

Triumphphant

Spirits



by Maggie Wilde



Global Spirited Women ...reaching out to Baby Joseph

A little over a year ago with a passion to make a difference Cheryl Spicer founded a networking organisation that has become an inspiration to many.

'I wanted the group to have meaning,' Cheryl explained. 'We're not only a networking group who meet for social and business purposes but we support people in the community with educational, emotional and humanitarian projects.' We are 'The universal voice of love, faith, hope and inspiration connecting people to their hopes, their hearts and their possibilities.'

In the past twelve months the group has completed eight 'Special Projects' including film nights to help feed children in Cambodia, sponsorship of a Gold Coast lady with MS, pampering days for survivors of sexual assault, educational workshops for members and amongst other things supporting Baby Joseph and his mum here on the Gold Coast, Joseph is a special little boy with brain damage.

When Cheryl introduced me to Baby Joseph and his mum it became a meeting that touched my soul and opened my heart. This is a true tale of Triumphant Spirits and I share it here in the hope that others will be inspired. The true story of baby Joseph and his mum... Be inspired!

On August 9, 2002 at the Gold Coast Hospital life for 46 year old Ingrid Weber changed forever. She gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby boy and proudly called him Joseph. Tragically within hours of his birth Ingrid knew something was terribly wrong.

At 6am on August 10 a nurse handed Joseph to Ingrid. 'As I held him in my arms my heart sank with fear. I ran down the hall calling for help.'

Baby Joseph had begun to experience a series of massive seizures. It was a minute by minute fight for survival, but the damage was done. Mother and son were shipped to the Mater Hospital. 'I was distraught' said Ingrid. 'They still didn't know what was wrong.'

After a myriad of scans the effects of the seizures were explained leaving Ingrid bewildered and without hope. 'Before they showed me the MRI results they explained that the sections of the brain that had suffered



damage would light up on screen,' she said. 'The whole of Joseph's brain lit up.' Confused, Ingrid needed to understand how Joseph would be affected. The specialists agreed his sight, hearing, senses and all movement was damaged. When she asked what was left of her boy, Ingrid was told 'His heart is still beating, his lungs function and he is still able to have some bodily functions, apart from that we don't hope for much.'

It seemed that the area of Joseph's brain that regulates intelligence was not affected. He would be a normal intelligent child trapped inside a body that would never hear, see, speak, sense or move.

Ingrid spent many nights wandering throughout the hospital with her child in her arms. 'I touched him and stimulated his muscles' she said. 'I whispered messages of love from a mother to a son. I wanted him to know who his mother was, to sense me. Even if he didn't survive I wanted him to know he was loved.' She smiled.

With a mother's' instinct Ingrid began to notice things were not as expected over the following weeks. 'If something small dropped on the hospital floor Joseph would jump. He must have heard something!'

Ingrid began to notice further discrepancies in the doctors' prognosis. Each time she walked past a particular picture in the children's ward Joseph's eyes would flicker. 'I knew he was registering something' Ingrid said with excitement. 'I decided right there his brain was responding. My little baby could see something, he could hear something.'

Ingrid began to stimulate Joseph's body with renewed energy. 'I noticed if I put breast milk on my finger I could get him to suck a little.' With the help of a compassionate nurse she convinced disbelieving doctors to let her try and feed Joseph naturally. They agreed reluctantly to remove feeding tubes and let her finally connect with her son.

'I just knew he would be fine and he was.' Ingrid smiled. 'I can't explain it now but I always knew Joseph would survive. I instinctively spent all

might singing to him, rocking him. I never stopped. I held him, talked to him; I told him my whole life story; I showed him everything I could see. I would let him touch and feel things. I bombarded him with sensation over those months.'

Ingrid believes that when given the right environment the brain can repair damage and recreate neural pathways. 'I understand that when you are in a hospital situation they play it safe, they have to. But I knew my son and I wasn't going to let him down.'

What is more extraordinary about the miracle of Joseph is that the brain stem was damaged. Every message coming in and out through the body comes through the stem. That is why the original diagnosis was so final. If the stem is damaged the body shouldn't be able

to respond. Somehow Joe was responding and continues to grow stronger everyday.

