

2017 Tribute to My Teacher Award



Sammy Baker and Lizzy Sue Metz

My name is Megan Metz, and my daughter Lizzy Sue, is five years old. She has been dancing for Miss Sammy since she was two years old. I can't remember a time that Lizzy Sue wasn't dancing. We laugh in our family and say we are pretty sure she came out twirling and dancing. I knew from the start I had to get her involved in dance for two reasons. 1- she obviously danced around everywhere and loved music. 2- she was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis at two weeks old and I knew from the start I had to keep her active if I wanted to keep her healthy and have a chance at living a long life.

Cystic Fibrosis is a chronic, progressive disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits the ability to breathe over time. It causes thick, sticky buildup of mucus in the lungs and the pancreas. This diagnosis rocked our entire world. We spent the first-year learning everything we could. Lizzy does hours of treatments every single day just to stay healthy and takes over 25 pills a day, along with several other medications. Germ-control is huge for her. From the very beginning it has always been a constant internal struggle of what to let her do vs. what not to let her do so we don't compromise her health, but also let her live as carefree of a life and we can.

Needless to say, although we wanted to get her moving, we were completely nervous about who we left her with. I would be lying if I said I wasn't terrified the first day I took her to dance class. She had never been in a daycare and around other little kids where germs were prevalent. I was lucky enough to hear about a studio that Lizzy Sue's Cystic Fibrosis nurse recommended. Not only did her own daughter go there, but she was best friends with the director. I figured if we were going to do this, then that was the place to try. Lizzy loved dance from the very start. Her very first teacher was Miss Suzanne (who she still loves and adores) and she fell in love with dance class immediately. She always told me "more mommy, more!" After her first year I decided we would do dance again. After all, Miss Suzanne was so good with her, she was a mommy herself, she was a second-daughter to Lizzy's CF nurse- she just understood it all and I didn't have to worry. Little did I know, Lizzy wouldn't have Miss Suzanne that next year and Lizzy's class would grow from 4 students to over 10. My nervousness kicked in all over again and I didn't think anyone could live up to Miss Suzanne in Lizzy or my eyes. Lizzy told me the entire way to dance, "but I want Miss Suzanne! Hers my teacher! I love her!" I was skeptical. I was scared. I was that helicopter mom.

However, all of my fears disappeared from the first moments Miss Sammy laid eyes on Lizzy Sue in class. It was a love at first sight by both- truly. Lizzy couldn't wait to run up to her and hug her each and every class. When I watched them, I knew there was a special bond being formed from the start. I just didn't realize at the time how big of an impact she would make on my daughter's life at such a young age. There is truly nobody I would rather have teaching my child than Miss Sammy. She teaches Lizzy so much more than how to dance. She teaches her values. She teaches her confidence. She teaches her to embrace her disease with her head held high and proud- never being ashamed. Miss Sammy is the kind of teacher anyone would want for their daughter. Does she have high expectations? Yes. But she is a natural born teacher and knows how to reach kids in a graceful way. I never worry about Lizzy getting upset, I never worry about Lizzy not being cared for when I leave her for hours at a time on dance nights. I know without a doubt she is in the best hands there is.

It's a big decision to leave your child with someone- especially when they are going to be around them a lot. As a teacher myself I know that apart from parents, teachers do so much to shape the lives of children. That's not a decision I took lightly nor will ever take lightly. I thank God everyday that he brought Miss Sammy into our lives to provide a happiness, comfort and peace for Lizzy Sue in the wake of all of the other things she has going on in her little life. I know I'm not alone in my feelings toward Miss Sammy. I know many other girls who would say the same things and more and I know so many parents would agree with me as well. Miss Sammy is more than a dance teacher. She is a mother to her students. She is a friend. She is a listener. She is a cheerleader. She is a motivator. She is the most humble and kind person I know.

When I asked Lizzy Sue to describe Miss Sammy she said, "I wuv Miss Sammy so much. Her is so pretty, funny and so nice. Her is my bestie. I'm going to grow up and work for Miss Sammy and maybe be her roommate. She makes my heart so happy just like dancing does. She makes me feel happy and I wish I could be around her all the time. Oh yeah and she also does really good breathing treatments!"

Rita Pierson once said, "Every child deserves a champion- an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be." Sammy is undoubtedly Lizzy's Sue Champion. I can say with 100% certainty that Sammy will push Lizzy Sue over the years to be best dancer she can be, but more importantly the best possible person she can be.