

GOFF ...

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... or even your disabilities and given labels, that if you set your mind to things, have goals and challenge yourself daily, your dreams are achievable and can come true," Goff said. "And the label of being Autistic doesn't affect me as a negative - but as positive ... I am Aliena, I have Autism and that's OK. That's who I am."

Goff was diagnosed when she was four, and her mother, Melissa Goff, explained that "doctors didn't think she'd develop intellectually or mentally very well and anticipated she'd always struggle with learning. But when we enrolled her in school in Oklahoma there were no special education classes so we had to 'mainstream' her. Being in that mainstream class lit a fire under her - she really progressed. Fast. Within a month she could read and then became the top reader in second grade. Aliena was co-mingled with both special ed kids and regular kids. We loved that school - more normally."

The Goffs, a military family, moved to Cave Junction in 2011, so Aliena attended both Lorna Byrne and IVHS. Her mother believes Goff may be the first autistic kid at IVHS to graduate with high honors - she maintained a 4 point grade-point average throughout high school. She also earned four credits from Rogue Community

College (RCC).

Goff said she "loves" all her teachers and the staff at IVHS. "I tend to stick toward more adults than people my own age. However my greatest influences would be my family, specifically my dad and my mom. Because of my specific circumstances they were there to help me improve and grow to who I am today."

"I think Aliena is an exceptionally bright young lady and have been impressed with her since her freshman year," said IVHS special education teacher Lynn Schiermeyer. "She's made tremendous growth - both socially and academically - as most of our students do. Aliena's goal is to become a librarian and I cannot wait to walk into a library sometime and have her say, 'Hey, Mrs. Schiermeyer, look at what I did, I made it.' I know she's going to get there. She's an awesome young woman. I'm so very proud of her."

Goff seems to take it all in stride. "You can't really see or detect autism, it's just a part of you, just who you are," she said. "Plus it's good to have people being different in this world because if everyone had the same kind of mind there wouldn't really be much change," and laughing, she said "if everyone was the same it'd be boring." She added that "maybe we cannot always do things like other people - but you can learn to do it a different way."

Those differences can be interesting: "Sometimes I don't get sarcasm - I hear

things literally. And I think in pictures, like Temple Grandin. (Dr. Grandin became a prominent author and speaker on both autism and animal behavior.) I can see things with a fresh perspective. It's very nice and sometimes it helps me work things out. ...And it can be very helpful in art, like being able to see things in colors, and sometimes seeing in picture helps me to explain things - I can describe the picture."

Asked about her favorite activities Goff said, "I love to read, I read all the time. I love puzzles that challenge my mind, country music, sewing, playing video games and learning to cook. I would love to learn German because of my dad's roots and botany from my mom." She also said she wants to spend more time in the kitchen with her mom, who is "an amazing cook and cake decorator. She made me a lot of wonderful cakes for my birthdays."

About her future, Goff comes back to her love of books. She became inspired after volunteering at the library in Cave Junction. "I would love to become a librarian. I've always loved the library, so much knowledge there; so nice and peaceful. A lot of places that are really loud can unnerve me and make me anxious, but it feels really good in the library."

This summer, Goff wants to volunteer with animals, and come fall, she plans to take a few basic courses at RCC. But perhaps more importantly, she plans to focus on other aspects of life for a while. "Right

now, I've only known school. ... I'll also take a few steps back to learn and pursue other things, like cooking, traveling and spending time learning more about myself outside of books." Whatever her choices, Goff is sure to continue making everyone proud to know her.



Aliena Goff

DWYER ...

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"I really enjoy learning and I always make a point to involve myself in class and not be a passive note taker - actively participating and asking questions and seeing how the material applies to me, and also, thinking critically about what we're learning about really helps."

He explained how examining why things happen and asking key questions can enhance the learning process. "If you're reading an article, think about what the source is - like what's in it for them [the authors] to push this narrative. And even thinking about your own thoughts, like if you have a gut reaction against something, look at why you have that gut reaction and is it correct or not?"

Dwyer said he's lucky to have had good teachers - and also credits his parents "which were probably my greatest teachers of all. From a very early age they read with me and my mom was singing with me. And me and my dad used to do equations just for fun - I don't think that's very common. Also in terms of moral teachings they've been great examples in treating people fairly and thinking clearly. And they've also been my chauffeurs for a long time, driving me around to different meetings and practices. Plus they let me go to Spain too and that was very cool."

After completing two and a half years of Spanish at IVHS; Dwyer attended high school in Valencia, Spain in a foreign study program for five months. "Once you're immersed in the culture it teaches you to think in the language. It's a deeper understanding. You get a real feel for the language," he explained. Dwyer's parents also met up with him at the end of his school term and the family then toured Spain together.

Dwyer says it was IVHS's Ms. Szijarto who helped him learn to love Spanish language and culture - and to love language in general. "She really motivated me to be an exchange student. I owe a lot of my success in my college essay and other writing I have done to her."

"I also want to thank Mr. Bradley. He's the reason I enjoy math. You can tell he really cares about what he's teaching. A lot of times he'll seem amazed by what he's showing you and that enthusiasm really comes

across. That's a rare characteristic - especially for a math teacher. I've seen a lot of students learn to enjoy math because of him."

Mr. Lathen, IVHS's social studies teacher, is also high on Dwyer's list. "His classes were always the most fun. He'd have these activities where he'd keep us in the dark until the very end, and then, connect the activity it to the theme. Like he could connect a card game to economics and help us understand these abstract concepts better."

"Ari is a pleasure to have in our building every day," said IVHS Principal Tanner Smith. "One of the things that I admire about him the most is that he's willing to tutor and help other students at our school. Ari has the ability to do anything he chooses and then hit it out of the park. I have no doubt that Ari Dwyer will do great things and continue to make our community proud well after High School."

Dwyer will attend the Clark Honors College at University of Oregon this fall and plans to live in the Global Scholars Hall dormitory for his first

year. "I want to explore sociology and linguistics, but I'm not really sure about a major yet. I'll also take some music classes and continue with Spanish. If I have a problem, it's with liking too many things." (Not a bad problem to have!)

Dwyer has played the violin through his IVHS career. When he was nine he received a violin from his aunts for Hanukah. He's performed with the IV String Band for five

years and also plays in a family band with his mother, well-known local musician Carol Valentine, and father, Jack Dwyer, a retired Lorna Byrne teacher. "The joke was that they didn't have any fiddlers around the Valley so they had to grow one themselves," Dwyer said.

"A music education helps out with all types of education and in my case that has definitely been true," Dwyer said. "Music has an infinite

leaning potential - you can always keep practicing and keep honing things and go further. Even if you're up to standards, you can always make something better. And in terms of teaching me discipline, I pretty much practice daily."

Dwyer wants people to know that "kids who get a music education at a young age do better in school and do better in life."



Ari Dwyer

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