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**SMALL WONDERS FOUNDATION COMES TO THE AID OF STATEN ISLAND GIRL**

**REFUSED ENTRY TO DISNEY STORE BECAUSE SHE HAS MICROTIA AND CANNOT WEAR A MASK**

LOS ANGELES—Nine-year-old Alexis LaGrega of Staten Island, New York, who made headlines when she was denied entry to her beloved hometown Disney Store due to a medical condition, has traveled to Los Angeles over her summer break to undergo a life-changing surgery for microtia.

Alexis cannot wear a Covid-19 mask with ear loops because she was born with a small, misshapen right ear that prevents the loops from staying on her ear. She is also partially deaf in that ear.

Alexis’ mother, Holly LaGrega, said her fourth-grade daughter was discriminated against by the Disney Store because it would not provide any other options for Alexis to enter the store, even after learning that microtia is the reason the mask does not fit her. During the Covid-19 pandemic Alexis has worn a double-ply neck gaiter to school and to her many dance classes and cheerleading events without incident.

“What happened at the Disney Store was so shocking and disappointing—to have your child discriminated against for a physical condition was so upsetting,” said Alexis’ mother, Holly LaGrega. “I knew I couldn’t let it go because I don’t want this to happen to any other child.”

When members of Small Wonders saw Alexis’ story, they reached out to her parents to provide encouragement, information about the options available, and some financial support.

Small Wonders Foundation is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that provides financial assistance, resources and encouragement to families of children with congenital and acquired differences of the face and body who require surgery. Started in 2005, Small Wonders Foundation supports the work of world-renowned pediatric plastic surgeon Dr. John Reinisch, who donates his time and expertise to helping young patients from around the world. The organization has helped more than 40 children from 19 countries around the world.

The LaGrega family continued to research their options for Alexis and after meeting on Zoom with Dr. Reinisch traveled to Los Angeles in mid-June so that Dr. Reinisch could perform the surgery to make Alexis’ ear whole. The LaGregas returned to Los Angeles on July 8th for a follow up appointment during which Dr. Reinisch would remove the blue mold covering Alexis’ new ear and she would see it for the first time.

“We knew of Dr. Reinisch through all of our research and Facebook groups we belong to for parents of children with microtia and everyone speaks so highly of him. But he is in California and the idea of traveling across the country, well, that just wasn’t in the cards for us,” said Holly LaGrega. “So when Small Wonders called to help, I thought how amazing that this could actually happen for us.”

“When I met with Alexis and her parents, I knew instantly that I could help,” said Dr. Reinisch about the surgery he has performed on Alexis’ right ear. “I was so impressed with Alexis—there she was being treated differently, unfairly, due to her microtia and she still had such an optimistic disposition. Her story is sure to help other young people living with a physical difference and should inspire us all.”

Small Wonders Board Member Carrie Adelman said: “We are so glad we can help Alexis receive the world-class care she deserves from Dr. Reinisch and his team. It is only through the generosity of donations and Dr. Reinisch that we are able to help Alexis and other children from around the world.”

Small Wonders Foundation is a Los Angeles-based nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that provides financial assistance, resources and encouragement to families of children with congenital and acquired differences of the face and body who require surgery. A donation to Small Wonders can help other young people like Alexis LaGrega. Started in 2005, Small Wonders Foundation supports the work of pioneering pediatric plastic surgeon Dr. Reinisch, who donates his time and expertise to helping young patients from around the world. Learn more at [smallwondersfoundation.org](http://smallwondersfoundation.org/) and [donate here.](https://www.smallwondersfoundation.org/donate)

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