born in Odessa, Ukraine and abandoned at birth due to a rare deformity of my right leg. I spent the first five years of my life in a Ukrainian orphanage, and two weeks before my sixth birthday was adopted by an American family. With much prayer, counsel, and recommendations from many specialists, my parents decided it was necessary for me to have my right leg amputated below the knee. On the morning of my amputation, even at such a young age, I was excited, knowing my life would never be the same.

Six weeks after my surgery, I was fitted with a prosthetic leg, and in no time, was out and about running like most little girls. I enjoyed bike riding, playing t-ball, and racing with my friends. I was fearless, and often forgot that I had an artificial leg. However, as I grew older I began to realize the negative implications of being an amputee. I noticed that I was not as fast or as good as my classmates were at sports. I became frustrated, and often blamed my leg and God for my inability to achieve the athletic successes that my friends were enjoying.

In sixth grade I decided to play volleyball. From the moment I stepped out on the court I had a love/hate relationship with the sport. Though I loved volleyball, I was frustrated and hated the fact that my artificial leg hindered my playing ability. By no means did I have a God-given talent for this sport. Rather, I had to work ten times harder than any of the other girls just to be able to achieve the same goal.

As I entered high school and grew in my relationship with Jesus, I began to accept my artificial leg, as well as the issues that came along with it. This acceptance caused my attitude to change for the better. In eleventh grade I made the varsity volleyball team. I was elated! I worked hard to prove to my coach that I deserved to be on the team. In twelfth grade I was blessed with the honor and privilege of being team captain, leading my team to its second consecutive district championship.

During my volleyball career I never quit and I never gave up, even though I often wanted to. God helped me persevere so I could be an example to others. I hoped people would see something in me that would inspire them to achieve their goals.

I believe that I would be an excellent recipient and representative for the Taylor Haugen Scholarship. I am truly a student who persevered through difficult circumstances, and achieved great things while honoring Christ. I am, perhaps, the perfect example of someone Who did not quit and never gave up!

## “Don’t Quit, Never Give Up” Essay

Taylor Nixon

The majority of high school students divide their elusive free-time between study sessions, sports, and social events. Through these extracurricular activities, one develops essential friendships that provide inner security and drive them to succeed. However, very few of these friendships can stand the test of time, and many are forgotten. But that is not the case with me. I will never forget my best friend Taylor Haugen. He was known as "T" by most of his friends and I have known him since third grade. We lived about a mile from each other. We went to the same school, our mom's worked together and our families went to the same church. We did everything together! We went on vacations together, played little league football together, wrestled together, ran track together, played in the band together, and went to church together. "T" was exciting and passionate about many things; football, politics, the University of Florida and our church.

You see, "T" and I were more than friends; we were like brothers. It got to the point where we could, in a way, read each other's minds and communicate nonverbally; we knew one another inside and out.

We also became accountability partners and brothers in Christ. We fed off each other's energy, and helped one another through hardships; all while pursuing one goal; being more like Jesus.

On August 30, 2008 my dearest friend, Taylor Reid Haugen, died very unexpectedly, due to complications from a football injury. "T's" death left me completely and utterly devastated. His death was the most tragic event of my life and the one friend, on this earth, that I knew I could count on was gone; forever. My brain kept telling me that I was alone, but I knew in my heart that I was not and that I would never really be alone. In my darkest hours, it was God's transcending love that would comfort me. I would soon know that His love was more powerful than I could ever imagine and only by trusting God would I be able to get through this.

Today, I am thankful for the time and memories I have of "T" and for all that I have learned from this experience. One of the most important things I realized was the brevity of life. I used to think that life was a long and sometimes a grueling phenomenon. Now it's apparent to me that we are not guaranteed another single day on this earth and for all we know this day could very well be our last. Because of this, I have chosen to live my life to the fullest each day and not stress over the little things that may bring me down.

"T's" parents have sent up a foundation in his honor, The Taylor Haugen Foundation (THF). Its mission is to provide scholarships to "faith-based, outgoing, community-oriented, academically-proficient athletes" in the local community. Another component of the foundation is the Youth Corp. I have made a personal commitment to be a very active leader in this part of the organization. The Youth Corp provides students with opportunities to complete service projects for others. The THF has given me a chance to serve people just as "T" would, and in the process

I can share Christ with my community and make a difference.

Although I have dealt with much sadness and heartache, I have come through this experience with a new-found passion for life and realize the impact of relationships and friendships. I take nothing for granted. I wake up every morning and ask myself, "If I died today, what would I be remembered for?" I want to be remembered as the person who will lift others up when they are down. I also want to shine Christ's light on everyone I meet. I am confident I can bring a God-given joy to my fellow students and reach out to those in need. Taylor Haugen's motto was "Don't Quit - Never Give Up." I want to exemplify that attitude daily, in honor of my best friend, "T", who I will never forget.