

Portsmouth Graduate Finds College A Mix of Two Worlds

Newport Daily News Newport, RI - December 27, 2003

PORTSMOUTH – Going away to college has given Devon Hostetler, 19, a boost of confidence.

It's her first time away from home and for Hostetler, who was born deaf, it's a big step.

"I really like the classes," she said through her cousin, Dori Wark, 19, who acted as an interpreter. "It's where I feel I can just do anything that I didn't do in high school. I feel like I really belong."

In June, Hostetler graduated from Portsmouth High School, where she spent four years preparing to head out on her own. But her journey through school was a little tougher than most. She had to have an interpreter with her almost all the time.

In high school, Hostetler was the only deaf student. At the Rochester Institute of Technology, she gets the best of both worlds because the institute has a sister school, the National Institute for the Deaf, on the same campus.

"I live with deaf and hearing people on the same floor (in my dorm)," she said. "I really like college. Deaf and hearing people all stay together. It's two worlds mixed together."

Having deaf friends at school is a big part of what makes college such a good experience, she said.

"I love my hearing friends, but it's not the same," she said. "Life is a lot easier and more fun. I can speak my language and people can understand where I'm coming from."

Hostetler said that her friends who are deaf understand her feelings and problems more than her hearing friends, which makes her feel more comfortable.

"I'm able to sign with friends as fast as I can," she said.

Still there are things about home that she misses.

"There no dogs to play with, no mom and dad to talk with. I usually have long talks with my mom," she said. "(There's) no dad to tease me about what I do...there's no water or ocean around."

Hostetler is enrolled in a program to earn an associate's degree in art. She said she plans to switch over to a bachelor's degree program after taking some art classes. She's also taking a lot of computer classes.

An art career seminar helped her to focus what she wants to do with her major. She said she wants to work with graphic arts when she graduates.

"I know it's probably hard...but I really like it. I can do it," she said. "You can play with colors and letter—I always wanted to do that when I was younger."

Going away to school was a good move, and Hostetler said she has no plans to come back to Portsmouth or Rhode Island when she graduates. She wants to move to New York or Pennsylvania, where there are larger groups of deaf people.

Hostetler has played soccer since she was 4 and currently is a member of the Division III team at the institute. She said she doesn't play a lot, but she's happy to be part of a team. Her positions are halfback and forward.

"It's really a good school. It's really good for me," she said. "It's something I can do well."

by Anne Kumar

Daily News Staff