



November 2011

Dear Valued Clients & Friends,

### **More on Life with Maggie**

Through the years I occasionally have shared stories about our special-needs, easy-to-love daughter Maggie. Many people have responded on how much they enjoy these windows into her world, calling them heartwarming and asking for more. More than a few readers have even suggested I write a book. For now, occasional vignettes will have to suffice.

The premise behind the ever-popular All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten comes to mind in regards to Maggie. Despite being a now 26-year-old adult woman in chronological age, Maggie possesses the intellectual capacity of a young child. Yet, despite drawing the short stick in life, Maggie instinctively knows what is truly important. She quickly gets to the heart of the matter, and her insights are often profound.

Over the past year, I have given much thought to her sense of well-being. So, on occasion, I directly ask our girl if she is happy. To my relief, she consistently responds that, yes, she is indeed happy. Pressing further, I ask what makes her happy, and she answers without hesitation "us." I take this to mean her family, mom and dad and sister Martha (Sissy) and brother Jack (Bro). What a wonderful gift it is to know she is genuinely happy because of our love and the richness of her family interactions.

Maggie definitely knows how to love and that she is loved. Sadly, too many people with a whole lot more going for them than our cognitively impaired daughter do not. Each night as she heads up to her room for bed Maggie will say in the sweetest voice, "I love you, dad" - and I know she means it.

At times, such as when I inquire about her happiness, Maggie will deliver a very mature and adult remark. "Why do you ask?" says Maggie. "Just curious," I say. "Curious or curiouser," comes her wry reply.

In many ways Maggie's life is full. She looks forward every Wednesday morning to her weekly two-hour, special-needs art class. A remarkable woman named Donna Lexa founded a non-profit organization in Waukesha over 25 years ago to use art to serve the needs of the disabled in the community. Donna Lexa tragically died in an auto accident some years back, but fortunately this art center and classes have grown and prospered in her memory.

For half of her life, Maggie has been a part of what she refers to simply as "Donna." Over this span she has amassed quite a body of artwork. Her bedroom and a full wall gallery in the basement showcases her many original masterpieces. Mom Cathy is always on the lookout for programs and outlets for Maggie's benefit, and we are so thankful she discovered Donna Lexa Community Art Center. It has definitely enriched Maggie's life.

I try to pick up Maggie from art class whenever I can on Wednesdays so we can enjoy our standing lunch date. I have found interacting for a couple of minutes with the art class group to be among the highlights of my week. Maggie clearly relishes being a part of this family of struggling artists. When leaving, she always tells them she loves them, and they respond in kind.

I have taken notice at the Donna Lexa art class and from observing many Special Olympians through the years

that classmates and teammates genuinely care about each other. This is true despite wide differences in age, ability levels, race or gender. Maggie is by far the youngest of a diverse group in her art class. I get a warm feeling watching the more able push those in wheelchairs into the elevator or guide classmates back upstairs at the end of class. One nice woman assists Maggie in removing her smock, washing her hands and finding and putting on her coat. It is a beautiful gift when you think about it. We could learn much from the disabled community in our midst.

As a natural part of the life continuum, Maggie has experienced the cold finality of death. This occurred on two sad occasions this past year. Dave was Maggie's Special Olympics basketball skills coach these past few years. The disabled athletes work at weekly practices in season to improve their dribbling, passing, shooting skills and conditioning, should they go on to compete in basketball games. Maggie struggles mightily with dribbling, but is known for sinking a fair number of shots. Her shooting style is unorthodox, to say the least. She can only get the ball up to the rim by shooting underhand and adds to the degree of difficulty by not even looking at the basket. This is quite a feat for her, and when she manages to make a shot it gives me a huge rush. Maggie's triumphs are always accompanied by high fives all around.

At the start of each basketball skills practice, Coach Dave in his loud booming voice would instruct the athletes under his charge to put the balls down and assemble in a circle around him at half court. He would then lead them in a boisterous clapping session which ended in total silence and rapt attention. Maggie, having been charged up, would inevitably continue talking. Dave would have to quiet her down with a stern, "Maggie!" This never failed to get her attention. She would reply contritely, "Sorry coach," thereby eliciting a big smile from Dave. Coach Dave could not hide that Maggie was one of his favorites.

