



Those First Steps By: Christy Weeks

He was standing in the girl's bathroom with his female teacher, a distressing situation for a five year old boy. To make things worse he would have to wear girl's pants for the rest of the school day but he had wet himself and needed to change. She helped him out of the wet clothes and had to stop herself from letting out a cry of shock. He was scarred from neck to toes, some much more severe than others, it almost looked like he had been burned. She gently helped him change. She would not let him see her cry, so she walked him back to the classroom and then made her way to the lounge where she broke into tears. She had come into that bathroom out of necessity, maybe even a little disappointed in him, but would walk out touched and change my son's life more than she will ever know.

On October 22, 2005 my son Cruz was in a car accident where he was thrown out the window and critically wounded. As a result, he missed all but the first and last three weeks of Pre-K and was confined to a wheelchair with little hope that he would walk again. Ms. Reva Fisher was to be his Kindergarten teacher and honestly I wasn't sure how that would work out. I had heard from other parents and students that she was strict and hard. When I first met her I left with a feeling that Cruz would be a hindrance to her and seriously thought of changing teachers. After that incident in the bathroom all of our lives would change. Ms. Fisher told me that story about the bathroom at our parent-teacher conference and from that point on, Cruz and Ms. Fisher were buddies.

Ms. Fisher was the kind of hands-on teacher that you need for Kindergarten. She was always creating and having the kids use their imagination. She was funny, smart, inventive, kept the kids excited about school and yes... she was also strict. I appreciated that quality about her. She wasn't strict for her own benefit but for that of our children. She would expect nothing less than the best from her students. She had the ability to make learning fun and because of that my son, who at times was teased at school, enjoyed school and looked forward to each day. Cruz had spent many hours in physical therapy and was absolutely certain he would walk again. He slowly regained his strength and had begun to walk some prior to Kindergarten. I sent the wheelchair to school to help Ms. Fisher. Cruz tired easily and I didn't see it as her duty to have to carry him around. We left the wheelchair at school and he started walking onto and off the bus. I later learned that other teachers would "make" him use the wheelchair. He told me he had to get off the bus and go right to his chair. I saw the sadness in his eyes when he told me. I was angry. I couldn't understand why anyone would treat a child as disabled instead of guiding and encouraging. Again Ms. Fisher saved my son's spirit. She saw what was happening and asked me if she could "hide" the chair. Ms. Fisher encouraged Cruz to walk off the bus to the breakfast line and carry his own tray. She described to me the joy when he could be "normal". She encouraged him to walk in school and on the playground. She was like a surrogate mother and physical therapist. She never doubted he could do anything.

At the Spring Concert in 2006, Cruz was brought to the gym with his classmates in his wheelchair. I had come in late and only a few seats were at the top of the bleachers.

The students all sang and danced around in their chairs with the choreography. At one point they all laid on their backs like ladybugs and Cruz tried too. At the end of the show it was announced that the children had a gift for all of the mothers... a flower. The children had to walk to the bleachers and hand them to us. I was hurt and worried because I felt that Cruz would be left out, just one more group exercise that he could not participate in. They played music and Cruz stood up and walked. He came all the way across the gym floor to the bleachers. All the parents around me were excited and impressed. I was going to go down to get my flower but Cruz started to make his way up those bleachers. Parent after parent offered their hands and arms to my son to get to me at the very top. I couldn't see well since my eyes were filled with tears. My son was walking, the parents were helping, his teacher was watching and I gave him the biggest, most embarrassing hug I could when he made it to me.

I have to admit that I worked very hard with Cruz to help him walk again, but Ms. Fisher played a large part too. She was there when I wasn't. She taught my son independence, courage and hope. She didn't ever give up on him and she helped mold him into what he is today... a healthy, studious, considerate, hard-headed, hard-working, nine year old boy. She also taught him the value of being a good student and to be excited about learning. He told me once that he loved Ms. Fisher and I believe that he does. Ms. Fisher holds a place in my heart for what she did for my son. Words on a piece of paper cannot do justice to the part she played in Cruz's life. Who would have thought that a car accident would create hope and a sense of pride for a young boy and his mother, that a trip to the bathroom would open the heart of a teacher who was ready to retire, and inspire all of us to do our very best?



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