

by Hamilton Richardson

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*October 26, 2010* - Success cannot easily be quantified, as it tends to be very different for each person even though his or her accomplishments may be numerous.

For 12-year-old Katie Holmes, although she may not necessarily think so, the accomplishments she has already racked up during her young life would spell success to many that meet her.

According to Holmes' mom, Pam, her daughter has been participating in her favorite thing, playing classical guitar, for a long time.

"At age 4, while living in Spokane, Wash., Katie sat alongside as her maternal grandmother started up folk-style, steel string, acoustic guitar lessons," said Pam Holmes. "Katie had such a knack for it that before long, she started taking guitar lessons, too. At age 5, we found a classical guitar teacher, bought a nylon string guitar, and Katie hasn't looked back since.

That experience began the girl's steadily advancing skill set on a guitar, which has already earned her many accolades.

"When we moved to Alabama in 2005, we connected with Dr. Andrew Zohn at the Schwob School of Music in Columbus, Ga. Every week now for over five years, we've driven over to Columbus for classical guitar lessons," said Holmes. "Under his guidance, Katie has performed in master classes with classical guitar luminaries such as David Russell and Jason Vieaux and placed in numerous competitions, including first place in both the Columbus State University and East Carolina University middle school guitar competitions before she was 12."

Katie Holmes maintains a humble attitude about what she's accomplished and may accomplish in the future in the field of classical music.

"I enjoy playing guitar for an audience, and I think I have a competitive spirit," Katie said. "I love being in guitar competitions, even when I don't place in them. I enjoy and appreciate people's comments on my playing ability, and I think I play pretty well. Practicing at home, knowing that it is several months before I can play my pieces in front of people, is pretty frustrating, but it's definitely worth all the hours when I get on stage."

On top of her skill as a guitarist, the young girl, whose mom and brother live in Prattville with her and whose father is stationed at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, also loves to learn.

Holmes has been homeschooled for years and her mom has supplemented her schooling at a Millbrook-based co-op.

"We have gone to great lengths to provide academically challenging experiences for her. She's done an online writing class through Johns Hopkins CTY, a Robotics Camp at Auburn, and an

intensive academic summer camp through Duke TIP," said Pam Holmes. "While each of those did succeed in challenging her, she has been equally challenged by some of the classes she's taken locally through Academy Days' homeschool co-op in Millbrook."

The 12-year-old has taken writing courses that her mom says have been very challenging for her, as well as an Introductory Arabic class, which incorporates the same curriculum in use in high schools and colleges. The student has also taken history, science, and cooking classes at the co-op.

"Co-op allows Katie to get the classroom experience she loves -- and which, we've recently discovered, many top colleges look for when evaluating homeschoolers -- while maintaining the flexibility to pursue her many interests," said her mom. "We've participated in co-op three of the last four semesters."

Katie seems destined for accomplishment but maintains a cautionary view of what she will end up doing.

"When I'm older, I think I might like to be a professional musician. It would be fun to travel around the world playing guitar, and I also like to teach people, which is usually a big part of being a classical musician," she said. "As a second career, I'm thinking of going into robotics, and someday I want to build a robot that will help with the rehabilitation of disabled children through both physical and musical therapy."

Holmes said that one of the best things she did to encourage her daughter over the last several years was to encourage her, sit with her while she practiced her music and include Katie's competitions into the family dynamic, including taking family vacations around her guitar events.

Holmes added that, "a little one-on-one parental attention while tackling a challenging piece of music goes a long way. While she still doesn't like the hard work that defines real practicing, she loves the sound of music that has been well-learned and so continues to make progress, on her own now, every day."

So far this year, Katie has been a top scholar in the National Latin Exam, placed in the top three at the University of Alabama's Digital Film Festival in both the individual and team middle school competitions, and was honored by the Duke TIP seventh-grade talent search at the Grand Recognition Ceremony at Duke University.

She is currently dual-enrolled at Faulkner University taking music classes in the school's Fine Arts Department.

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