



THE GOLDEN CHILD

A story about a man who found his calling, a dad on a mission, a boy with grit, the community that surrounds them, and their love of basketball.

By Coach Mike

Dedicated to my Grandmother Hardy who
taught me to be the best man I can be.

The Golden Child

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First Edition

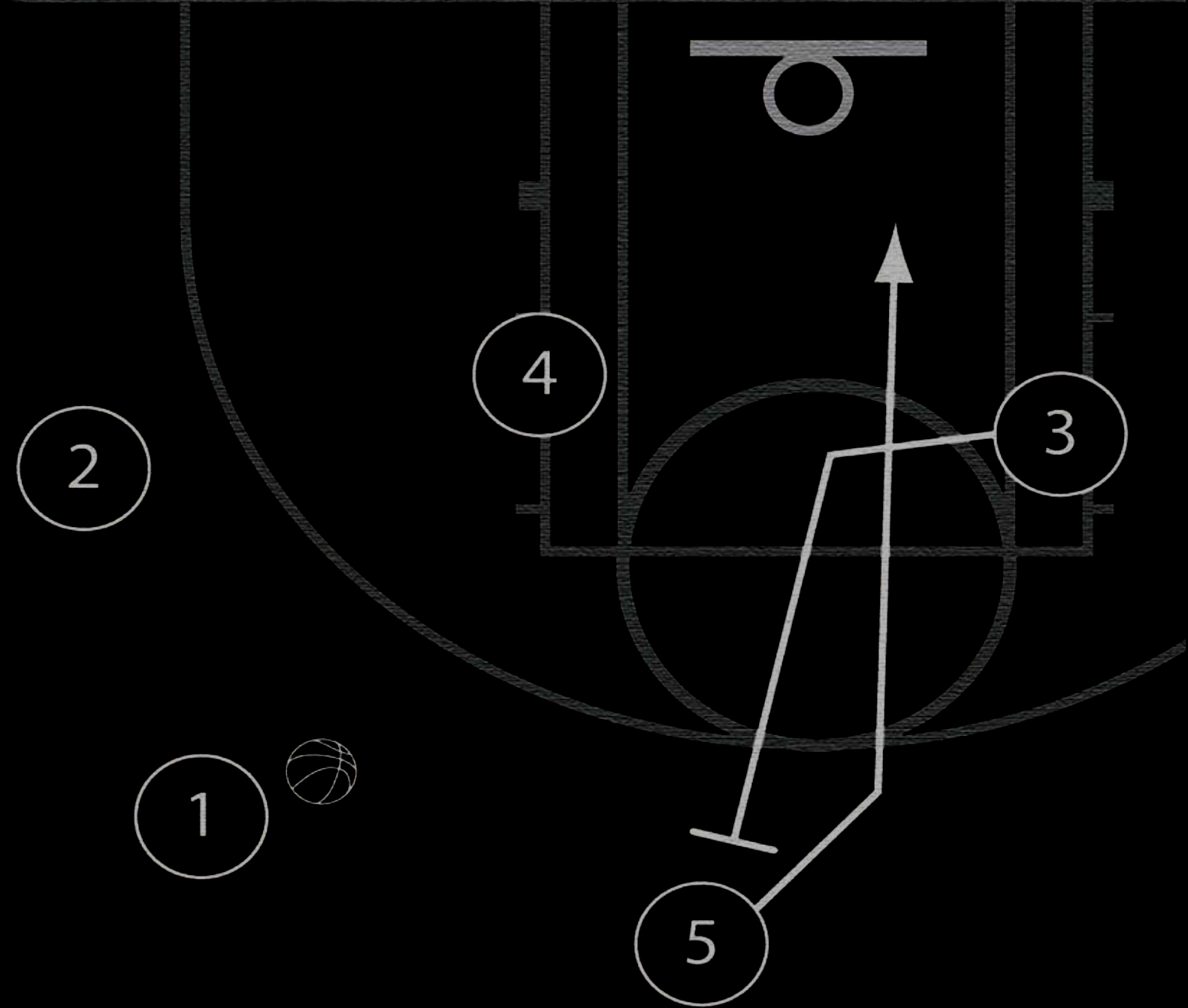
First Printing August 2015

ISBN: 0-9768285-4-5

Designed by: Paula Black & Associates

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Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Golden Child as...
having talents that promise great success.

