

Miracles Do Happen: Kayla's Story

By Candice Hogden

“But Jesus said, “Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 19:14

As I listened to the Bragdon family's story of their miracle I thought this is a story to be told for all to hear how God provides when least expected. That God cares about the simplest dreams of a child. That God is touched by the perseverance of faith in a young couple, parents of a child who has experienced more physical and emotional trials in her life than many people three or four times her age. That God in his sovereignty can and does hear the cries of his people and orchestrates events to show his glory and give sheer delight to a young child, whose faith appears stronger than oak. Those around her will attest to her strength of faith and the confident thoughts she has expressed to others about Jesus, her Lord and Savior. She is a gift from God and he showers her with his love and presence. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

The Story centers around Kayla, age 10. She has a brother named Sedrick, age 4, a sister Shelby age 1, and from time to time she has foster siblings. Her parents are Don and Tiffany who follow Christ even when hard times face them, and when all odds are against them. They are the persevering kind that St. Paul encourages us to be. Their home resides in a small town of Sparland, IL, where when driving by, if you blink an eye, you have passed it. It is in this small town that God showed up in a big way. “If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” Matthew 7:11

It began in August of 2005 when Kayla was 4 years old. She received the Vericella Vaccine (Chicken Pox). One month later she was diagnosed with Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis (ADEM) which is a seizure disorder. The cause of her disorder was due to the vaccine. Kayla basically has scar tissue on her brain that leads to seizure activity and affects her memory. She has seen 2 neurologists and 2 pediatricians. She has been in the hospital 5 times with her longest being 2 weeks. She has been on over 11 different medicines many which cause her to sleep a lot. She had Psychometric evaluations to determine if she had learning disabilities which she has. She also has missed a lot of school in her young life and when she goes to school, she has restrictions such as to stay away from certain playground equipment and certain areas of the playground.

The positive part is that Kayla is a social person and has many friends and has been able to move from one class year to the next with her classmates. She is enthusiastic about her learning. Her teachers have been very supportive of her and her parents. Tiffany and Don approached the vaccine compensation program to help them with their medical costs. This program will award families compensation if, after lengthy research, they see that the vaccine did indeed cause the problems.

The Bragdon family endured many stressful times. But after 6 years of their persistence, the program's research finally concluded after reviewing all of Kayla's medical records, and Psychometric evaluations that her medical condition was due to the vaccine. The family was awarded pain and suffering benefits that would pay Kayla's past and future medical bills. This was a miracle all in itself. They shared their grand news with their church family at St. Francis in Dunlap, IL. This was a praise item for all to hear. God is sovereign and provided for this family.

In 2008, Tiffany and Don were at an Epilepsy Foundation support group. One of the ladies hearing about Kayla's situation told them about the Dream Factory out of Pekin, IL, a local company. She asked them if their daughter Kayla had a dream that she wished would come true and that they might want to check into it. Tiffany checked out the Dream Factory's website and then called their office. A person indicated that they operate out of funds donated and that currently they did not have any funds. So, it was a nice hope for Kayla but only God knows why it did not turn out. Tiffany said she then put it out of her mind and basically forgot about it.

Then in February of 2009, Tiffany received a call from the Dream Factory in Pekin and said, "We have the funds now we would like to meet Kayla." They told Tiffany that a lady had come into some money and didn't need the money. She wanted to give it to an organization that would help others so she gave it to the Dream Factory. Joyfully surprised, for she had already put the idea out of her mind that the dream factory wasn't going to work out, Tiffany told Kayla about the Dream Factory and Kayla met with the staff in Pekin. They asked her, if she had a wish to be granted what would that be? She said, "I want to see my grandma and grandpa in Florida. I miss my grandma and grandpa." The staff said "Well, would you also like to go to Disney World?" Can you imagine the answer Kayla gave them? It was a resounding "yes!"

It sounds easy, right? No. Kayla would experience physical set backs from February right up to their departure date, May 22-28, 2009. The Doctor would give approval for the trip and then Kayla's health would decline. Tears were shed by the family. Kayla had looked forward to this trip. "Why was this happening?" they prayed. The trip was cancelled, and again rescheduled for the May 22nd date, with hopes that Kayla would improve. Kayla's health did improve, but then declined. She would go back into the hospital. Different medications were tried, she would then be sent home. She entered the hospital for 1 week, was discharged, but then admitted again for another week. She was then discharged just 2 days before they departed from Illinois to Florida. Tiffany promised the doctor she would watch Kayla like a hawk, that she knew her daughter's signs and would take care of her, but that Kayla was going on this trip. The doctor reluctantly gave the okay. Kayla's condition had not been stable long and she was at a high risk for more seizures to occur. But the doctor knew how important this trip was to Kayla. Kayla's care guidelines were given by the doctor for Tiffany to abide by. The trip was placed in God's hands and Tiffany and Don concentrated on making this trip fun and memorable for Kayla.

