



The Magnetic Life

Joshua Florence, TxP2P Parent

I would like to start off with a quick lesson in physics (please do not tune me out just yet because I said physics). By definition, a magnet is a material or object that produces a magnetic field. The magnetic field is an invisible force that is responsible for the attraction of objects like iron and opposite poles, as well as repelling other magnets with the same pole. The life of a magnet is full of what are called magnetic moments. Without getting too far off track, we will define a magnetic moment as an action that occurs between the poles causing an attraction or repelling.

I have learned many lessons over the past three years as a parent of a child with special health care needs. There are many things in our life that shape who we are but are kept hidden in the depths of our hearts and minds. Disability is not usually one of them. It's hard not to notice the person in the wheelchair, the little girl who is walking "funny", the boy who drools or the kid that is yelling and screaming like a two-year old having a tantrum but is clearly in his teens. Yes, disability is something that we often have to wear so that all can see, sometimes by choice but often not. It is this exposure that allows what I like to call Magnetic moments to occur

Elle had only been out of the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) for a couple of days, but as her father, I had made my mind up that I was not going to let her "special needs" stop us from doing anything, so we ventured out. Sharon, my wife, was much more hesitant, she wasn't sure if it was the right time to be getting out. You see, Elle had a G-tube placed two weeks prior and we were on an "every three hour feeding" schedule. After finishing a few errands to pick up some medications, we decided to go to one of our favorite lunch places. It was time to feed Elle as well. No matter how discrete you try to be, it is hard to hide the fact that you are hooking up a tube to another tube that is coming out of your baby's stomach. Once everything was hooked together, Sharon sat in the booth and held Elle while I stood next to her holding the syringe pouring formula into it. All of a sudden the syringe came out of the extension and the formula dumped all over Sharon and Elle in the booth. Sharon sat there, soaked and almost in tears as she said, "I TOLD YOU THIS WAS A BAD IDEA!!!!" I replied, "Everything is okay, we are fine." As I started to clean up the mess, Sharon whispered, "Now those two ladies are just staring at us!!" I turned and looked over my shoulder, there sat two older ladies across the way watching us. We quickly finished eating, packed everything up and began to leave. As we walked out, one of the two ladies who had been staring at us reached out and stopped Sharon. "Ma'am..." I froze and thought to myself, oh crap, here we go. Just as tears began to well up in the lady's eyes, she shared, "I just wanted to tell you, that you have a beautiful family." I was speechless, and did not know how to respond. I looked over at Sharon as she said "Thank you" while crying.

Texas Parent to Parent

1805 Rutherford Ln. ★ Suite 201 ★ Austin, TX 78754 ★ 866-896-6001 ★ 512-458-8600

website: www.txp2p.org ★ Email: info@txp2p.org

Over the next few months, I would often think back to that day. It was in that moment that I realized that not everybody that is staring is staring for the wrong reasons. You see, that day we had a magnetic moment. It was a moment, we were placed in a situation and realized we had put our “-“ side out. Instead of pushing us further away with another negative, that lady recognized that we needed her “+” side. It was something so small, something she probably will never remember, but I will remember it for the rest of my life. Our life is full of these moments, times were we see someone and realize they could use an encouraging word, “Hey - look at how awesome you walking!” or, “I love your wheelchair!” Or something as simple as, “Your daughter is beautiful” can impact a life and change the way they see world. You get to make the choice. Am I going to repel them away by not saying anything, or do I pull them closer, making them stronger? Life is full of these magnetic moments; why not focus on making them positive.

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