

Tatum Wiley



It is my honor to introduce Courage Award recipient Tatum Wiley, who uses her physical and emotional scars to embody courage daily. Tatum is a senior at McClintock High School and was diagnosed with Down Syndrome at a young age. Besides having Down Syndrome, Tatum has ADHD, familial cholesterolemia, low-tone hearing loss, and depression. She has undergone eleven surgeries; one heart, one hand, four knee and five ENT related.

Tatum shared that overcoming all of her medical obstacles, especially her knee surgeries, is something she is very proud of. Her knee issues created a lot of anxiety for her and her family, and the process of healing was never easy. Tatum ultimately had to overcome the fear that her knees could give out at any moment.

Her and her mother Beth shared memories from a trip they took to Muscle Beach, California which Tatum was extremely ecstatic about because she loves the excitement of jungle gyms. However, their trip took a turn for the worst and her knees ended up giving out, which resulted in an ambulance ride. This was an extreme challenge Tatum has overcome, and this truly demonstrated her resilience at an early point in life.

Despite her medical and physical challenges, she has participated in and excelled at swimming, track & field, kayaking, golf, cheer, Zumba and horseback riding. Beth Wiley, Tatum's mother, shared that horseback riding has been a major confidence booster for Tatum. It has truly given her the confidence to tackle anything she sets her mind to, and shown her that all goals are achievable with a positive attitude. Tatum and her mother also volunteer

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around the horses every week, to help her give back to the sport that has given her confidence to pursue her interests with an infallible spirit.

This spirit and fierce determination makes her a favorite of her coaches and teammates. Tatum's commitment to achievement is also demonstrated in her academic pursuits. She loves to read, appreciates science and history and expresses her love of music in her choir and jazz/rock history classes.

She shared that music is one of her biggest passions in life. She expressed that she would love to pursue a career as a Broadcast Technician in the music industry, and be a part of the development of the sound and tracks on albums for all types of artists.

Tatum's natural strengths and inherent resiliency that are on display in everything she does, were suddenly pushed to their limits. When she was just twelve years old her father, Steve Wiley, died of a heart attack. At an age when most cannot understand death, Tatum began to learn how to live without her father, who was literally and figuratively the biggest champion she'd ever known. While struggling to comprehend her father's death and the raw emotions of grief, she turned to her mom, her brothers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles for guidance. With their love and acceptance, Tatum has found confidence in talking about her dad's death and how it has shaped her.

She shared that she is inspired by her mom who offers her support in every way, whether it's her education or pursuing her passions. Her two older brothers Ben and Jonah also

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offer her support and motivation on the homefront, even though she expressed they can be kind of annoying in that typical brother fashion. The biggest takeaway is that Tatum did not hesitate to say that she is still inspired by her father everyday.

The cumulative impact of Tatum's life experiences has allowed her to become a compassionate, caring, and accepting young woman. As her choir teacher describes her, "Tatum interacts...every day. She is one of the first to arrive to the call, she always has her camera on, and is ready to go. By having her camera on, she sets the tone for those who are camera shy, and this is very encouraging to the group. She is always willing to ask questions and type in the chat when she would like to share. She brings passion and energy to the class and is always willing to socialize and befriend new students."

Tatum shared a quote that she came up with regarding how she intends to live her life; "Be strong, be elegant, and be yourself". Tatum is true to herself in everything she does and finds joy in expressing herself in many ways like listening to music, podcasting, and her newly started YouTube channel. She would like to thank her family and friends including her mother Beth, brothers Ben and Jonah, her Nana and Papa, and her closest friends Lindsey and Sophie. Tatum would also like to thank her nominator, CARE 7 Youth Specialist, Elizabeth Cling who has been with her and her family since birth. These people have helped her love herself and express herself unapologetically.

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It is truly an honor to present this award on behalf of the City of Tempe to Tatum Wiley, who also happens to be celebrating her 19th birthday today! So, happy birthday Tatum and congratulations!