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A New Hope

By Kristin Davis



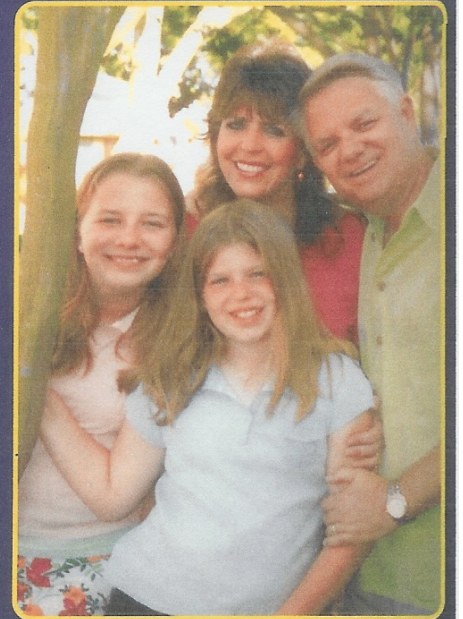
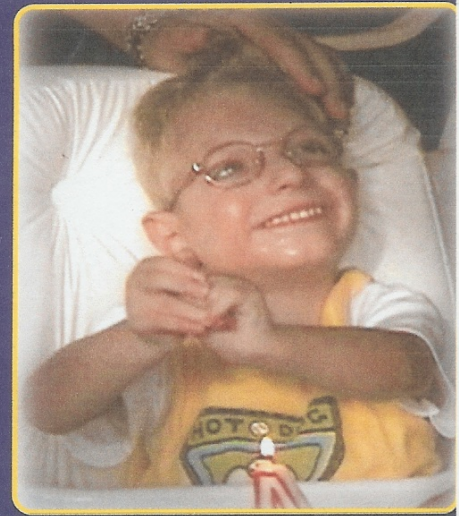
On June 6, 1997 a child was born whose time on earth would be short, but whose impact would last a lifetime. Born prematurely at 32 weeks, **Nathaniel Timothy Kuck** had a syndrome that his doctors were unable to diagnose. After an emergency C-section, both Nathaniel's and his mother Marie's condition did not look good. "My vitals began to drop," Marie Kuck explains. "I almost died in the surgery." During the first three months of Nathaniel's life, he went through several surgeries and remained a resident at the Arnold Palmer Hospital. "It was a roller coaster ride," Marie says. "Our whole lives became focused around taking care of him 24 hours a day."

Marie and her husband Tim traveled with their two daughters to the top children's hospital in the nation to try to find a cure for Nathaniel's condition. Unsuccessful, they later traveled to Dallas where 3-year-old Nathaniel would undergo his third surgery. Still unable to find a cure, they were at the edge of their limit when they found hope. "A nurse came and talked to us with tears streaming down her face," Marie remembers. "She asked if she could say a prayer for us, even though she had not prayed before, and the words she said I will never forget. She asked God for Nathaniel's purpose in life to be accomplished." Although Marie and Tim both say they found the prayer odd at the time, the prayer's meaning came to light years later.

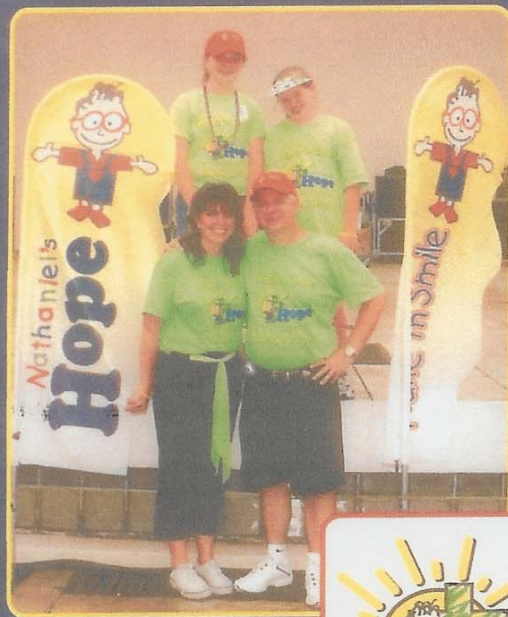
Nathaniel passed away in his mother's arms at four and a half years old. "He never spoke a word in his life, but his purpose was greater than anyone could imagine," Tim says. "We realized after his death that this wasn't the end, but only the beginning." Tim says he knew that their family had a responsibility to help other families who had special needs children. "It wasn't until then that we remembered the prayer from the nurse in Dallas. We wanted to help others and bring encouragement and hope. It was a clear calling." The Kuck family became inspired to come up with ideas of how they could turn tragedy into triumph. Inspired by their son's life, they started a non-profit organization named **Nathaniel's Hope**.

They held their first event on June 6, 2002—Nathaniel's birthday. The event was called "**Make 'm Smile**" and was created to celebrate the lives of special needs children and their families. The event is still held annually in June and helps educate the community about special needs children. "We call these children VIP kids because, at our events, our goal is to make them feel like kings and queens," Marie says. The third annual celebration was held this year and included food, dancing, games, and special visits by Disney and Universal characters.

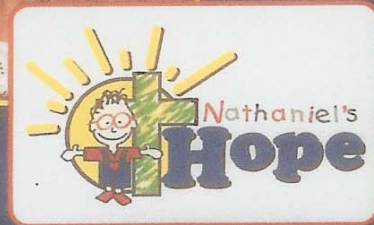
Marie and Tim also created a program called "**Buddy Break**" which gives caregivers time off from watching over their loved ones with special needs. Twice a month on Saturday, a medical staff and program volunteers spend time with the special needs person for three hours. "One of the challenges these parents and caregivers face is that they become emotionally, spiritually, and financially bankrupt from taking care of a family member with special needs," Tim says. "When you get bad report after bad report about their condition, you're looking for some glimmer of hope."



NATHANIEL'S



The Kuck Family



The Kuck family has made it their mission to provide hope to others, especially on holidays when people in need are sometimes forgotten. Marie recalls spending Christmas day in the emergency room with their entire family. "There is not a single person, including the staff, that wants to be in the hospital on Christmas day," she says. "There are lots of events being done for charities around Christmas, but I don't know of any that do anything for people in hospitals on Christmas Day." This inspired the Kuck family to take it upon themselves to bring baked goods, candy canes, and Christmas carolers to the hospital on Christmas day every year. This December will be the eighth year the Kuck family will spend Christmas Day at the hospital. The carolers that participate want to be there on this special day when young and young at heart join together to bring toys, Christmas carols, and smiles to the children and families that spend Christmas Day in the hospital. Watching faces light up touches the carolers so deeply that it is hard to say who is blessing whom.

Bringing hope to Central Florida is a way for the Kuck family to keep the memory of Nathaniel alive. "The idea for all of this didn't come from a drawing board, it came from the heart," Tim explains. Marie and Tim plan to expand the idea behind Nathaniel's Hope beyond Florida. They eventually hope to write a book, create a center, and even make "Make 'm Smile" a national event. With the hope to bring national recognition to special needs children, the Kuck family wants to help people realize that being 'differently-abled' does not make you weak.

Tim says, "On the surface they might not seem to be able to contribute, but there is great power in the seemingly powerless." ■

For more information on how you can get involved with Nathaniel's Hope, please call (407) 857-8224 or visit www.NathanielsHope.org.