



An Inspiring Family



by Nora Cook, Parent Advisor



My name is Nora Cook, and I am a Parent Advisor for Tennessee Infant Parent Services. Through my job, I am privileged to meet many parents who are experiencing a wide variety of challenges and struggles associated with the disabilities of their children. Some are dealing with the complications resulting from the premature birth of a child. Others are coping with physical disabilities and the necessary whirlwind of ongoing therapy and multiple doctor appointments. Still others are caught in a frightening nightmare of huge medical bills, exhaustive demands on their time, and bouts of depression. It's overwhelming for them, and that's definitely an understatement. My job is to help these parents as they struggle to find a balance between the chaos and the control that they need to have in order to be the best parents they can be.

I was recently led to a precious family who was just embarking on the "roller-coaster ride" which was all too familiar to so many others, but was still foreign and terrifying to them. The day I met James, Laura, Lawton and Megan, I knew there was something special about them, but at that point I didn't know what it was. All I knew was that they were overwhelmed and devastated by the recent diagnosis of Megan as having what was known as infantile spasms. This meant that she was experiencing up to three hundred seizures each day. The family was shocked by what was happening, because for the first six months of her life, Megan was developing normally and reaching all the expected milestones. Then one day (Laura knows the exact date and time) the spasms began occurring. I have no doubt that Laura and James will remember the details of that day for the rest of their lives. While everyone around them was going about the daily routines of their lives, the Broyles family was experiencing this event with Megan that, from that day on, would change their lives.

I met Laura and James a month after the diagnosis had been made. Both parents were frantic for answers, help, and support. As I began my weekly visits with them, I was amazed at the stamina of Laura as she relentlessly waded through an amazing schedule of daily therapy, appointments with various doctors and specialists, and an intrusive parade of professionals marching into her home to work with Megan. She seemed to possess an inner strength that enabled her to juggle everything and at the same time meet the everyday needs of her four-year old son, Lawton. I quickly began to look forward to our weekly visits because I enjoyed being there, and I was glad to be a part of the plan to help this family. Little did I know that they would help me in ways that would drastically affect my outlook on my career, my family, my faith, and my life.

Meanwhile, while Laura was dealing with the daily grind of therapy, medications, exercises, etc., James was providing for the family. He already had a good job, but he took on two other jobs so that Laura would be able to stay home with the children. It was necessary for Megan to take a medication that was very expensive, but absolutely necessary. James made sure that his daughter received every dose. While dealing with all of this, he made time for Lawton so that he would feel special. Every night at the children's bedtime, if he was at work, he would take time to talk with both of them on the phone and say their prayers with them. How many fathers would take the time to do that?

I can't identify any isolated incident, but the entire experience with this special family has strengthened my spirit and enabled me to grow as an individual, and hopefully as a professional as well. There have been some extremely scary and trying times along the way. Laura and James just dealt with each one as it occurred and looked for hidden blessings within. They looked for the positive and tried not to dwell on the scary parts. There were also many good things that occurred along the way. These made it easier to get through the tough times.

This family is truly grateful for the help they receive from everyone. At Christmas, they invited all of the therapists and me into their home for a lovely dinner to express their thankfulness for our help with Megan. After dinner, they presented each of us with a special gift individually tailored to our unique personalities. (Laura had secretly called our spouses to find out what types of things we liked.) As if this weren't enough, later that evening the clown ministry from their church showed up and told us that they were there to express what Laura and James wanted to say to us but couldn't. I knew we were in for something special because I looked over at Laura and she was already crying. They performed the most moving tribute I have ever seen. It was a skit about true acceptance and love for others. Then they lined up and sang "Thank You for Giving to the Lord" as they signed the words. It was a truly spiritual experience. That living room was completely filled with the purest form of love I have ever felt. I looked around to see if anyone else was feeling it, and chills ran down my spine as I realized that everyone was affected as if we were one entity. It was so powerful. The most special part was seeing Megan sitting in the midst of all the people who had grown to care so deeply for her. It was too powerful for me to express with mere words. I'm crying now as I recall that evening. A simple gesture of thankfulness on this family's part became one of the most amazing spiritual experiences of my life! It was absolutely beautiful.

That evening came to a close, and we all left to resume our individual lives. As I continue to work with this family along with the others that I see, I ask God to work through me. I know that by myself I am inadequate to meet their needs. I am very lucky and thank God every day for allowing me to do the work that I do.