Coach Dave, the father of Erin, a Down Syndrome daughter in her twenties, died suddenly while at work last February at the age of 55.

Maggie was sitting in her familiar spot curled up on the couch in our family room on a Friday evening when Cathy received the phone call informing us of Dave's death. Handing the phone to me, Maggie, with her antennae up, was somehow able to surmise that her Coach was gone. When she is sad her bottom lip protrudes. Basketball skills will never be the same without the giant presence of Coach Dave.

Back in August of 2010 I wrote a piece and shared the inspirational story of Maggie's friend and teammate Diane. Diane had won an imponderable gold medal at the Special Olympics State games held that June. What always set Diane apart was her beautiful smile and resolute determination. So, it was so hard to learn that the ugliness of a past cancer had returned with a vengeance to claim her precious life this September. Diane, a true angel, was just 23.

I was at work in my office when Diane's grieving mother Mary called our house and told Cathy of this tragic ending of a young life. Cathy phoned me with the dreaded news. I will admit this loss hit me really hard. Diane was truly special. My first thought was how we were going to tell Maggie. Cathy assured me that Maggie already knew. She once again had overheard the phone conversation from another room and somehow knew what was up. "Is she dead?" Maggie inquired in a somber tone, and a choked-up Cathy had to nod yes.



*A happy Diane with gold medal.*

For someone who doesn't usually get her age right or the correct day of the week when asked, Maggie does comprehend the element of death. In discussing Diane, Maggie knows she is no longer alive and was placed in a coffin box. To her, Diane is now far up in the clouds (Maggie will look skyward) in heaven next to her deceased grandfathers. However, they were both old and sick with cancer but Diane was just sick. Maggie knows she will never see her friend again, and that makes her sad.

On a happier note, Maggie rarely fails to make us smile. For one thing, we never know what she will come up with next. A couple of years ago, Cathy and I took Maggie along to an industry conference we were attending in Las Vegas. With her heightened sense of humor, Maggie found it amusing that she was having a ceasar salad while we were staying at the Caesars Palace Hotel.

While Cathy was attending some meetings, Mag and I took a stroll down the strip and stopped to eat lunch at a modest outdoor café well past the string of luxury hotels. There, we came across a popular fellow who was charging tourists who wanted to take a picture with him. Well, this scene caught the attention of Maggie, I don't quite remember, but perhaps she called him boyfriend. That would be just like her. Anyway, this familiar stranger came over and sat down with us at our table. Ignoring me completely, this showman turned his attention to Maggie, asking "Do you know who I am?"

Without missing a beat, our girl said, "You're Elvis," and a moment later for good measure added, "Presley!" I sat amazed by the surreal conversation that took place between the Special Olympian and the make-believe king. Maggie inquired about his oversized ring and this erstwhile but kind Elvis started talking something about its relationship to Frank Sinatra and the mob.

The following week at Donna Lexa Maggie's classmates asked where she had been the previous week, adding they had missed her. "I was in Vegas" she said with a wry smile.

"What did you do there?" they wanted to know.

"I saw Elvis."

At that, Phil, a 60-year-old in her class whom I refer to as the Weatherman because of his keen interest in the weather, piped in, "She couldn't possibly have seen Elvis."

"Yes I did," Maggie replied adamantly.

"No you didn't! Elvis is dead."

"Maybe you saw an impersonator," Phil logically explained. Maggie now refers to any reincarnation of Elvis as a "personator."

Life with Maggie is often challenging, but you can rightly assume, it is never dull. We are so blessed as a family she is a happy part of "us." I hope at this time of thanksgiving you are blessed as well.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Maggie's Dad,

John McCarthy



*Maggie and boyfriend Elvis.*

Your Anxiety Removal Team®

John T. McCarthy, CFP®  
Robert P. Kult, CPA  
Avis H. Haasch

Scott D. Grittinger, CFP®  
Amy L. Finley  
Catherine A. McCarthy

Michael J. Weil, CFP®, ChFC, CLU  
Jacqueline A. Schneider, CFP®