Who Is The **Golden Child?**

The Golden Child is a real person... and
the inspiration for some true life lessons.

The Golden Child is also one of the key reasons

**why I do what I do today.
His story is an important
part of mine.**

My name is Alen Hardy. My
friends call me Coach Mike.
I am about to tell you a
story about...

Dreams

Barriers

Dedication

Setbacks

Drive

Opportunity

Challenges

Aha! Moments

Joy

Purpose

Courage

Inspiration

Rewards

Teamwork

**IT'S SAID
THAT WHEN ONE
DOOR CLOSES
IN LIFE, ANOTHER
ONE OPENS.**

This story is proof that this saying is true.

I've come across many closed doors in my life, but always, eventually, found an open one. Through one of those open doors I found the Golden Child. He and his family changed my life.

And this is our story...

DREAMS

Since I was a kid I have always dreamed about playing basketball, but sometimes life got in the way.

And sometimes I got in the way.

The story starts with my Grandmother Hardy. In our neighborhood outside of Fort Lauderdale, everybody called her Mother. She babysat for families in the neighborhood. When she cooked, it was for the whole neighborhood. She even ran a little store from her house, where neighborhood kids could buy things. She was popular, she was loved, and she meant the world to me.

Mother passed away when I was 12. It was my first real experience with death and it hurt like nothing I had ever felt before.

My grandmother never did get to see me play basketball, but I can still hear the words of encouragement she gave me in every other aspect of my life.

When I was a little kid, my father didn't live with us. He made some bad choices, got caught up with some bad elements and went to jail. My mother was expecting me when he went away, and already had two other kids to support.

At a very early age, my older brother, Anthony, stepped into the role of father figure and helped raise me. He was the first person to teach me how to play ball... and he is still my best friend.

My father came back into the family when his case was dismissed. Through all the tough times, he held on to his dream of my playing in the pros some day.

So, in addition to my own dreams, I had two other people living their dreams through me: my dad and my brother. Not that I minded, because their dreams were my dreams.

LIFE LESSON #1

DREAMS CAN ENDURE.

Stuff happens, and sometimes life doesn't go the way you want it to. That doesn't mean you can't have dreams, or that those dreams won't stay there for you.

From where I stand...

**“No sacrifice,
no reward.”**

By Anthony Hardy - Brother

“*Life for me, at the age of 15, was about sacrifice and patience. With my dad now in jail and my mom doing what she could to keep a roof over our heads, I suddenly became the man of the house. Life for me changed 100%. I had to focus on my sister and brother, which meant no more football, basketball and volleyball for me. These things were now on the back burner.*

I can recall a time when mom wanted Mike to get a haircut but didn't have the time to take him. I decided it was my responsibility to get the job done. I took clippers that are used to groom a beard and cut my brother's hair. The result was patches all over Mike's head. When our

mom came home from work she actually cried, but she knew I had done my best to help out.

As the years went on, Mike started to get involved in sports. His first sport was football and he was really good. He played quarterback, running back, wide receiver, cornerback and safety for his pee-wee football team. By the time he was in middle school, basketball became his focus, I guess because he had seen me play basketball in school. He played every chance he could, both at school and after school at the Boys' and Girls' Club. Mike had finally found the sport he truly loved.

But, he was very skinny, and short, and knew very little about basketball. Mike became my number one priority as I began training him. I knew what it took to get to the next level so I did everything in my power to ensure that he was well prepared.

One day I asked Mike if basketball was what he really wanted to do with his life. His answer was “yes.” So, I told him he needed a motto to live by. His motto became “no sacrifice, no reward.” Mike took that motto and ran with it; it helped him get through high school and into college playing the game he loved.”

— Anthony Hardy

BARRIERS

Over the years I've come across a lot of barriers that stood in the way of my ability to live my dream of playing basketball. Some of those barriers were of my own making.

