



BECOMING YOUR BEST

Stories Of Hope And Encouragement

Becoming Your Best Newsletter

Greetings,

Helen Keller is quoted as saying, "When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another." This is great wisdom coming from a lady who had to overcome many difficult and challenging obstacles in her own life.

Truly, she did the best she could and many miracles were wrought in her life and in the lives of millions of others that she impacted. Helen Keller's story is inspirational and provides hope to those who may face difficult and challenging situations as well.

Our story this month is also a story that is inspirational and I trust one that will provide hope to many of our readers. This story is helpful to understanding the perspective of parents of a child with special needs. It also portrays the positive impact that this young man has had on the lives of many others.

One of the keys to helping this young man to overcome some of the obstacles in his life has been through his involvement with a wonderful organization—the Special Olympics. Time and time again, I have seen children and adults benefit from their participation in Special Olympics.

I encourage you to find out more about Special Olympics and do what you can to support it—with either your time by volunteering or by a donation to help support those with special needs who want to participate.

To quote Anne Frank, "No one has ever become poor by giving."

Submit your inspirational stories to: stories@becomingyourbest.com.

Subscribe to our FREE newsletter: newsletter@becomingyourbest.com.

[WE ARE NOW ON FACEBOOK—BECOME A FAN.](#)

Eagle photo by Bob Sumners. See more at www.shootthebeach.com

Mission:

We are dedicated to presenting inspiring stories of hope and encouragement about individuals with disabilities.

These stories of success are meant to provide support and the keys to "Becoming Your Best!"

Thank you for your stories and your support!

George M. Graham Jr.

"HE HAS TO LIVE IN OUR WORLD; WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN HIS."

BY TERRI ALLEN

That simple phrase has become a motto in our life and sums it all up in our day to day, month to month, and year to year routine.

Our story begins 18 years ago when I gave birth to our son. He didn't waste any time coming into this world. Only five hours after arriving at the hospital, he was placed in our arms and our hearts. He became the youngest of our five children.



When Tyler was born his hips were dislocated and he was placed in a harness that he would wear for a year until the bones and sockets in his hip grew to fit and function properly. After four other children, we did what most parents do—we watched for the first of everything: his first smile, his first words, his first steps, etc. Strangely enough, many of those did not occur in the time frame as our other children. With his first birthday approaching, Tyler was not crawling or saying any decipherable words, only grunting. Of course I blamed it on the harness, because it was so difficult for him to crawl.

At age four, we had his hearing checked because he still was not talking as clearly as he should, just a few words but no sentences. Walking now was not a problem and he was everywhere walking, running and jumping.

When Tyler began kindergarten, there still wasn't age-appropriate talking and he was so incredibly shy. He would place his arm over his eyes for much of the day and cry often. The teachers conferred with us, and we agreed with their decision to test Tyler's IQ. We also agreed with their recommendation to hold Tyler back in kindergarten.

We moved to another state because of a military transfer, where again, Tyler went to kindergarten. At the end of that year, they also recommended testing. This time the results were more revealing. I can still recall that day as if it just occurred. While sitting in a room with many teachers and counselors, my husband and I were informed, "Your son's test came back and he is MMR, Mild Mentally Retarded."

As if in a movie, my whole world stopped and I remember saying in disbelief, "What do you mean?" They continued to talk and I never really heard the words they said. I didn't know what it meant. It was just too much to absorb, and I didn't know then that this process of learning and comprehending would never really stop.

I remember the first Special Olympics he participated in the following year. We stood in the stands and watched the kids file in. It was too much for my husband to bear. He left with tears in his eyes and cried wondering what was going to happen to our son. I stayed and watched Tyler run, jump and laugh, still mind you, as shy as ever. They always had to coax him to do anything.



"HE HAS TO LIVE IN OUR WORLD..." - CONTINUED

In the next couple of years we had what seemed to be appointment after appointment with various physicians, always trying to find an answer. The drives home were always the same—silence, tears and fear of the unknown for our son. We questioned what was going to happen to him, what would he be when he grew up, or maybe, just maybe, one morning he would wake up and be like our other children?

We also questioned what happened. Did I do something wrong in my pregnancy, was it my fault, was it Dad's fault, what happened? Every day seemed to consume us with questions and wanting desperately so many answers.

We made our final move with the military to Elizabeth City, NC in 2001. Tyler was beginning 2nd grade. This is the year I really began to learn about Individual Education Programs (IEP's). Modifications were put in place for classes and additional services were provided such as speech classes.



This is also where our journey towards him reaching his highest potential really began. Tyler would see a pediatric neurologist every year for evaluations and genetic tests, while making sure the schools were giving him the best they had to offer.