The place Kayla and her family stayed was called "Give Kids the World." The place is a dream in itself created by a man named Henry Landwirth who in WWII lost his parents and was separated from his twin sister in the Holocaust. Born in Belgium in 1927, the family moved to Poland in 1930. He has written a book called "The Gift of Life" which talks of the trauma he experienced and witnessed and how he wanted to make a difference in giving life to children. He created this village that is truly magical for kids where they can forget their troubles, embrace happiness and enjoy being a child. This place's motto was "we're here to serve all." Tiffany said, "They make it so you don't need to worry. They serve you and do everything. You have VIP passes." Kayla received a "Give Kids the World" badge which helped her experience no waiting in lines for places. In the "Give Kids the World" village, Kayla and her siblings received a gift everyday. At breakfast, college aged boys would sing to the families and play the harmonica. There was an ice cream shop open 24 hours a day. Food was available wherever you turn, including the fun food that kids like such as Cotton Candy. There was a miniature carousel, dinosaur miniature golf, and a place you could get your face painted. There was a life size Candy Land game with live characters which was the playground. There was a castle of miracles with stars on the ceilings. Kayla got a star with her name on it and then the star was placed on the ceiling. There was a beautiful chapel with stained glass windows inscripted with words of hope, faith, love and peace that Kayla visited. The place was like a miniature Disney all in itself catering to the children of special needs.

The trip included going to see Grandma and Grandpa for 3 days, 3 days at Disney World (which included EPCOT, Hollywood Studios and Magic Kingdom), 2 days at Universal studios, which Kayla opted out of to spend a day on the beach and to spend a day at Give Kids the World, and 1 day at Sea World. Kayla was able to spend quality time with her grandparents and she cherishes a photo taken of her and her grandparents. Though Kayla said she didn't like wearing a mask on her trip, the mask did prevent her from getting any illnesses. She was very susceptible to illness yet her health remained stable.

While the family was enjoying the trip, Don and Tiffany felt understood by families who also had their children there. Tiffany said you could feel the love from others. The love was contagious. She said, "You felt special and didn't feel alone as you talked with families who were going through similar struggles." She said others would reach out to her and the family and she felt inspired to do the same. She also said they saw kids less fortunate than Kayla. Ones who were in wheelchairs or motorized chairs. Ones who could not walk or talk. And yet she said she saw them happy and smiling. All were treated special. Tiffany said she felt blessed that Kayla did not have the many limitations she witnessed in other children and that she could enjoy herself more freely. The last day of their trip "Give Kids the World" gave them keepsake gifts, one being a Candy Land game with the characters of the real life Candy Land game in the Village and the others being a Disney Photo album and the book "The Gift of Life."

Tiffany said, "Since we have been back Kayla talks about everything she experienced. We felt so blessed. We still can't believe the trip happened. God blessed us. The trip was outstanding! Everything was great! We're all still reeling from the vacation." She

said the trip was jam-packed with blessings. Tiffany listed many: As a mother to see Kayla happy and enjoying herself; to see her expression of awe and wonder when she arrived at Magic Kingdom Castle (Kayla said, “We’re here!, We’re here!”); doing things as a family and having family time all together; to have fun and not feel everyday stress; to see Kayla’s face light up when she saw the 3 princesses, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Belle, and seeing the fairies and Tinker Bell; and seeing God at work in all the volunteers. Tiffany said the most memorable time was when the family went to Magic Kingdom and Kayla saw the little Mermaid and got her picture and autograph from her. She said, “I felt so happy when her face lit up and her eyes were glowing. I wanted her to love her trip and she did.”

Don said one of his favorite things was seeing that Tiffany had a good time. He said seeing Kayla being able to get to the front of the lines at places allowed her to see so much, which he was also grateful for. Don said he saw God work in many ways. He said the Lord provided them with the money to do the trip and to have spending money. He said before they left on the trip the rain was consistent and that it was also raining in Florida. He had prayed that the rain would stop so Kayla could have a fun trip. He said the moment they stepped off the plane the rain stopped. He continued to say that the night of the fireworks at Disney, the sky looked threatening but God kept it from storming. Don said that God gave more than he could imagine. He saw Sedrick enjoying himself too. Sedrick enjoyed sitting on the couch with Minnie and Mickey Mouse and loving the Toy Story figures. Sedrick said, “I liked Pluto the dog.”

Kayla was beaming as I interviewed her. She showed me the Disney photo album and the signatures of Disney characters she received. She showed me the picture of her with Grandma and Grandpa. She said, “My favorite part was seeing Grandma and Grandpa. I liked Disneyworld too. I liked going to the beach and picking up shells.” She said the “wow” part of her trip was riding the rides at EPCOT and seeing Prince Caspian.” She said, “What I *really liked* was their bacon at breakfast at “Give Kids the World”. I liked their Gingerbread house too.”

Kayla said her favorite characters that she saw were Prince Caspian, Carl from the UP movie and Doug the dog. Kayla said, “The funniest part was when I had to be in a wheelchair to keep from getting tired and people would ask what’s wrong with me and I would pop out of the wheelchair.” She said what she liked most was the “Give Kids the World Village.” She said, “They had miniature golf and great banana splits. It was just fun. It was like being in a big castle like being in a house with lots of fun.” These are words spoken from a wondrous childlike spirit. It was truly a dream trip for all.

The family said it was like almost being in heaven being with people all around showing unconditional love to all. Don and Tiffany said, “If we can give back to what has been given to us, we will.” Kayla said the miracle trip continued when she got back from Florida her school teacher took her to the movie “UP.”

So, do you believe in miracles? If not, reread Kayla’s story and see how our God Almighty who is in heaven is touched by our needs and lives. He cares and weaves the

circumstances around us to give us the tiniest, and the grandest of miracles. God's miracles do happen. What's your dream...?

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
Psalm 37:4

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