

Ball State student Taylor Hall shares her passion for activism and music

Grace McCormick | Feb. 26, 2021

When Kent Millard attended civil rights marches in the 1960s, he was taught to link arms with fellow protesters so no one would be separated from the group. Millard knew attending marches and protests could be dangerous even though participants were nonviolent. Trainers told him what to do in the face of violent retaliation.

“They told us if somebody hits you over the head with a club, just go down and cover your head,” he said. “And if you see someone being beaten, you jump on top of them and someone else jumps on top of you, so you’ll all get a few blows, but you won’t be beaten to death.”

If any protesters fought with the people who were beating them, Millard said, it would have undermined their efforts to secure voting rights for African Americans. Nearly 60 years later, he still emphasizes the effectiveness of nonviolence to his granddaughter, Ball State senior public communications major, Taylor Hall.

“My grandfather marched with Martin Luther King, and he shares his story all around the country for different churches and schools,” Hall said. “Growing up and hearing his stories kind of established a family orientation.”

Hall said she started getting involved in the Black Lives Matter movement in May 2020 after Indianapolis police shot and killed Dreasjon Reed. She joined Black Women in Charge, a community formed by young women to protest racial injustice, in June 2020 and played a part in organizing protests in Indianapolis after the death of George Floyd.

“Over the summer, you saw people from all over Indianapolis come together for this one cause, so it felt like a family,” Hall said. “I felt very safe and very comfortable. I would stray off by myself inside of protests just because I’m so comfortable inside of Indianapolis and I never felt in danger.”

In the spring 2020 semester, Hall was enrolled in Associate Professor of Communication Studies Beth Messner’s class about the rhetoric of marginalized voices and social movements.

Messner said the class discussed how social movements develop and are sustained, which Hall said inspired her to be a leader in the Black Lives Matter movement.

“I think Taylor’s interest in issues of equality is something that is just part of her spirit and DNA,” Messner said. “I think as a communication studies major in general, she has probably gained skills and gained confidence in being able to articulate messages and figure out how to reach audiences.”

Messner said the students who sign up for her “Rhetoric of Marginalized Voices” class seem to already be leaders in their communities.

"I think they have concern for their community and they are willing to address those concerns through trying to find solutions," Messner said. "I am just incredibly proud of the work that Taylor does and if I've had a small part in helping motivate or teach or inspire her, I consider that a blessing."

In addition to Messner's class, Hall said she was also inspired to join the Black Lives Matter movement because of her family members.

Hall's father wrote a song called "I Can't Breathe" after Floyd's death, which she first performed in front of what she estimated was about 10,000 people in Indianapolis.

"That being my first time performing the song was amazing, and from there, I really haven't stopped performing," she said. "In the summer, I was performing every week, sometimes multiple times a week, multiple times a day."

Hall said she received invitations from principals and school administrators to talk with middle and high school students after they heard her perform. She said she loves teaching students about social movements and inspiring them to use their voices. Hall founded Artivist LLC and developed a six-week education program for middle school students ages 12-15 to inspire them to be activists. Each week covered a specific topic: art, activism, education, diversity, inclusion and self-esteem.

"Afterward, I had my first 'Youth Voices Matter' rally at the statehouse, and the students had an opportunity to show what they learned through the 'artivist' series," she said. "That's probably my favorite part of what I've done so far — giving students an opportunity to have their voices heard and feel part of a movement."

The mission statement of Artivist LLC is "inspiring activism through art." Hall said she thinks music helps make social movements feel more accessible.

"It's easier for some people to understand your cause when it comes to music and other forms of activism," she said. "Most people are used to having someone speak to them ... but with music, people can just take it in, and process it easier and really take in each line and understand what that means."

Hall said she was inspired to create Artivist LLC to give back to the local community in Indianapolis.

"For me, what's most important in activism is community engagement and community development," she said. "You can't ask for a change in the world or in the state until you change your community. You have to help the people around you."

Hall estimated she performed at more than 20 protests through last summer and fall. Sam Boro, Hall's manager, encouraged her to travel to Washington, D.C. for the March on Washington Aug. 28, 2020.

“She just came out with [‘I Can’t Breathe’], and we were thinking, ‘It only makes sense to go to Washington, D.C. and make connections with people out there,’” Boro said. “She had a lot of success, a lot of people wanted to book her, and she got a lot of news and radio outlets trying to cover her.”

Hall said she is in the recording studio weekly and hopes to come out with an extended play of about five songs within the next few months. After she graduates this summer, Hall said, she wants to pursue music and public speaking as a full-time job.

“Taylor has always had talent,” Boro said. “With her music, I feel like she’s thinking of it more as a job instead of a hobby. When you transition a job from a hobby, you can see the success that comes with it too. She’s taking it more seriously, and people in her audience are aware of that.”

Hall tries to speak to students over Zoom once or twice a week and hopes to become more involved in the Indianapolis community after she graduates.

She also still frequently talks with her grandfather, who said they meet for lunch a few times each month.

Hall said she remembers the ideology of nonviolence and the resilience of activists before her each time she sings her song’s lyric “don’t stand for hate, stand for love.”