

Taje Warrick's Miraculous Life



By Mary McCashin

Taje Warrick
Photo by Wally Warrick

Tick...tick...tick...

On August 27, 2014, Wally, Kim and Taje Warrick anxiously sat in a sterile neurosurgeon's office. Taje, 10 years old at the time, had recently undergone an unexpected MRI the day before. Taje's ophthalmologist had noticed an inconsistency during an eye exam a few days prior and immediately ordered the MRI. Tensions were high, there were questions lacking answers, and patiently the Warricks had to wait. "I knew something was wrong," said Kim Warrick. "They sent us home from the MRI and said we needed to see our family doctor the next day, no excuses."

Tick...tick...tick...

Taje's mom Kim slowly began to weep, having tried to shield her emotions from her daughter as long as she could. "I was trying to be so strong for her," Kim said. "She was sitting in my lap and looked back over shoulder at me and I just couldn't hold it in anymore." The doctor entered, took a seat, and slowly began to explain

the MRI's shocking results.

"They've found a tumor on Taje's brain, or an arachnoid cyst," the doctor said. It was 8 centimeters by 6 centimeters by 4 centimeters. It's taken up the whole right frontal lobe of her brain. She needed to have a craniotomy immediately to remove the tumor and relieve the pressure on her brain.

Boom.

Shell-shocked from the news, the Warricks shuffled home and began to accept what lay ahead in their life. Taje would have to stop competing in the Low Children's Jumpers immediately, and would be unable to ride for months, or even a year, following her surgery. Trainers, teachers and friends were informed of the dangerous surgery she'd face in just one week. Horses were placed in training, school arrangements made and the family braced for what lay ahead.

It also came to light that Taje had suffered one — if not a series — of strokes prior to her MRI. "I remember one night she was in the

shower and she just started screaming bloody murder that she couldn't see me," Kim said. "I told her I was right there, and not to worry. As quickly as she'd started screaming, she stopped. It worried me so that's when we started seeing doctors to see what had caused it."

From cardiologists to neurologists, Wally and Kim searched for answers. Their beautiful daughter, full of life and passion, kept on riding, oblivious to her parents' concerns. But finally, they'd found an answer.

So on September 2, 2014, Taje underwent her craniotomy. "I wasn't really scared until they started to wheel me down the hall and I saw how scared my mom was," remembered Taje.



Taje and Drommels at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida. Photo by SportFot

Kim added, "I was trying so hard to be positive and kept telling her to give me a thumbs up. She was already getting sleepy so she couldn't lift her arm, so she just made a little thumbs up with her hand."

Miraculously, Taje made it through the surgery without a single complication. At 11, she now has metal plates on her skull, and doctors feel she should go on to live a normal and full life, which is exactly what Taje has done.

Within two months, Taje was given the all-clear to ride again. Kim said, "I might have been more nervous for that than the surgery! I went to the far end of the arena so I could be all by myself and just watch from a distance."

No one was happier about the first ride back than Taje. "I just wanted to ride my ponies!" she said. "I was scared, but as soon as I got on, I felt fine." One successful ride back was all it took to relight the passion Taje had for horses and competing.

In just a few months time, she was back competing on her two horses, 7-year-old Drommels and 16-year old Mufasa. Taje also has two young horses in training to become her future jumping mounts. She's actively competing in the High Children's Jumpers and



Taje and Drommels in Kentucky competing in the High Children's.

Photo by Shawn McMillen Photography

has been successful at the Kentucky Horse Park, Great Lakes Horse Show, ESP in Wellington, Florida, as well as the 2014-2015 Winter Equestrian Festival in Low Children's.

Despite the doctors, the surgeries and the additional cranial hardware, Taje has remained her happy, energetic self. "If anything," said Kim, "she's become increasingly focused. The second

she rides into the arena, she's a little adult. She's focused on her horse, her course and competing. The second she comes out of the arena, she's 11 again and jumping over schooling standards with her friends."

Taje has plans of jumping Grand Prix courses and going to the Olympics, something her parents can only encourage. She knows she's not like other kids, but it's not something she dwells on. When asked if she knew she was brave, she replied with a prompt, "Yes."

Taje's tenacity and devotion to her horses is something to be admired, not only by her peers, but by adults and professionals as well. Despite the past year of her life and an upcoming MRI to check the healing process, she remains the same kid she was before, no demands or special treatment, and the word "can't" has never left her mouth. The drive she possesses is the kind that takes equestrians places with their careers. The passion to travel and pursue her greatest accomplishments with her family at her back is all Taje cares about, and it's an attitude that people should definitely take note of. 🐾

About the writer: Mary McCashin is a freelance writer from Mocksville, North Carolina. She released her book, "Bulls, Broncs, & Buckles" in June 2015. Her pride and joy is her New Forest Pony, Will.