

February 26, 2017

Dear CRMA Family,

I wrote this a few years ago and CRMA was kind enough to share it to the families in our school. It was very well received. Riley recently told me, some of the younger kids in school are staring pointing and name calling. I don't feel they are doing this because they are mean. I think kids do this because they don't understand. Please take the time to read this and then if you have never had the conversation with your child. Take the time to talk to them about dwarfism, and all differences. The book and movie "Wonder" are great starting points.

My name is Kirsten Miller. I am single mother of two wonderful children (11 and 12). I am a Fire Lieutenant/ Paramedic for Miami-Dade Fire Rescue. The Engine Company that I work on is E55 in Cutler Bay, FL. I have also lived in or near Cutler Bay for the last 31 years. If you asked me 11 years ago what I know about dwarfism, I would not have known very much. I probably only knew that it was the medical term for people that are little.

On January 19, 2007 that all changed. My very handsome baby boy, Riley Jon Miller was born. Just days before he was born I found out he had some form of dwarfism. When I gave birth it was determined that he has Achondroplasia. Achondroplasia is the most common form of dwarfism. About 70% of all people with dwarfism have achondroplasia; however there are more than 200 different kinds of dwarfism also known as skeletal dysplasia. A child with achondroplasia is born 1 in about 25,000 births. There are an estimated 30,000 people in the United States with dwarfism. Dwarfism is not a disease; it does not have or need a cure. People with dwarfism do not usually have cognitive learning delays.

So as you read you can read, Riley is very special just by birth, and I am a very lucky mom to have been given such a gift. My son is bigger than life. He has a wicked sense of humor. He loves baseball, and soccer, chess, and video games. He has many friends and family that love him and he loves. Recently I noticed my very outgoing son has become more reserved around new groups of people. At first, I thought "Oh well it's just an age thing, he'll grow out of it". Then I realized, he started noticing when people stare at him. I even saw a woman in a store trying to take his picture last week. He was called a Midget, by a grown man. The ignorance of these

people is trying to dim my son's bright light. As a mother, I want to scream and shout and tell people how ignorant and rude they are. Then, like a light bulb, it hit me, I was once ignorant. (I never have, nor would I ever do or say the awful things some people do.) So I need to try and get the word out, but not by yelling and screaming at people. Not by cursing them out. That really doesn't work anyway. Maybe something I do or something I say will change a person and the way they act toward people with differences.

See it really is not just about dwarfism, it is about acceptance of mankind. In the last 11 years I made a realization - It is human nature to look at anything that is out of the "norm". We look at pretty people, and ugly people. We look at people with strange haircuts, or colors, people wearing clothes too tight, pants too low. I could go on, but I think I've made my point. The problem is when it goes from a casual look, to a stare. When people take unwanted pictures or call people unwanted names. Riley has not been taught labels. He describes people as he sees them. It is often quite cute. A "red head", is "The girl with orange hair." A description is just that, it describes the person. Labels are words that have a negative connotation attached to it. The words Midget, Retard, Fag, Nigger, Spick, Honkey, etc... these words all have a very negative connotation (They were hard for me to even type). When these words are used and directed at a person, they are intended to be hurtful. I cannot think of anyway any of these words can be used that is not belittling, and degrading. If you are to use any of these words, you are degrading the person you are directing it toward.

I wish my son could grow up in a world that would not judge him because he is little. I wish when people look at Riley, all they see is a handsome blond hair blue eyed boy. That he has the best smile and most contagious laugh. I know I will not always be around to protect him, so I hope to give him the self-confidence to deal with any adversity that comes his way. I hope he always has good friends to help to defend against the bullies, when the bullies do come around. I hope he handles himself with all the life skills he has learned along the way. I hope he keeps his light shining bright for the world to see. I know God has big plans for my "little" boy.

If you want to learn more about dwarfism please visit, www.lpaonline.org, or

www.udprogram.com