That being said, there were times throughout Tyler's school years that we had to be huge advocates, fighting for and demanding certain items as required by law. I was finding I had a substantial support system, and I welcomed it with open arms and an open heart.

It was during those elementary school years that a certain peacefulness instilled itself in my husband and me. We finally came to realize and accept that Tyler is who he is, and nothing was going to change his genetics, and nothing was going to change the outcome of his disability.



We stopped searching for the needle in the haystack, stopped searching for why, and began our determined journey about how can we make his life better. The most important thing we have always wanted for Tyler was to be accepted by his peers and to have him feel like all the other kids even when we know he was not.

As Tyler grew older, we saw how important it was for him to have those same feelings. He just wanted to fit in. Our guiding principle of "He has to live in our world, we don't have to live in his" took root and grew.

Tyler participated in everything just like the other kids in elementary school, even dressing up as Thomas Jefferson for a historical presentation. We also realized that by the time he entered middle school his shyness was subsiding.

One of the things he looked forward to every year was the Special Olympics, and by this time Mom and Dad always sat in the stands and cheered him on, and yes, with tears every year. This was the day he could jump the highest, run the fastest and be the best he could be. The friends he made from those volunteer helpers (huggers), my goodness, to this day they still hug him and always smile.

Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Allen (Dave and Terri) and to Tyler for sharing this wonderful story with our readers. All photographs used in the article were taken by family members and used with permission.

"HE HAS TO LIVE IN OUR WORLD..." CONTINUED

During these middle school years we noticed how many friends he was making. He also asked to join the wrestling team. His 7th and 8th grades let him experience being part of a real team for the first time, enjoying something normal, being like the other kids. His teammates knew Tyler was not like them, but they loved him and laughed with him. Tyler taught those kids something special about being special.

As he entered high school, I recall his first day. He said he was so scared and he had picked his fingers until they bled a few times because he was so nervous. This is a telltale behavior he's exhibited for years when he is scared.

Now, it's been 4 years since Tyler walked through those doors the first time at Northeastern High School. He is a senior with only six months to go until he graduates. He has not been in regular education classes since 8th grade, but does attend elective classes with the other students like JROTC, Phys Ed, Music, etc.)



Tyler has for all 4 years worn a gold sock and green sock every Friday for football games. The past three years he has been a volunteer on the football team as the water boy, or has he says, "Hydration Manager." And yes, even while on the field with the team he has worn his green sock and gold sock.



We have noticed in the past couple of years how many people know him. It seems all the kids at school have befriended and love him. I don't say that lightly. Even on vacations we have met people who know him or know of him.

One of his greatest accomplishment or more aptly put, gift, occurred this past October at Homecoming. Tyler was nominated by his peers for Homecoming King.

Though he was not ultimately elected Homecoming King, he was selected as one of the Princes on the Homecoming Court. It was an emotional moment in our lives that the world stood still, seeing him on the field at half time, dressed handsomely in a suit, hearing his name called, (I'm crying as I type this remembering it again.)

As he walked toward the crowd, I could hear the cheers, I could hear students and adults yelling, "TYLER!" I knew at that moment we had been blessed and that all we ever wanted was acceptance for him by his peers and that had been granted. I reminisce about that shy little boy with his arms over his eyes now walking proud, head held high with that tremendously familiar smile that everyone knows. I knew at that moment that Tyler has made a difference in so many people's lives.



Watch for something new coming in 2012—Quest to Becoming Your Best!

"HE HAS TO LIVE IN OUR WORLD..." CONTINUED



Having a special needs child is extremely taxing. It requires an abundance of never ending patience, dedication, and love. As we have come to realize over the years, it can also be the most rewarding gift you will ever receive. Most parents praise their children for what they do; we are praising Tyler for what he gives to so many people each and every day. Always remember, "They have to live in our world, we don't have to live in theirs."

Tyler's senior picture will appear in the yearbook; under it will be his motto...

"Life is not about being different, but making a difference in life."



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Special Olympics transforms lives through the joy of sport, every day, everywhere. They are the world's largest sports organization: with nearly 4 million athletes in more than 170 countries -- and millions more volunteers and supporters. They are also a global social movement.

Please show your support of Special Olympics. Help them reach more people with intellectual disabilities and bring them the power of sport to build confidence and good health. Donate or volunteer today!

You can find out more information about Special Olympics by going to their website at <http://www.specialolympics.org>.

Visit our website - <http://www.becomingyourbest.com/> and become a friend on Facebook at Becoming Your Best. We appreciate your support and spreading hope and encouragement to others.