



When Beekeeping and Tourette Syndrome Come Together

Penny Wagner

Met Dakota Wagner, a 15-year-old beekeeper located in Ohio. Dakota started at ten years old as an apprentice helping with equipment and holding the smoker. As she grew older, she grew more interested and always wanted to help with the bees. She and her family have been maintaining 3-6 hives every year. Some of those colonies include swarms caught by Dakota or splits that she performed by herself. Dakota enjoys taking time and performing inspections, not so much in the hot summer months, but she understands the importance of maintaining her hives. During the fall months, Dakota is busy wrapping the frames and freezing them before she stores them for the season.

The unique thing about Dakota is that she has been diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome, a neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, sudden, uncontrolled involuntary movements (motor tics) and sounds/vocalization (verbal tics).

Motor tics are movements. Simple motor tics include but are not limited to eye blinking or jaw movements. Complex motor tics involve multiple muscle groups or combinations of movements which can include hopping, jumping, and twirling.

Vocal tics produce a sound. Simple vocal tics include but are not limited to sniffing, throat clearing, grunting, or shouting. Complex vocal tics are words or phrases that may not be recognizable but consistently occur out of context.

To be diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome, a person should have motor and vocal tics and have had tic symptoms for at least a year. Males are three to four times more likely to develop

Tourette Syndrome. Unfortunately, there is no cure. Dakota's vocal tics range from tiny whistles to complex sentences. Her motor tics have a more comprehensive range, and they can be anywhere from a simple wink to hitting objects. After going misdiagnosed for two years, she was formally diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome in early 2020.

There is currently no medication developed to specifically treat Tourette Syndrome (also called Tic Disorders). The average person with the condition goes undiagnosed for two years, so education, research, and development are Dakota's top priorities. During her journey of learning about the condition, she realized that if she keeps her mind focused and busy she can main-

tain control of her body for the most part. This encouraged Dakota to be more involved in her activities, such as playing softball and beekeeping.

Dakota continues to learn more about Tourette Syndrome so she can better understand what makes her tic. In an effort to help spread awareness, Dakota came up with an idea to use the extra beeswax from her hives to make lip balm. The labels on her lip balm are dedicated to getting the word out, with Tic Disorder/Tourette Syndrome Awareness printed on them. She created a business called Tic'd Off and uses it as a platform to raise awareness.

Tic'd Off exploded, and it grew faster than expected. Dakota only had so much wax from the family hives so





she ran out pretty quickly based on the high demand for her lip balm. Dakota and her family had to make a call out to local beekeepers, who eagerly provided wax for Dakota, and continue to provide support. The Tic'd Off labels state, "Beeswax from our beehives and our beekeeping friends."

Dakota is also an Ohio Youth Ambassador for the Tourette Association of America. "I feel that if more people knew about Tourette Syndrome or Tic Disorders, it would help not just me, but other people who are struggling

and helping cope with day-to-day activities," Dakota said in a release from the Association. In addition, Dakota donates a portion of her proceeds to the Tourette Association of America to help fund research and development.

Dakota's beekeeping hobby and her Tic'd Off initiative have created a platform to help educate her peers and communities all over on promoting understanding and social acceptance of Tourette Syndrome and its symptoms. Once she was correctly diagnosed, she was able to equip her-

self with proper tools to help herself overcome her struggles.

"Spreading awareness ultimately leads to education and knowledge and prevents people from being in awkward positions and prevents situations where people are being bullied," she said. Understanding how to cope with her disability has led to her increased participation as a beekeeper, and provided motivation to work hard toward her goals.

Penny Wagner is Dakota's mother.

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