

# This Is OUR Story

BY PAT WHITE

Forward by Patricia White



THE SMILE SAYS IT ALL! Through the years I have often wondered why I was chosen to be blessed with a child that somehow smiles “through it all”. This journey began on Tuesday, April 21, 1987 at 11:30a.m. Gazing into the eyes of my newborn daughter was one of the most refreshing experiences I’ve ever encountered. It was hard to imagine her entry into this world with such a beautiful smile versus the normal screaming of a newborn. What could she possibly be smiling about? The next 31 years would somehow unveil this mystery.

I can only imagine the questions that may be pouring out of your heads wondering what our life has been like. Until you have walked a mile in our shoes, you’d never fully understand the life of dealing with a disability in a world that seems to not be so accepting. As challenging as it can sometimes be, the joy that my daughter brings to everyone she encounters far outweighs it all. Shannon never meets a stranger without sharing that precious smile and words of encouragement. “What a gift to the world!”

I vividly recall my sister and I feeding the homeless one cold winter in Atlanta. I was so determined to include my son and of course, Shannon

so they could partake in the experience. As we passed out food and warm coats, Shannon peered through the car window and summoned a gentleman whose presence was probably shunned upon by the world. Although he carried all the characteristics of someone living on the streets for a long period of time, Shannon spoke nothing less than kind words to him. She told him he looked nice and she liked his jacket. This gesture from a nearly 5 year old child really pulled on my heartstrings. Even at this young age she somehow knew the importance of letting others know that their existence matters. To this day, she includes those in need in her daily prayers. Imagine this...SHE is the one that is waiting on her miracle, but allocates time to always pray for others. “Again, what a gift to the world!”

When Shannon confronted me about sharing her story with the world I was elated, yet hesitant at the same time. The humiliation, discrimination, exclusion, and embarrassment my daughter has had to face during her lifetime was more than what I cared to give energy to. Yet with each challenging escapade I’ve managed to find solace in focusing on the bright side of it all. If she can smile through it, how dare I not count each episode as a hidden blessing. Each morning we pray and thank God for yet another day. Her favorite scriptures are as follows:

- The joy of the Lord is my strength.
- For we walk by faith, not by sight.
- Now fit is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Although she stands firm in believing for her miracle, in the natural she continues to endure situations that are “not so nice”. In writing HER story, it is OUR desire to shed light on the innermost feelings that people with disabilities face. Hopefully, you will embrace what she has to say and believe with me that she is indeed a gift to the world!