



"I mainly started (dancing) because my older sister danced and I wanted to be just like her," Julie said.

Janet was nervous about letting her daughter dance until Ann Carroll, the owner of Ann Carroll School of Dance in Franklin, Tenn., told her if Julie wanted to dance, she should let her.

Niki Pennington, the head instructor of the lyrical department at the school since 1999, had never encountered someone with a prosthesis before Julie enrolled in her class.

Pennington started teaching Julie around age 7 or 8. Neither Julie nor her parents ever asked for special treatment.

"She just kind of blended in with everybody and she was truly a phenomenal kid," Pennington said.

Although Julie was determined to let nothing get in her way, there were still some things in dance that were difficult for her. Nonetheless, in 2003, she was a toy soldier in the Nashville Ballet's rendition of "The Nutcracker."

"We had to dance with the cane, holding it together, for half the number and then once the rats broke it, we had to hold it in two pieces in both hands," Julie said.

She was worried that she wasn't going to be able to perform the role to the same level as everyone else, but with the help of the cho-

reographer, rehearsal director and a helpful amount of Velcro, they made it work.

Among Julie's family, friends and professors, she's known for three things: being determined, funny and caring toward everyone.

"I liked her immediately," said Jane Wellford, professor of performing arts at Elon.

Wellford first met Julie at spring orientation before Julie's freshman year at Elon. She described Julie as personable, outgoing, sweet and well-mannered.

"Yes, I couldn't help but notice that she had a prosthesis, but when I started teaching her in classes, I noticed there was absolutely nothing different about her than any other person at all," Wellford said.

In a piece Wellford choreographed in the fall, she required the dancers to do a series of physical movements, including catching each other. It was a strenuous dance that involved a lot of contact improvisation.

"It was hard enough for someone with two whole arms," Wellford said. "She was always so determined and wouldn't let anybody down or show any sign of weakness," Wellford said. "Never ever."

For Pennington, it was tough when Julie graduated high school because the two had become so close.

"She inspired me on a daily basis with her positive energy and her perseverance," Pennington said. "She is an amazing individual and I am honored to have been her teacher

and her friend."

Elon alumna and fellow dance major Jess Duffy couldn't stop praising Julie and her determination.

"It's her attitude that shows me her drive and passion," Duffy said. "It's really inspiring."

One time when Duffy was on tech for black box with Julie, they were cleaning up the set and Julie was messing around with the push broom, pretending to be struggling as she pushed with only one arm.

The stage manager noticed what Julie was doing and said, "You know it would help if you had two arms."

"It was silent for a while but then Julie says something like, 'I just have the one!' and everyone started laughing, well, except for the stage manager of course," Duffy said.

Julie shows her humor about her missing arm all the time. Sometimes she plays pranks on people – her youth minister at church would go around telling people that Julie only shook hands with her left hand. Once people would grab her hand, she would pull away so that her arm would detach itself.

As Julie grew as a dancer and showed her determination and love for the art, Janet grew out of her wariness of letting her dance and knew she made the right decision.

"I think initially I was scared her arm might fall off," Janet said. "I love watching her dance, as any mother would. It's an extra special level with Julie because her road hasn't been as easy as some."

Julie, who was the fastest typist in her fourth grade keyboarding class, despite missing five fingers, never let her disability stand in her way. She even wants to open her own dance studio someday so she can teach others how to live the dream of being a dancer.

"Being different than everyone else, especially in the dance world, there's tons of times I could have made an excuse, and been like, 'I can't do that because I don't have an arm,' but not letting anything stop me and not getting stuck when something isn't going right is the thing keeping me going," Julie said, as a smile spread across her face.