

MOVIE

on the

COMING NEXT WEEK:
Proud to be American?

Jamie Heard has scars to show — literally — from difficult times in her life.

Jamie, who turns 18 next month, has endured four heart operations: two as an infant, and another two in more recent years. The scars run from her back to her chest, and then down to her belly.

At one time, she acknowledged, this was a fact she avoided making public.

"I used to wear shirts up to here," she said, holding a hand to her neck.

These days she wears styles that, especially in warmer weather, reveal parts of those scars.

"They're there; people should know. It's me," she said. "I always wish I didn't have scars, but I won't stay covered up and I'm not going to have plastic surgery. That's who I am."

Jamie applies the same deal-with-it attitude to the rest of her life. Though she takes medication daily, can't play contact sports and may never be able to have children — due to the potential strain on her heart — she doesn't wallow in self-pity.

"I don't see myself as being different from other people," she said.

Indeed, the Greece resident leads quite a busy life. She's been active in both the youth group at Our Mother of Sorrows Church and the National Honor Society at Greece Arcadia High School. She has performed numerous community-service projects and has been a parish religious-education aide.

Last fall, Jamie received the diocesan Hands of Christ Award, given annually to outstanding high-school seniors; and on May 18 she was inducted into the Greece Youth Hall of Fame. Following her June 27 graduation, Jamie will attend SUNY College at Fredonia to major in psychology.

Quite an admirable set of accomplishments for someone who has endured four delicate surgeries — the first one, an emergency surgery after her parents, Stephen and Lynore, rushed her to the hospital when she was only 10 days old.

Jamie was discovered to have a narrowed aorta. This congenital defect is known as aortic stenosis, causing partial to near-total blockage of blood flow from the heart to the rest of the body.

Jamie had a second operation to repair the aortic valve when she was 5 months old. She went in for two more surgeries, in late 1994 and early 1996; receiving a mechanical replacement valve during her last operation.



Jamie Heard

All the operations were performed at Rochester's Strong Memorial Hospital. Jamie said that the fourth surgery was, hopefully, her last.

Around the time of the most recent surgery, Jamie recalled, "I began praying to God a lot."

She refuses to blame God for any hardships she has endured.

"Some of my friends, when something goes wrong in their lives, they get mad at God or don't believe in him," she said. "But when something bad happens to me I feel like it's my fault, not God's. And when something good happens, I don't compliment myself. I thank God."

Jamie said she never got scared about her surgeries, even though they were all potentially life-threatening.

"Maybe that's being naive, but that's the way I look at

things," she said. "I don't like being pessimistic. It doesn't scare me. Death does not scare me."

"The only thing I'm scared about in life is spiders," she added, semi-jokingly.

Jamie said she trusts God with her health, and all other matters as well.

"I just sort of leave it up to God. I say, 'Whenever you want me to feel happy, then do it. It's up to you when I'm going to be happy.'"

Jamie acknowledged that she doesn't hesitate to share her faith with others.

"Sometimes I do preach to them. They don't like it; they call me a 'God girl.'"

Yet mostly, she said, her peers value her faith and openness. "My friends come to me first when they have problems," she said.

In fact, Jamie said she'd like to become a social worker so she can make a career of listening to people and assisting them with problems.

"I've always wanted to help people out with their lives so they won't be down," she said. "I like to make other people happy."

"There's that old saying, 'You have to love yourself before you love others.' That's why I want to help others, because I know who I am and I want to help them find who they are."

According to Jamie, surviving her surgeries and pursuing a career of service are all part of God's plan.

"I'm obviously supposed to be doing something with my life. That's why I'm still here."

Story by
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Photo by
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Publication date: August 19 • Advertising deadline: August 12
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