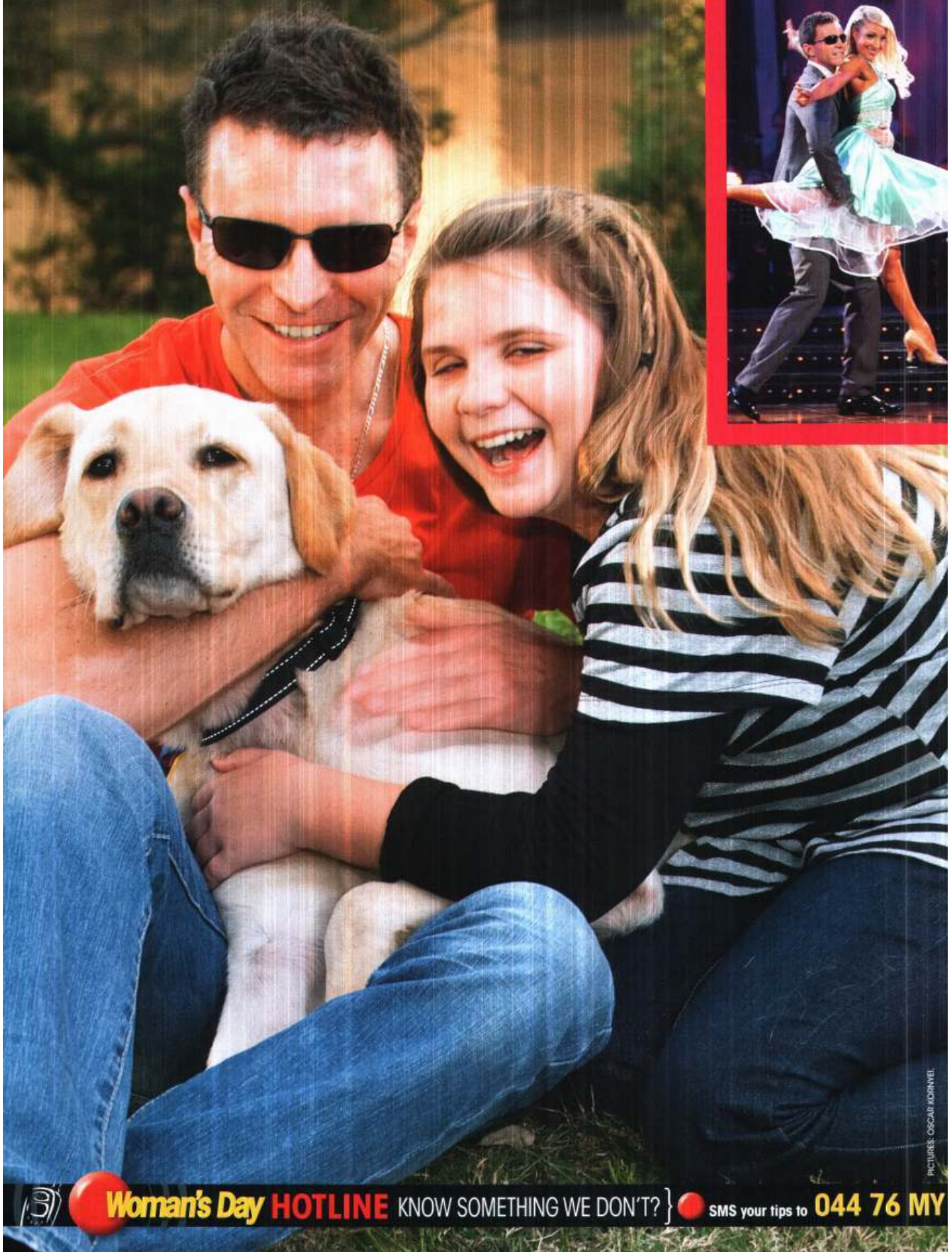




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GERRARD
GOSENS

'I'm dancing for my daughter'

The blind adventurer has never let his disability defeat his ambitions – now he's a role model for daughter Taylor, who inherited his condition, writes **JO KNOWSLEY**

Gerrard Gosens has the whole nation watching when he appears each week on *Dancing With The Stars* – but his 11-year-old daughter Taylor doesn't need to see his performance to be inspired.

Like lots of little girls, Taylor adores her father, but this pair have an additional bond. Taylor was born with Gerrard's congenital eyesight condition, and has just four per cent vision.

Gerrard, 39, has refused to let his blindness defeat him. He has co-piloted aircraft, competed in three Paralympic Games and remains determined to conquer Mount Everest after a failed attempt in 2005.

But the day Taylor was born in October 1997, he strongly felt there was something wrong with her eyesight. When his fear was confirmed, he almost collapsed with shock.

"We didn't really know, and nor did the doctors, how much my blindness might be hereditary," Gerrard says. "Our son Jordan, now 14, was born with no eyesight problems. And when Taylor arrived, doctors thought she was also fine.

"But when I reached down towards her she grabbed one of my fingers and pulled it to her face. I had a really sick, sinking feeling, because, even though I couldn't see them, I knew immediately there was something wrong with her eyes. When doctors later confirmed

it, I had to clutch the bedside railings, because I thought I was going to pass out."

Gerrard and his wife Heather, 43, who heads a special education unit for disabled kids in Brisbane, always wanted a large family. But after Taylor, they were so scared of producing another blind child they decided to have no more children.

Taylor has inherited Gerrard's disability, but also his dogged determination. Her dad admits they share a special bond.

he does was part of the attraction for Heather when they met in 1987. At the time, he was running from Cairns to Brisbane in a charity fundraiser.

"I stopped him on the street and told him I thought what he was doing was amazing," she recalls. "What I hadn't expected was to be confronted by this gorgeous, sexy man! He's just not what you expect a blind person to be. I have always loved the man. I've never really seen the disability."

'I want to show her, and all young people, that they can overcome obstacles to achieve their dreams'

"Yes, I suppose it's because I know the challenges Taylor will face as she goes through life in a sighted world," Gerrard says.

"By doing *Dancing*, I want to show her, and all young people, that they can overcome obstacles – whatever they are – to achieve their dreams."

Taylor reckons the best thing about her dad is that he's so adventurous.

"I love the fact he thinks anything is possible – and so do I," she says.

"I love rowing and horse-riding. I got Mum and Dad to help me learn to ride my bike to school. When I grow up I want to be a Paralympic horse-rider."

Gerrard's focus, strong-mindedness and determination to achieve the best in whatever

Gerrard's two-year-old seeing-eye dog, Chief, is a much loved part of the family. Taylor hopes to have her own seeing-eye dog in the future.

In the meantime, her dad strives to impart the attitude his own parents instilled in him.

"They always said, 'Go out and give it a go. If you run your bike into a fence, so be it'. And that's what I do," he says. "I think Taylor is going to be exactly the same."

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Gerrard, pictured with Taylor and Chief (far left), has been a real inspiration to his daughter as he performs with Jessica Raffa on 'DWTS' (top).



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