My father and brother both worked multiple jobs to pay the bills, so they never had much time to put me on the right path. They did the best they could.

By the time I was in fifth grade, I was the class clown, and not in a funny way. Well, my father didn't think I was being funny, anyway. In fact he told me I couldn't play basketball until I got more serious about school.

As a child and teenager, I was troubled and made some bad choices. I could be naïve as well. I got betrayed so many times by people I thought were my friends that I had a tough time trusting people.

Here's an example of the kind of betrayal I'm talking about. One day when I was in tenth grade, a friend came up to me, gave me a thick manila envelope, and asked me to keep it in my book bag. I said "sure," put the envelope away, and went to my next class.

The next thing I knew, school security guards walked into the classroom. They called my name, and said that I might know something about some answer keys to a test, which had

disappeared from a teacher's desk. I had no idea what they were talking about. I said they could check my book bag.

That manila envelope? It contained the missing answer keys.

The "friend" who asked me to hold them? He told the school administrators and security guards that he saw me take them from the teacher's desk.

The result? I got suspended from school for five days.

I made a choice to take that envelope from my friend, naively so, and got thrown under the bus. In other words, I got in the way of living my basketball dream.

LIFE LESSON #2

CHOICES MATTER.

Every choice has a consequence, some good, some not so good. If you want to stay on track, learn to make the right choices.

From where I stand...

**“Like father,
like son.”**

By George Hardy – Father

“*When Mike was a baby, he had a brain tumor that we thought might take his life. Little by little, the tumor shrank until it finally disappeared. I knew then that my son was a living miracle, a living testament to God’s grace. Around that time a great pastor we knew, the Reverend Jimmy Thompson, prophesied that Mike would grow up to be a special person. Since that time he has always lived up to those expectations, whatever the trials and tribulations.*

When Mike was young, he made some of the same mistakes I did at that age, but he always learned and

grew from those mistakes. My situation helped mold my whole family, especially Mike. Trouble doesn't last forever, and Mike responded to the tough situation by becoming a great basketball and football player and an incredibly hard worker. I always like to tell people he got his athletic skill from his daddy, but the work ethic, the drive to be better, the instinct to let his actions speak for him – that came from within.

I worked three jobs so Mike could have a better life, and I am so happy he is taking full advantage. I will say that when Mike told me he was transferring home to

finish school so that he could become a travel basketball coach, I was a little disappointed. He is such a great player and had a great chance to play professional basketball overseas. Now, though, when I see the look in his eyes when he talks about those kids and the Team Swoop program, I know he made the right choice. You can see his passion for what he does, and it makes me so proud and thankful to be his father. His achievements have given me new life, and I can honestly say that Mike is my golden child. ”

— George Hardy

DEDICATION

The high school I attended, Dillard High, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has a long and proud basketball tradition. Dillard won the state championship four straight times in the early 2000's and I was beyond excited to be part of such a great program.

My freshman year, I tried out for the junior varsity team. The coach thought I was too small, too fragile, and too soft. He cut me from the team. As anybody who knows anything about high school basketball will tell you, if you can't make the JV, you have little to no chance of later making varsity.

Instead of moping, I kept practicing. Every day, while

the JV team was in the gym running through drills, I was on the outdoor courts, practicing. My best friend, Javier, who was on the JV team, would tell me what drills the team was running on a given day, and I would do the same drills.

The coach (we called him Coach Rock) noticed all of my hard work. A couple of kids had dropped out of the JV team during the first part of the season, which opened a door for me. Coach Rock brought me back to the team for the second half of the season.

Once I was back with the team, I worked hard. I learned how to persevere, and I learned how to lead, and

eventually I made the varsity team. Javier was there by my side all along the way, watching me blossom as a player, and ultimately becoming co-captain with me during our senior year.

Senior year was magical. Dillard won all but two games during the season, and cruised through the playoffs to win the state championship. At the end of the season we were ranked 15th in the nation... and I was on top of the world.

If I had walked away after being cut freshman year, there's a good chance I wouldn't have been part of the championship team senior year. There's also a fair chance I wouldn't be where I am today.

