

Happy November and welcome back to the Kids Crusaders Corner. We woke up to our first snowfall of the season today, ugh. It feels like last year's snow just melted and we somehow missed summer and fall altogether.

As we enter into these "holiday" months, November is typically the month that everyone focuses on what they are "thankful" for (keeping with the Thanksgiving theme). There is nothing wrong with feeling thankful. It honestly should be something we do 12 months of the year instead of one, so this month's newsletter will be focused on the positives.

When I contemplated what I was going to write, I found myself stuck on not wanting to sound too cliché. I always try to write from my heart and keep things real. In a "special needs world" a lot of the times keeping it real doesn't always come across sounding positive or uplifting. Going into my 25<sup>th</sup> year of raising a child with a disability, I can attest to the fact that it is far easier to be consumed by the sadness and overwhelmed by the responsibilities that are present daily than it is to sit and feel grateful.

Taking out the disability factor in the equation, it seems like the world in general is truly falling apart. Every day on the news there are stories of countries at war, acts of terrorism, plans to separate families by deporting illegal immigrants, random mass shootings, the list is endless and not uplifting. So how does one (with or without a disability) separate these daily life events out and just be grateful? I think the answer lies within each individual person. For me personally it requires taking my mind out of the mass conglomerate of worries that race through my over-crowded brain and allowing myself time to just "be" in the moment. For me that means turning off the television and turning on some music that I enjoy, it means lighting some candles and watching the flames as they dance effortlessly. For some reason it takes a lot of energy to reflect on the good that is always right in front of us because we are consumed by all of the bad that is surrounding us. We are stronger than the bad that surrounds us. We can become stronger by making efforts to be more present and in the moment.

One of my favorite quotes from an incredible man, Fred Rogers, is "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster", I remember my mother's words and I am comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world." Ahh, Mister Rogers was a wise man with a kind soul and is sadly missed. Part of being in the moment and present can include being one of the "helper people". I am grateful to know so many helper people and that I choose to live my life being one.

I could write pages of things that I am grateful for and of course they would all sound like the typical "list" that most people would recite if asked what they were grateful for. I have my health (for the most part, although I am not enjoying the "aging" process and feel that it should be taught along with common core math as part of education curriculums), I have a husband that works hard to support his family and watches too many episodes of The Walking Dead (which is a mystery to me that he must watch this on TV when he has me personally walking around the house without an expensive film crew), I have 3 absolutely amazing kids that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world, I have a home (with dirty laundry and dishes that need to be done and dogs that bring in muddy paw prints and bathrooms

that need to be cleaned...but I have a home!), I have a professional career that has saved lives and touched hearts, I have food to feed my family and friends that are my chosen “family”. The basic list I guess I would call it. But if you stop the commotion around you and really take inventory of the basics, they really aren’t all that basic. The small things are truly the big things.

Being a parent to a child with a disability has given me so much more to embrace in life. The people that I have met that I wouldn’t have, the networking and emotional support that keeps me going on days when I just want to curl up and say “you win, I quit” are what come to mind as I am writing this. Being asked to be a part of DIG and the wonderful changes that they are making in the world that break down the barriers and support inclusion was so humbling for me (I love sharing my stories with all of you, even if I am always late for my article deadlines...sorry Debbie ☺). As some of you may already know, I am a huge fan of “paying it forward”. I believe that if every person would take the time to practice this each and every day, no matter how small the gesture, the world we live in might have a chance at turning itself around. People are born innocent. Ignorance and hatred are learned behaviors.

There are 2 great organizations that I want to mention in this month’s article because they have impacted my life (and Nick’s life) in such a positive way. The Facebook group I Run for Michael ([www.whoirun4.com](http://www.whoirun4.com)) that matches athletes with people who can’t participate in activities for physical or developmental reasons fosters loving and lifelong relationships. We were blessed with 2 amazing “runners” that have made Nick feel so incredibly special. They are family to us and I am so happy to be able to congratulate them on their engagement! Nick was so excited and we can’t wait to hear more about their wedding plans. They reinforce that “Happily Ever After” truly exists. (We love you Jen Seid and Adam Macdonald!! Thank you for bringing so much joy into Nick’s life.)

And the second organization is called The Kyler Koat Project. A Kyler Koat is a coat made from 2 layers of fleece with a hole to place over a person’s head. The Kyler Koat replaces the need for a winter coat. Nick received his last week (just in time for the snow) and already I can see how much easier our daily struggle during the winter months are going to be. I will no longer have to wrestle Nick’s arms through store bought jackets and it will shave literally 30 minutes off of our morning routine. The Kyler Koat Project was founded in memory of Kyler Reese Marshall who passed away at the age of four from complications due to his disabilities. His mom and volunteers spend many hours sewing these Koats for families, paying it forward and keeping Kyler’s legacy alive with unconditional love. They make every effort to donate these Koats at no cost to the families and rely on donations to support their foundation. They can be found at [www.facebook.com/KylerKoats](http://www.facebook.com/KylerKoats) and donations can be accepted at [gofundme.com/kylerkoats](http://gofundme.com/kylerkoats) (If anyone feels like paying it forward!). I want to thank Alecia Marshall on behalf of all the families that she has helped and for letting Kyler live on in the hearts of so many.

In closing, I would just like to extend my gratitude to all of the friends I have made along this journey. There is always strength in numbers. During your times of reflection, try to stay in the present moment and embrace all of the love that is within you. Reach back and grab a hand of someone that needs it, offer up a smile to someone who has lost theirs. Pay it forward. Make memories.

May your holidays be surrounded with family and friends, love and laughter...and memories.  
Happy Thanksgiving from our family to yours!

“To be a star you must shine your own light, follow your own path and don’t worry about the darkness for that is when the stars shine the brightest.” (Unknown)

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