

# MOVIE

## on the

Story by Mike Latona  
Photos by Andrea Dixon



Jackie Sortino, 17, screams as she is yanked down the hallway by a bungee cord at track practice at Greece Olympia High School Dec. 7.

## 'I can do anything' — even with epilepsy

When somebody makes fun of Jackie Sortino's medical condition, the hurt runs deep. It's not just her own feelings that are at stake, Jackie explained. She also bears the suffering of many others who are ridiculed for a situation they cannot control.

The condition is epilepsy, a neurological disorder that subjects its victims to unpredictable seizures. The seizures may be characterized by falling down, blackouts, nodding, blinking or other repeated movements that appear unnatural.

Those are the moments, Jackie stated, that victims of epilepsy need help and compassion. Not put-downs.

"I've seen a lot. I don't find it funny, because I've seen people who can fall over at any time. These are the people



Jackie laughs with her friend Beth Reimer, 16.

who can't defend themselves. So I defend for them and me," said Jackie, 17, a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist in Greece.

Yet Jackie also said she doesn't want to make enemies of those who poke fun. Rather, her goal is to provide information about epilepsy in a clear and emphatic style.

"There's a middle ground — between the person who teases, and the person who's been there," she said. "Through this all, I've learned that people who tease are immature and need to be educated."

For instance, Jackie will explain that her seizures have involved staring off into space, eye-fluttering, and feelings of fright. Many people don't realize there can be such a wide range of symptoms for people with epilepsy, she said.

"People think that if you have a seizure, you just fall to the ground and start shaking," she remarked.

Jackie said she has been excluded from some parties because of her disorder. And last summer, she noted, a boy she was seeing made a joke about her epilepsy and hurt her feelings.

Though he apologized, Jackie decided it would be best if they were just friends from then on.

In fact, Jackie said, any future boyfriend would have to be sensitive to the feelings of people with epilepsy — as well as people with other physical difficulties. "I think the word is 'understanding,'" Jackie said.

Jackie's epilepsy was diagnosed when she was 3 years old. She said she began telling schoolmates about her disorder when she was 9. A few years

back she began attending Camp EAGR, a summer camp in Warsaw, N.Y., for children ages 8-15 with epilepsy. Jackie served as a counselor-in-training at the camp this past summer.

"Before I went to Camp EAGR, I really felt I was all alone with this," Jackie said. "You feel very welcomed, very loved there."

Jackie recently received a major honor for her efforts to raise awareness about epilepsy: In October she was named the 2000-01 "Winning Kid" by the Rochester/Syracuse chapter of the Epilepsy Association. Jackie was selected after submitting an essay in which she described how she deals with her condition.

As the "Winning Kid," Jackie will conduct seminars on epilepsy and appear at other functions on behalf of the Epilepsy Association. In fact, she hopes to hold an assembly at Greece Olympia High School, where she is in her junior year.

"The more I can tell people about it, the better," she said. "I feel good that I might have helped someone."

While serving as an ambassador for the Epilepsy Foundation, Jackie must also keep careful track of her health. Though not normally prone to violent seizures, she suffered two major seizures last spring — her worst yet, she said.

"I had to be rushed to the hospital, not knowing what was going on," Jackie recalled.

She and her mother, Laureen, said the seizures were caused by an improper level of medication. Jackie must now take 11 pills per day to keep the seizures under control. With proper monitoring, her mother said, the seizures may decrease over time, or even disappear. And, if Jackie can stay seizure-free for an entire year, she will also be able to apply for a driver's license.

Other than the driving issue, not much else appears to hold Jackie back. She competes for the Greece Olympia indoor and outdoor track teams; is a member of drama club; works part-time at a retail store; and volunteers occasionally with students at Holmes Road Elementary School. She would like to become a teacher and perhaps even write a book someday.

"I can do anything," she stated.

**COMING NEXT (Jan. 4):  
NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS**

**Christmas Concert Starring The Dady Brothers**  
with special guest, guitar legend Kinloch Nelson and featuring The Drumcliffe School of Irish Dance  
Saturday, December 16, 8pm - Colgate Rochester Divinity School Auditorium - 1110 South Goodman St.  
Tickets \$10 (\$8 students/seniors) in advance or \$12 (\$10 students/seniors) at the door. Advance tickets may be purchased at The Irish Import Shop on W. Ridge Rd. Celtic Imports on Monroe Ave. - The Bop Shop in Village Gate or by calling 716-254-3704

**"One in Faith, One in Knowledge, One in Community"**  
All Saints Catholic Junior High School will hold an Open House on Thursday, January 4, 2001 at 7:00 p.m. Students from grades 5 through 8 are invited to attend.  
All Saints Catholic Jr. High School  
170 Spencerport Road • Rochester  
Call (716) 429-6010 for information

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