LIFE LESSON #3

**SHOW,
DON'T
TELL.**

True dedication means working at something even when you think nobody else is looking. When you show your dedication, you'll get much better results than if you just tell people about it. As they say, "show, don't tell."

From where I stand...

“Nothing comes to a sleeper but a dream.”

By Javier Frazier – Friend

“Acceptance of hard work,” was the first thing I said to Mike after we learned who was cut from the team freshman year. But because he was crying and upset, he didn’t understand what I was trying to tell him. It wasn’t until two days after being cut from the team that he asked me why I said that. I told him that since we both played the same position I knew that he needed to get a lot tougher mentally and physically if he wanted to play a role on the team. We were both 5’7” freshman, but Mike was only 120 lbs. and I was already 150 lbs. So he took my advice and decided to put in the work. Every day he would ask what drills we did during practice so he could do them as well and get better on his own. I told him that in practice we started out by doing 100 pushups and

stretches so we could bulk up our bodies. Afterward we would do a lot of defensive drills and I also suggested he put up shots to become better on the offensive end. That whole freshman year he put in the work and he grew and eventually he earned a spot on the team.

He came back as a 5'10" sophomore and lead the team in scoring and steals. But he was humbled again during our junior year; he played few to no minutes a game for a team that made it to the state championship, but lost. His confidence took a major blow. He told me, "we can't let our high school career end without a state title." Over the summer he would call me every day to go work out or just play ball.

We built a strong connection over that time and it showed on the court as we cruised through our senior season, only losing two games.

In the state championship, the big moment came, as it always does. Down five points with three minutes left in the game, the defensive drills and the physical part of Mike's game showed up as he stripped the ball from the biggest player on the floor and changed the momentum of the game. It was the best feeling in the world to win a state championship with someone who was like my brother; someone who put in the same amount of blood, sweat, and tears as I did. It is a moment I think about often and will cherish forever. ”

— Javier Frazier

SETBACKS

After high school, I had scholarship offers from a bunch of great schools, as did my friend and co-captain, Javier.

We had another friend from Dillard, Jabari, who got no offers. Jabari and I both played guard, and as my back up at Dillard he never really got the chance to show what he could do on the court. Jabari was an orphan who lived in the foster care system, and he knew that his only shot at continuing his education was through basketball.

There was one school, the University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB) in Odessa, Texas, that wanted me badly. The coach told me he would do anything to get me to commit. I took him up on it. I told him that if he could

find a scholarship slot for Jabari, that I would come to UTPB. Coach said yes, so Jabari and I headed for UTPB.

I'd be lying if I said I liked it. I didn't. At all. Smalltown West Texas is a long way from urban South Florida, physically, culturally... you name it.

I was homesick and I was bored and I often wondered just what I was doing there. Occasionally I had to remind myself that I chose UTPB for a reason: to give my friend Jabari a shot.

One day during freshman year, I decided to go to the local YMCA to find a pick-up game. That was against NCAA

rules, which limit where and when you can practice. I made a mistake, and I paid for it.

During that pick-up game, I tore a ligament in my knee. When Coach found out, he got mad and decided to kick me off the team. I lost my scholarship and had to come home.

I learned some hard lessons that year. Things happen for all sorts of reasons, and you won't always get the outcome you expect, or want. At the same time, you can't control other people's reactions; you can only control your own actions. My actions did have one good outcome, for Jabari. He eventually transferred to Florida State, where he's completed his Master's degree.

LIFE LESSON #4

**DO THINGS
FOR THE
RIGHT
REASONS,
REGARDLESS
OF WHAT THE
OUTCOME
MIGHT BE.**

Sometimes bad things happen as a direct result of something you do or a choice you make. It doesn't mean you're a bad person, just that you had a bad outcome.

From where I stand...

**“Never leave a
man behind.”**

By Jabari Caldwell - Friend

“*I'll be the first to say that Mike played a very important role in my life. We met when we were young and had an instant bond. Our friendship was more like a brotherhood. My father died when I was very young and at the time my mother was not financially stable enough to raise me. So my legal guardian and parental figure became a close friend of the family whom I viewed as my mother.*

The loyalty Mike showed me over the years made us family. He had my back and I always had his. At the end of our senior year, Mike helped change my life forever. I had a solid high school career and wanted to play in college, but I still didn't have any offers worth taking. On the other hand, Mike had offers from numerous colleges around the State of Florida, but he promised me he would never leave me behind.

