

2018 was a year of exciting change for our family. We moved into a new neighborhood which required Eli to change middle schools. We are so proud of Eli because he has handled the transition to the new neighborhood and school like a champ! This is a big accomplishment since Eli struggles with change which is very common among children with autism. Eli has met some great new friends and has had a good experience riding the bus, which is another new task Eli had to master.

I walked him to the bus stop on the first day of school but after the first day, Eli has navigated the bus stop like any other middle schooler. It brings me joy to see him walk independently to the bus stop and talking with his neighborhood friends. He always looks up when I drive by on my way to work. I smile and wave and he smiles back and blows me a kiss. Even though this melts my heart, I also know that blowing your mom a kiss in front of your middle school friends is not typical behavior at 14 years old.

We spend a lot of time and money teaching Eli what is appropriate behavior, what is socially acceptable, and how to live in "our world." So I took this opportunity to explain to Eli that he didn't have to blow me a kiss at the bus stop. Eli just looked at me and simply responded "but I want to blow you a kiss." How could I argue with that?

His response made me reflect that while it is important to continue to teach socially acceptable behavior we might be happier if we all followed Eli's rules that he shares with his family and friends daily:

- **Rule #1:** Wear a smile.
- **Rule #2:** Tell your family & friends that you love them. Tell them often.
- **Rule #3:** Tell people they are pretty, even strangers at the grocery store or restaurant.
- **Rule #4:** Blow people you love kisses (even if you are on national TV standing behind Al Roker on The Today Show).
- **Rule #5:** Don't have enemies. Love people who are hard to like.
- **Rule #6:** Hug people. Hug often.
- **Rule #7:** Believe in Santa so the magic of Christmas will live forever.
- **Rule #8:** Find the beauty in the simple things of life such as doing laundry. (Watching the washing machine spin is truly fascinating.)

For the past 12 years, Nathan and I have been participating in the Autism Society Central VA walk that helps raise funds in the greater Richmond area. Please join my family once again in helping make a change in the autism community. Last year, with your amazing generosity, I raised over \$12,300. All funds raised provide much needed support to families and individuals like Eli living with autism, and the money stays **in the greater Richmond area**. I hope you will consider supporting Team bELIeve in one of the following ways:

1. Make an online **donation** to the ASCV 5K Family Fun Day (Jennifer Barnum- Team bELIeve): <https://runsignup.com/Race/68858/Donate/OrPfUD9loyT8vhbp>
2. Walk with us on Saturday, May 18th at 9am at Stony Point Fashion Park: <https://runsignup.com/Race/68858/Donate/AuMQ3J7DaX8aXxWS>

S.W.A.K (Sealed With A Kiss),

Jennifer & Nathan (Eli's #1 bELIevers)