"I've stopped questioning life; I accept the gifts that are given to me."

Now 2 1/2 years old, with help Joe can stand. He can hear, see and feel. He is even beginning to speak. He says 'Mum', 'Dad', 'Toys', he knows his sister by name and he is happy to express his joy at the 'Kitty' and his disapproval at Mum when he's sad or smile at her when he's happy. 'He's a normal little boy, growing stronger everyday' smiles Ingrid.

Ingrid has a small troupe of volunteers who help to stimulate Joseph's body everyday with a strict regime of exercise. 'He hasn't got full use of his body yet,' Ingrid explained 'but he will one day. He's a fighter and there's a reason he's here or he would have given up a long time ago.'

As if on cue Joseph stirs from his deep slumber. Searching the room he locates the sound of his mother's voice and responds with the smile of an angel. When I laughed, he turned his big blue eyes towards me and smiled. My eyes filled with tears and my heart opened to all that is Joe.

I can easily see why Cheryl and the ladies from Global Spirited Women have taken Ingrid and Joseph into their hearts. Within minutes he had already melted mine.

It is Ingrid's belief that there are many children and families let down by the overstretched medical system. She has met families where children are boxed into a prognosis and parents are told there is no hope and sent home to survive.

She is adamant 'There is hope and there is help, it's just knowing where to look. Joe now has the chance to grow with his sisters and brothers, to know he is loved and to share his story of hope. He brings us so much joy and is an inspiration to so many others.'

Ingrid believes it is important for parents of children with brain damage to know that there are things they can do. 'Never give up on your child. Provide the right healing environment to give them the best chance. Feed them the best organic foods, research, keep their bodies and minds stimulated with exercises and sensations. You are all they have.'

When Joe was first born Ingrid asked herself the inevitable question. 'Why her? Why Joe? Why this challenge at this age? I still don't know the answers to those questions.' She says. 'But I do know Joe and I are supposed to be together. Throughout the years information or sources have come to us from nowhere. I've stopped questioning; I trust I will be led by a universal force to what Joe and I need.'

A fine example occurred recently when Ingrid became aware of a documentary by David Suzuki. It was a program about a doctor in Osaka who works with brain injuries and has amazing results. 'I felt drawn to go there with Joe but I didn't even know where in Osaka the kindergarten was. All I knew was David Suzuki narrated a 2 part video on the brain and talked about this 'unknown' centre.'

Then Global Spirited Women came to the rescue. Cheryl introduced Ingrid to the people who brought David Suzuki to Australia in May. They asked me if I would like to meet David to ask about the centre' Ingrid said. 'I've stopped questioning life; I accept the gifts that are given to me.'

When this first happened I was angry and hurt. I had an external, selfish understanding of 'God.' Ingrid continued.

'I've changed a lot since then. Now I understand it's a strength you draw from within, an energy of love. It's available to us all. We just have to learn to tap into it.'

As she picked Joseph up Ingrid mused 'I think I finally understand the vulnerability of being human. Joe has taught me that. In death we experience nothing but here, we get to experience everything. The highs, the lows, it's all an experience. I don't know where we go from here but it's a wonderful life and I get to experience it all and so does Joe.'

The journey to health continues today for Joe. The fear of further seizures is always present and it takes months of commitment to repair neural connections after each seizure.

Ingrid receives one standard physiotherapy session every two weeks from health services and she is not eligible for disability grants. Everything Ingrid has achieved she has done on her own. She is exhausted but determined to give Joe the best chance she can.

Ingrid has found a specialist from Melbourne who flies in every four weeks to assess Joe and teach further exercises. They have a few volunteers who assist with his exercise routine and of course the ongoing support of Global Spirited Women.

Ingrid believes that one day they will get to Osaka. She is adamant that Joe will walk and they will stand together to inspire others with their brave story of the human spirit.

To discover how you can help Baby Joe on his journey to health or become involved in a project of your own through Global Spirited Women contact:



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