

by Allie Wilson

Taylor Patel '17 has a sense of resilience ingrained in her spirit. Her statement "Whatever I will do, I'll do it in style" may simply seem like another lighthearted take on life until you realize the challenges she embraces each day.



FROM BIRTH, PATEL HAS HAD A DEFECT IN HER VISION. She has a type of retinal folds, which causes the retinas in both of her eyes to be wrinkled. She is the only person in the world with her particular visual impairment. Her limited vision prevents her from doing otherwise routine activities like driving or reading fine print material. Nevertheless, she chooses to find what she can do, and she does it with full vigor.

"I think, because there's not a lot I can do, I really want to look at (life) as I tried my hardest to do whatever I can as much as I can to inspire others to see their dreams," Patel said.

Patel has been visiting India with her family since she was six years old. Every visit they make has a purpose to do good. She has been working with the Andh School for the Blind — “Andh” means dark or unseen — during those trips for about nine years. She and her family bring necessities for the children such as backpacks, supplies, and uniforms; this year, they brought sweaters and duvet covers.

Now that she is older, she says her trips to the school have become more interactive and have more meaning. She plans to keep up with some of the students her own age as they leave the school.

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Patel with students at the Andh School for the Blind



Walking on the runway



Patel and her parents pose with a student after handing out backpacks

**"I can do this and I will do this.
I will show you I can."**

"They've inspired me to take every opportunity that I can to dream big and try everything I want to try. Just to live life," Patel said.

The life of a 17-year-old is a busy one. Looking for potential colleges, finding your passion, passing classes and exams, maintaining friendships ... there is a lot to add to the "To Do" list.

These circumstances are fuel to Patel's fire. Not only does she handle this load, but she has also added to it with pleasure and confidence in her strength and ability. For example, Patel has been cheerleading since seventh grade at Ravenscroft.

"Cheerleading is something I love and it's been great for me," she said.

When people make wrong judgments about whether she can do something, she uses it for inspiration.

"You don't want people putting you down, saying you can't do something, but it gives me this drive to do better," Patel said. "Your first instinct is to shut down, but I try to use that and punch it out. I can do this and I will do this. I will show you I can."

Her peers and the faculty at Ravenscroft see that inspiration as well.

"Taylor strikes me as someone who is full of life, and she happens to be sight-impaired," said Dr. Susan Perry, Assistant Head of the Upper School. "When you first meet Taylor, she is just this wonderful person and is a gift to our community. When you think about Lead From Here, she is leading self every day as a loyal friend and is committed to her passion."

Her other interests include fashion and criminology. The two may not have much in common, but they both have been important to her for a while.

Patel started the "Tip Top Trends With Taylor" club at Ravenscroft to engage fellow students in the fashion world. The group is planning a fashion show in the spring. She was also chosen to be on a fashion consulting board for the BP line at Nordstrom this year.

Patel's dream school is the University of Miami, where she hopes to major in business and minor in criminology.

She then plans to attend law school and eventually become a criminal defense lawyer.

This aspiration came about when Patel was in fifth grade. Her mother asked her to watch a "Forensic Files" episode about a girl her age who had been abducted, in hopes that she would learn how to protect herself and be informed. Patel says it scared her originally, but it also fascinated her. She couldn't stop watching after that.

Since then, Patel has attended summer classes at Yale University as part of the EXPLO Program to study criminal psychology, attended the National Student Leadership Conference at American University to learn about national intelligence and security, and she plans to enroll in a studies program next summer at the University of Miami to obtain college credit for forensic psychology. *R*