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Hugo Girl Travels The World In "Dollhouse"

By Louise Edwards

HUGO - This 12-year-old may stand just 36 inches tall and weigh a mere 25 pounds, but she still sings and dances her way from one school lesson to the next.

Hannah Kritzeck, one of the "smallest people in the world," has what is known as proportionate primordial dwarfism.

Her mom, Jackie Kritzeck, says one of her constant concerns is that people mistake Hannah for a toddler.



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But all this has not prevented Hannah, who has lived in Hugo since 2001, from becoming a globetrotting young actress with a New York theater company, or stopped her dreaming of a future as a TV presenter.

"I'd like to be on TV," she explained. "I want to be like Miley Cyrus - she's only 15 now.

"I'd like to do a lot of things on TV - singing, dancing, reading a script."

At the moment, Hannah is in between stops on an international tour with director Lee Breuer, in Mabou Mines' "Dollhouse," where she plays the part of Emmy and gets to cartwheel across the stage and perform a tarantella dance, among other things. To date, she has performed in Rome and Singapore on the tour, and will add Bogota, Seoul, Athens and possibly London to the list over the coming months.

Breuer's award-winning and unusual production of playwright Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" features shorter-than-average male actors (up to 4 feet tall), and women of normal height, who perform on a dollhouse set with child-sized furniture. That furniture suits Hannah, who wears a size 4T.

But size is a matter of perspective, and Hannah, who attends Central Middle School in White Bear Lake, also loves cheerleading.

She just returned from a successful trip to St. Cloud with her school team, where they placed first in St. Cloud State University's middle school competition.

"I'll always be cheerleading, even when I'm 20 or 80," she pledged.

The performing whirlwind all started three years ago, when Jackie and her husband Larry realized the normal childhood pursuits of baseball and softball were not going to work for their daughter.

"We started looking at what her talents were," explained Jackie. "We put her in acting classes, and

that seemed to be where she flourished."

Gymnastics, singing, dancing and cheerleading swiftly followed, and today Hannah can't even walk through a room without bursting into song or launching into one of her many dance routines, even recruiting her two dogs to dance with her.

"In school, her teachers will say they can see her going down the corridor doing her cheers all the way to the next class," smiled Jackie.

Despite her obvious joy for life, Hannah doesn't have it easy.

Standing just three feet tall in a world created for people roughly double that, means even the simplest of things, such as a conversation with friends, can prove difficult.

"That's what's going to be tough when she starts going to dances at school," said Jackie. "She's going to have to be bold enough to say to people, 'Hey, I can't hear you - hold me up.'"

"But if she's being held up all the time, I don't want people to think she's a baby. On the other hand, for her to hear and take part in the conversation, she needs to be held up."

It's a catch-22 situation for Hannah, who is more than aware of the challenges she'll face.

"I don't like it," she said with brutal honesty. "I don't get to be with my friends because they are tall. I just want to be bigger. I just want to be normal."

That happens just once a year for Hannah, when she attends the national Little People Convention, an annual gathering of those with primordial dwarfism.

This year it's being held in Detroit, Mich., and Hannah is looking forward to catching up with old friends from previous conferences.

Though Hannah's thoughts to the future are relatively short-term, Jackie is thinking further ahead.

"In my dreams, I would love for her to be married," she explained.

"She will probably need to be close to adults, though.

"I thought wherever we are, we could have another little home on the property or downstairs, so she could live a normal adult life. She talks about that, too.

"We just want to keep her happy and healthy and doing the things she likes to do."

For more information on primordial dwarfism, refer to www.primordialdwarfism.com.