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(744 WORDS)

Dancer Paez steps up to the challenge during recovery from spinal surgery

BY BILL KRESS

It's been said that dancers, like all performing artists, like nothing more than to be challenged. And then there's 11-year old Georgina Paez.

This rising star from West Kendall is known to be a quick study, artistically and academically. But now she's now facing a new lesson – the importance of patience and resilience.

Earlier this year, after winning in the Starbound Dance National Competition in San Antonio, Texas, Paez learned she had to have urgent back surgery. She was diagnosed with something called high-grade spondylolysis, a condition in which one bone in her lower spine was sliding forward over the bone below it.

“Needless to say this was devastating to Georgina,” says her mom, Barbara Munoz, “as she repeatedly states ‘dance is my passion’.”

The painful condition apparently came about due to all the conditioning and training she was doing in preparation for dance competitions. And it's serious, because in the case of Paez, it lead to a squeezing of her spinal cord, severe back pain, and numbness – a lot for a little girl to endure, let alone one with a promising career ahead of her in the performing arts.

The good news, the surgery she underwent in August was a success. The bad news is, there's a long and enduring recovery still ahead. And this is the point where, according to her mom, “Georgina has had to learn some new steps – patience and resilience.”

It started with the anticipated four-day stay in the hospital that turned into seven days. “And now, as her recovery enters month four,” Munoz continues, “it already seems like a lifetime to her.”

Paez had been eagerly anticipating a turning point where she would finally be able to begin physical therapy and start to dance again. And although it helps to know that Spotlight Dance Academy has waited on her and is keeping her spot on their competition team, she still has had to come to terms with the fact that some things just can't be rushed.

So when the news recently came back that her surgeon would not release her to begin physical therapy until mid-February, naturally Paez was devastated. The prospect of being further away from dance and her daily routine of practice and classes was a huge disappointment.

“I know I’ll be back on the dance floor and doing all my dances again – and I know I’ll even better than before,” says Paez.

Meanwhile, with her mom’s support, literally and figuratively, Paez manages to keep center stage on several low-impact acting and modeling gigs – despite being in constant pain over the last several months.

Such projects have included a photo shoot in mid November at the Faena Miami Beach Hotel for “Act One,” issue 2 of an art and fashion magazine, set to come out during Miami’s Art Basil. Famed fashion photographer Sebastien Faena and fashion stylist Sohoa Achaval de Montaignu joined forces to create a beautiful publication this year, based around “Evita.” Paez was selected to be photographed among several other young male and female models, ages 5-15.

Paez also recently played key roles in several independent films including “Vow: No Way Out,” in which she plays Maggie Ryan one of the film’s lead roles; and “Clean Up on Aisle Nine,” another IMDB film.

In addition, Paez is participating in a fashion show hosted by DAMA Modeling School, an annual event hosted on Dec. 3 by Macy’s and other big name sponsors. She will be modeling for several designers at the show, having been personally instructed by DAMA School Founder Damaris Aguiar, a Caribbean beauty queen, international model, aspiring actress, dancer, host, and business woman.

There will be comprehensive coverage of the DAMA Fashion Show 2017, Dec. 3, from noon to 6 p.m. at the Hilton Miami Airport Ballrooms on Blue Lagoon Drive. The full day that includes a designer’s runway, shopping, live music, dance, and awards. For information and to get tickets visit www.damaschool.com.

In conjunction with the show is the USA National Miss South Florida pageant, in which Paez is one of the contestants. Her first pageant ever, she was selected from among a group of 100 young ladies – certainly a welcome distraction from the recent news about her extended recovery process and delay in getting back on her feet as a dancer.

“This is something new and exciting for me and perhaps the first of many wonderful moments and memories for me to experience,” says a beaming Paez. We’ll keep you posted.

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