

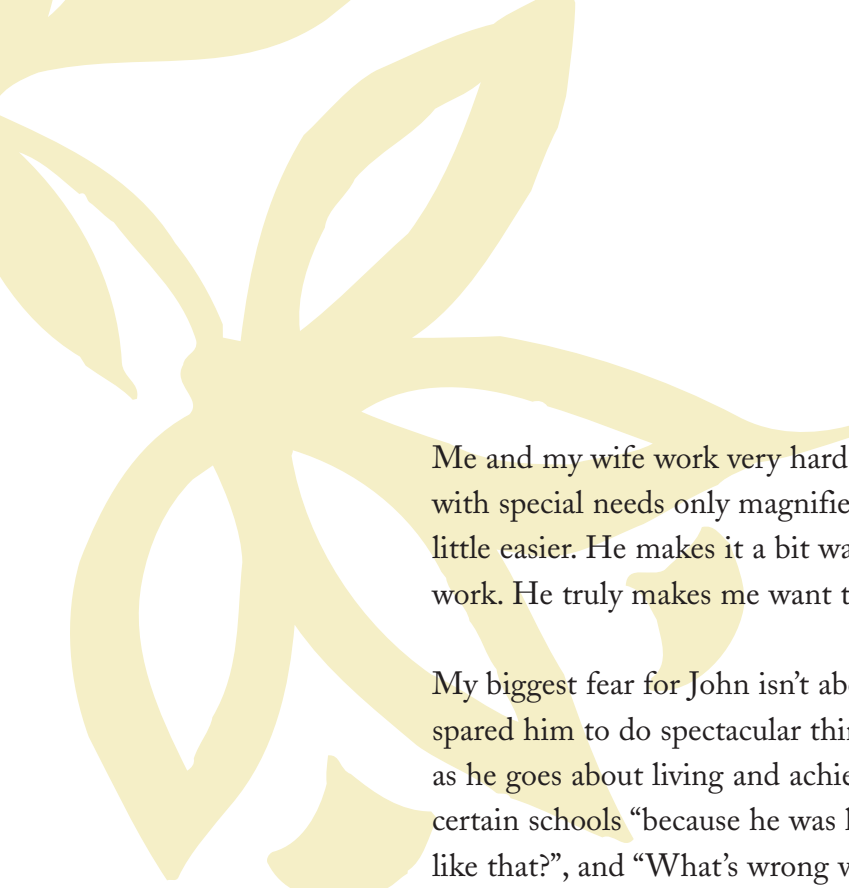
# John's Daddy!

**M**Y NAME IS RICK RILEY. I'M THE VERY PROUD FATHER OF JOHN Riley. Special people come into our lives in very special ways. John did just that. He was born after 28 weeks. He and his mother almost did not make it through a very traumatic birth. I went from a sound sleep to the hospital, to seeing his mom suffer, to becoming a father in a mere 30 minutes!

When I first laid eyes on my son, my first thought was, "Man, you are tiny in size but very long in length." I knew that he was truly a Godsend. John was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. I had no idea what that was, but I knew that it wasn't supposed to be good. I was very worried, but just seeing my son would make me forget about any worries that I had. It was as if the heavens would open and God's light would shine on him. I've never felt a love like this before.

My life with John hasn't been perfect though. Like any other parent, life's challenges won't always allow that to be the case. My most frustrating challenges would always occur when it was time to get John's services. I thank God that my wife had a better understanding of the system than I had. This was good, but very scary at the same time! I would've been lost had something happened to her, and John would've suffered as a result of my ignorance. I love and appreciate her dearly! So, I took it upon myself to be more responsible, and find the right information.

Society sometimes plays cruel tricks on fathers. We are supposed to be the providers for our families, but we are considered to be uninformed of our families' health and welfare. I can recall numerous visits to the hospital, only to be totally ignored. I finally asked for the "permission" to take John on some of his appointments by myself, so that I could establish my own dialog with his doctors and his therapists. The first question I would always get is, "Where's his mom?" In time I was accepted, mainly because I was the only other adult in the room.



Me and my wife work very hard. Raising a family is expensive, and having a child with special needs only magnifies this; however, just laying eyes on John makes it a little easier. He makes it a bit warmer on those bitter cold mornings when I head to work. He truly makes me want to be a better person.

My biggest fear for John isn't about what he will accomplish. I really think that God spared him to do spectacular things. I worry about how the world will treat my son as he goes about living and achieving his goals. We have been told he couldn't attend certain schools "because he was handicapped." Some kids will say, "Why do you walk like that?", and "What's wrong with your legs?" John asks me these questions as well. I explained his condition to him the best way that I could. He is very accepting of his strengths, as well as his perceived weaknesses. God has truly blessed me! He attends a "regular private school", where he excels socially, as well as in the classroom. He is a social butterfly like his father, except I spent more time in timeout than he does. He makes it there as well though! He's a chip off the old block! He's made three straight Honor Rolls! Everyone knows John Riley, or "John John!"

John is nine years old now and years truly have flown by. He enjoys basketball, fishing, and video games! He has played basketball for the local recreation team, and he did very well. None of the kids teased him, except for normal thing that kids laugh at each other about...bugs, smells, and girls! The thing that John seems to enjoy most of all is laughing. Sometimes, he laughs so hard that his stomach starts to hurt, and then he will start to cry. Go figure!

Someone once told me that "God doesn't give a person more than they handle!" I believe this to be true, but we can condition ourselves to be more accepting, and to be more understanding, as well. John and I are like brothers, and best friends. He tells me that I'm his best friend. There are times that I have to remember that he's actually years younger than me. I spend a lot of time with him, and I'm privately dreading the day when he doesn't want to hang with old dad anymore! I kiss him constantly! The world says that men aren't supposed to show emotion. I've seen strong men break down and cry about their kids. We love, care, and worry just like our wives do! I'm just glad God gave me John, so that I can feel comfortable expressing these feelings. I don't know everything about every subject, but one subject I do know, and love to talk about is John Riley. Can you see the sunlight? I can, and it is shining on John Riley!