

Learning to Dance in the Rain by Mac Anderson

The date was July 16, 2008. It was late in the afternoon and I was sitting in my hotel room in Louisville, Kentucky. I was scheduled to speak that evening for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA).

I was a little "down in the dumps." I hadn't gotten to exercise lately because of my traveling schedule and recently I'd experienced some mild bouts of vertigo (that inner ear condition that can cause the room to start spinning.) You got it...speaking and "spinning" are not good partners!

My keynote presentation was scheduled for 7:00 P.M., but I had been invited to show up at 6:00 to see a performance they said I'd enjoy. Little did I know that I was about to see something I would never forget.

They introduced the young musician. Welcome...Mr. Patrick Henry Hughes. He was rolled onto the stage in his wheelchair, and began to play the piano. His fingers danced across the keys as he made beautiful music.

He then began to sing as he played, and it was even more beautiful. For some reason, however, I knew that I was seeing something special. There was this aura about him that I really can't explain and the smile...his smile was magic!

About ten minutes into Patrick's performance, someone came on the stage and said..."I'd like to share a seven-minute video titled, The Patrick Henry Hughes story." And the lights went dim.

Patrick Henry Hughes was born with no eyes, and a tightening of the joints which left him crippled for life. However, as a child, he was fitted with artificial eyes and placed in a wheelchair. Before his first birthday, he discovered the piano. His mom said, "I could hit any note on the piano, and within one or two tries, he'd get it." By his second birthday, he was playing requests (You Are My Sunshine, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star). His father was ecstatic. "We might not play baseball, but we can play music together."

Today, Patrick is a junior at the University of Louisville. His father attends classes with him and he's made nearly all A's, with the exception of 3 B's. He's also a part of the 214-member marching band. You read it right...the marching band! He's a blind, wheelchair-bound trumpet player; and he and his father do it together. They attend all the band practices and the half-time performance in front of thousands. His father rolls and rotates his son around the field to the cheers of Patrick's fans. In order to attend Patrick's classes and every band practice, his father works the graveyard shift at UPS. Patrick said..."My dad's my hero."

But even more than his unbelievable musical talent, it was Patrick's "attitude of gratitude" that touched

my soul. On stage, between songs, he would talk to the audience about his life and about how blessed he was. He said, "God made me blind and unable to walk. BIG DEAL! He gave me the ability...the musical gifts I have...the great opportunity to meet new people."

When his performance was over, Patrick and his father were on the stage together. The crowd rose to their feet and cheered for over five minutes. It gave me giant goose bumps!

My life was ready to meet Patrick Henry Hughes. I needed a hero, and I found one for the ages. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget that night, that smile, that music, but most importantly, that wonderful "attitude of gratitude."

I returned to Chicago and shared Patrick's story with my wife, my friends, and our team at Simple Truths. About two weeks later, I received a letter from a friend. He said, "Mac, here is a quote from Vivian Greene that I think you'll love!"

"Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass...
it's about learning to dance in the rain!"

I thought...that's it! We all face adversity in our life. However, it's not the adversity, but how we react to it that will determine the joy and happiness in our lives. During tough times, do we spend too much time feeling sorry for ourselves, or, can we, with gratitude...learn how to dance in the rain?

It almost sounds too simple to feel important, but one word...gratitude, can change your attitude, and thus your life, forever. Sarah Breathnach said it best...

"When we choose not to focus on what is missing from our lives but are grateful for the abundance that's present...we experience heaven on earth."