

WISH BOOK: The power of perseverance

Single mother of autistic child has her sights set on family success



Aiden Bechtel, 6, and his mother Kristy Bechtel pose in front of their apartment.

CLARKSVILLE — Kristy Bechtel is not a quitter.

The 36-year-old single mother has worked hard over the past years, doing everything she can to make a good home for her son, 6-year-old Aiden, who was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy when he was 8 months old and Asperger Syndrome at 5.

“Everything I went through in my life prepared me for Aiden,” she said. When she was 23, Bechtel lost her fiancé to a drunk driver. She was seven months pregnant, and ended up giving up that child for adoption.

“Being 23 years old and still in college and working and just the sheer magnitude of [his death] was just too much to deal with,” she said. “I had to take a year out of school just to deal with that and financial woes. It’s like a big boulder being rolled over you.”

Eventually, it was Bechtel’s strong faith that helped her get through it — a faith that is still her rock today. “It’s been a long, difficult road,” she said. “Christ has played a central role. When I accepted Christ, that’s when the whole doors to my life really opened. “And that is why I am here today; His power and mercy and forgiveness, also to show that to others, has been a major part of my life.”

Bechtel works hard, against all odds. She cooks and cleans and helps teach Aiden as a single mother.

“And then you’ve got your finances that can fall apart at any minute,” she said. “You live pay-check-to-paycheck — car insurance, rent, utilities, food, gas — the money just evaporates.”

Bechtel studied organizational leadership and supervision at Purdue University, and she said that has helped in having the tools to raise a child with autism. Working with New Hope Services Inc. has also gone a long way to getting the family to higher ground.

“My mother always said, ‘Do your best,’” Bechtel said. “‘Nobody can ever complain if you do your best.’” Part of doing her best, she said, meant understanding when to put her pride aside and ask for help. She learned this six years ago, when she lived with her infant in a homeless shelter. They then spent five years living in the Jeffersonville Housing Authority, and in August, got an apartment in Clarksville.

“We’re starting a new chapter of our lives and this is an upgrade,” she said. “You go to the shelter, then you get your own place, now you move to something better. The only way is up.

“People [may] look down on the housing authority, but you [have] to start somewhere and keep building up. You’re not going to start in a mansion when you first start out. It just doesn’t work that way.”

Bechtel said when Aiden first started school, it was difficult. But the pair’s perseverance — the single word that she said best describes their situation — as well as guidance from New Hope have done much in helping him progress.

“I have worked with him day in and day out,” she said. “That first night, when he had homework, it was really hard. [Now] he knows all his alphabet, he knows all the way to 20, he knows sight words and he’s starting to read. It’s unbelievable. “If you look at his report card now compared to what it was a year ago, it’s a difference between night and day.”

Chelsey Engle, the family’s case manager at New Hope, helps Bechtel work with Aiden — teaching things like sight words, discipline and positive reinforcement. She said Bechtel has been completely receptive and ready to do anything it takes to help make a better life for her child.

“I think her story kind of speaks for itself,” she said. “I nominated her because of how far she’s come. It’s just the perfect story of stepping stones and doing it as a single mom with an autistic child; I can’t imagine.”

Bechtel said her next goal, hopefully within the next few years, is to secure a home with a back yard. “I’m hoping that when I do finally get debt-free, I can look at that house with the back yard,” she said. “It’s not out of reach.”

No matter what, though, Bechtel believes that if she keeps working hard and follows her faith, things will line up. “If I just take time to listen, persevere, trust and be patient and follow God’s leading, I know it will take me to the place I need to be.

“It’s not always going to be easy; sometimes doing the right thing isn’t easy. But for this child, I’m going to continue to stick it out forever.”

HOW TO HELP

The best way to assist families is with a financial donation with which items will be purchased. With each of the profiles of five families being featured Nov. 28 – Dec. 2 in the News and Tribune and at www.newsandtribune.com will be a list of items needed.

Donations can be dropped off at **New Hope, 1302 Wall St., Jeffersonville.**

Checks can be mailed to New Hope to that address.

Call 812-288-4304 or email patricia_kitehannon@newhopeservices.org with questions.

To donate with a **credit card**, please go to www.newhopeservices.org/donate.html and designate it as a **Wish Book** donation. The deadline to donate is Dec. 15.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE FOR FAMILY NEEDS

FAMILY NEEDS

Aiden Bechtel, 6 years old
Pants and shirt size, 7 to 8,
Shoe size, 1 to 1.5

- Christmas tree (real or artificial)
- Winter hat, gloves and scarf for a boy
- Underwear, boys size 8-10
- Socks, Aiden size 1, Kristy size 11
- Bookshelves
- Recliner
- Kitchen table and chairs
- Coffee table
- Kitchen storage/ cupboard
- Car (current one damaged)
- New bed for Aiden —slats, headboard, footboard for twin-sized bed frame
- Curtains and curtain rods
- Hat, gloves and scarf for adult woman
- Microwave
- Purse and perfume
- Towels and wash clothes
- Queen and twin-sized fitted and flat sheets

WANTS

- Troll dolls
- Legos (Batman)
- Cars (the movie)
- New bike with training wheels
- Max the Cliff Climber
- Terra Climber
- Stinky the Garbage Truck
- Magic tracks (glow-in-the-dark race car track)
- Hot Wheels car carrying case
- Hot Wheels Ultimate Garage
- SpongeBob (anything)
- Kinetic Sands and Silly Putty
- Favorite colors: Blue, green, yellow and purple

By Aprile Rickert

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