

## Alexa Hashem reflects on recent trip to Germany for 'Dance Olympics'

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MIDDLEBORO - In October, an article published in The Gazette about 16-year-old Middleboro resident Alexa "Lexi" Hashem and her then-upcoming trip to Germany for the International Dance Organization World Championships, a.k.a. the "Dance Olympics", blew up on the internet with hundreds of clicks, likes, and shares over social media from those wishing her luck at the internationally-renowned competition. Having since returned from the journey, we caught up with Alexa and one of her biggest fans to reflect on the experience.

"I kind of expected to start getting nervous but when the time came, I wasn't nervous at all. It was more like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe this is happening!' said the Middleborough High School junior. "It was such an amazing experience. I'll never forget it."

As a 16-year-old performing in modern dance, Alexa went up against over 40 of the best dancers from around the world in her age group and genre.

"My age division was 16 to 29 and I was the youngest one there. I ended up being 17<sup>th</sup> in worlds for the modern division. I was one of the 25 who made it past round one, then for round two they picked 14 and I was number 17. I wanted to win of course but it was still really cool," she said. "I made friends with

the two other girls from Team USA. They were both from the same studio in Washington," she continued. "Every other country had like 50-60 dancers, but USA only had us three."

When Alexa wasn't using the days leading up to the competition to practice in the hotel room, the Hashems took advantage of the extra time to take in the sights, sounds, and tastes of Germany.

"We did a lot of sightseeing around Frankfurt which was cool but my favorite place in Germany was this really cute place called Mainz. It's one of the oldest towns in Germany. The people there were so friendly and I just felt very safe and welcome there, and it was cool to see all the old architecture. It seemed like a lot of the buildings were really old and historic," she said. "One thing I noticed that's much different there is that people take their time more. People will sit at a restaurant and take three hours, everyone waits on the corner for the 'walk' signal even if no cars are coming - things like that stood out to me."

"And I'm a picky eater," she continued, "so it was hard to find food I liked, but one thing I tried that was really good was called schnitzel. I would eat that again."

"At first, I didn't know what to expect traveling to another country, to a place that we've never been to so far from home with our three daughters. It was exciting but a little intimidating too. When we got there, we felt comfortable from the start and all the anticipation slipped away," Alexa's mother Wendy Hashem said. "Everyone was helpful to us and we managed to figure out our way around."

When it came time for her daughter's performance, which actually came several days into the trip after much of the sightseeing, Mrs. Hashem says motherly pride was in full effect.

"Lexi was amazing on stage. Her nerves were never shown when she walked on the stage - she was calm and collective. I was beyond proud that Lexi wasn't afraid to step out of her comfort zone and travel that far to a place that was completely foreign to her and achieve something as spectacular as that. It was a great accomplishment and it will always be a wonderful memory to us."

And the trip may have set the stage for the next Hashem dancer to get in on the action in a possible future visit to the competition.

"My sister Julian is such a good dancer and I think seeing me definitely motivated her. While we were there she kept saying 'I just want to be dancing,'" Alexa said of her 14-year-old sister.

In her interview with The Gazette before the trip, Alexa noted she wished to pursue dance beyond high school. Now having returned from the biggest dance competition in the world, she says her passion for the craft only burns even brighter now.

"The flight there wasn't bad because we were all so excited and I slept most of the way anyway, but coming back was terrible. I guess coming back from a vacation is always terrible. I miss it - it was such an incredible experience so I'll probably be thinking about it for a while," Alexa said. "I already knew I didn't want to just stop dancing after I graduate next year, but now having had this experience I think I feel...; energized, even more than before. I know being a professional dancer involves a lot of traveling to new places so going to Germany almost felt like I was training or trying out for a job."

"It was just so crazy to perform something up on the Dance Olympics stage that I made up in my bedroom," she said of the self-choreographed routine she performed. "I would definitely go again if I get the call next year."