

Peel Blog

LEGER, Annick

MISSISSAUGA'S ANNICK LEGER IS GOLDEN AFTER SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES

RHYTHMIC GYMNAST WINS SIX GOLD MEDALS

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She was just a toddler at the time, but Annick Leger still remembers getting sick near the exact same spot every time she went to the hospital.

That was nearly 20 years ago and it's part of the journey the Mississauga native went through in overcoming leukemia and some of the crippling effects that came with her chemother-

apy treatments.

"It taught me with what I've gone through, I'm stronger than I think," said Leger, 22.

"Whatever has been hard in my life, I've stood up and worked hard through it. It shows that I don't give up."

Her perseverance has paid off in her Special Olympics career.

During the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi in March, she won six gold medals in rhythmic gymnastics.

"I figured whenever I try my best, I'll do well," Leger said. "The minute I realized my balance was good, I held it."

When she was two, Leger's parents were concerned after they noticed she was very pale and began losing her strength.

Leger underwent three years of chemotherapy to treat her leukemia, but along the way, doctors discovered one of the drugs had eaten away at the white matter in her brain.

She spent years re-learning how to walk and talk as a result.

"Apparently it's a very tiny percentage of patients who react to (the drug)," said Leger's mother, Nancy.

When she was 10, Leger's father, Don, died, leaving Nancy with four

children to raise on her own.

She found an ad for a Special Olympic games night in a magazine and signed Annick up. Annick tried a wide variety of sports and eventually committed to rhythmic gymnastics because she loved the costumes and dancing involved and felt as though she was telling a story each time she performed.

"I think the whole thing just retrained her brain," Nancy said. "It was like physical therapy for her."

Leger is finishing her second year in Humber College's Community Integration through Cooperative

Education program. She hopes she can get into a career involving exercise or nutrition because they've been such important elements in her life.

"It really makes sense how exercise has helped me in my life and how it helps other people," she said.



Bryon Johnson/Metroland

Annick Leger, a gymnast from Mississauga, won six medals at the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi.