Rachel Reetzke – Chinese Autism

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A 2010 WKU graduate from Franklin, KY is well on her way to blazing a trail in the field of autism research in China.

In this week’s View from the Hill, Amy Bingham talks with Rachel Reetzke about the path that’s led her to this point.

Rachel Reetzke knew she wanted to study communication disorders at WKU and set out to specialize in aphasia after her grandmother suffered a stroke and could no longer communicate. But after her grandmother died, it become too difficult for Rachel to continue those studies. That’s when she turned her attention to autism.

“I love the unknowns, so many things we don’t know about the disorder. “

Rachel Reetzke had no idea what autism was when she decided to change the focus of her major.

But some independent research and a job at the Kelly Autism Program at WKU sealed her fate.

“The experience at the Kelly Autism Program for two years at WKU was really an inspiring time. I learned it isn’t just a disability. Not just a disorder. This is about people, my friends.”

The honors student was also a spirit master, even named homecoming queen during her undergraduate studies, but was nudged out of her comfort zone when she was encouraged to gain International Research Experience in a Chinese Field Study.

“I went in thinking, oh I’ll gain my international experience and I’ll come back to the states and I’ll have the experience and go on.”

Instead, Rachel was more motivated than ever to research autism in China.

“I want to pursue research so I can help them participate in society, aquire jobs.”

The Fulbright scholar just returned from Guangzhou, China where she spent ten months assisting one of China’s top autism researcher in validating the Chinese Autism Diagnostic Scale.

“I realized, oh, whoa, we are the next generation that’s going to carry this type of research forward.”

It was a heady experience, much like the epiphany she had while attending a conference in Taiwain earlier this year and realizing the home she longed for was no longer in the states.

“The sense of home had changed for me. Home was no longer Franklin, Kentucky. Home was Gongzho China and that was a really interesting feeling.”

Reetzke’s next stop is the University of Texas at Austin where she will pursue a combined masters/doctoral degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders. She says continuing advocacy and research in China is definitely on her future horizon.

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

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