He chose to go to the University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB), not because he was going to have a great

deal of fun, not because it was a big school, but because the university scouts told him if he were to play for their school, I would be accepted on the team, as well. It was at this moment when I had an epiphany: God put Mike in my path for a reason.

When we first arrived on campus, times were great. Mike was well liked by many and had a reputation of being a people person. He was the only freshman who started on the collegiate basketball team. But I knew something was wrong with him. I knew there was more to him than

just a jocular personality and star athlete. I knew that he was not truly happy at UTPB and the thought of this made me feel guilty. Mike assured me that it was not my fault. He explained to me that coming to UTPB was his choice and I had nothing to feel guilty about. Regardless of the fact that he did not truly enjoy his experience while attending UTPB, he still encouraged me to enjoy my experience despite my inner guilt.

A few weeks after we had this conversation over UTPB, Mike tore his ACL at the YMCA causing him to leave UTPB and return to Florida once and for all. Since we

were like brothers and I knew he had sacrificed a lot to go to Texas in the first place, I supported his decision to return home. My respect for Mike grew after this experience because I realized that he was not only a man of his word but a loyal friend at that. ”

— Jabari Caldwell

DRIVE

Back in South Florida, I knew I had to take control of my future.

First I reached out to all the coaches who had shown interest in me when I was in high school. They weren't interested now. So my next step was looking at junior colleges. In the end I contacted more than 300 coaches.

One coach, at Broward Community College, gave me a shot, and I worked every day to make the most of that second chance. My dream still drove me. I started every game for the basketball team and worked hard on my game and my studies.

The effort paid off when I received a scholarship to

Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina. This was my chance to move to the next level and to prove that I could learn from earlier setbacks.

Playing basketball at Lander changed my life, and not in a way that I anticipated.

NCAA rules state that a player can only play for two four-year colleges in his or her careers (junior college doesn't count), so I knew that no matter what happened, this was my last shot at college ball. The coach at Lander recruited a lot of junior college transfers. These were kids like me who were on their last chance, and he knew it. He was always really nasty and demeaning to us, and we had to take it because we had nowhere else to go.

The coach pushed me out of my comfort zone when he had me play out of position, and he tested my commitment when he favored a lesser player. And all that time, he never, ever had anything positive to say to any of us.

At some point in my time at Lander I realized I would not make it to the pros. And as mean as the Lander coach was, I didn't hate him, because he did teach me a lot about how to motivate people. I learned that you don't have to be relentlessly negative to get the best out of other people. It doesn't have to be that way.

I didn't give up on my dream. I just found a new one: becoming the kind of player's coach that the Lander coach wasn't. As one door closed, another one opened.

LIFE LESSON #5

**GO
OUTSIDE
YOUR
COMFORT
ZONE.**

Often the best way to grow as a person is do something that's out of the ordinary for you.

From where I stand...

**“Play 1000% and refuse
to lose, no matter what.”**

By Robert Starkman – College Basketball Coach

“ I remember getting an email from Coach Mike prior to the start of the school year in 2011. He explained to me he had just overcome surgery and had a bad experience in Texas. I remembered Coach Mike as a solid player who came from a winning high school program and I decided to give him a shot.

I distinctly remember driving home from Gainesville after dropping my son off for his freshman year in college and receiving a call from Coach Mike. He was concerned he would not be able to attend school and make pre-season workouts because he needed to work to help his family out financially. I explained to him that

I believe family comes first; I told him that he should continue to work and do what he had to do for his family. For the first time in my coaching career I waived the workouts for one of my student athletes. He couldn't thank me enough. I felt he needed to do what was right, but I also explained he couldn't give up an opportunity to get his education.

Although we had a disappointing year, Coach Mike played 1000% every game. He was asked to play multiple positions and he did. He was a pleasure to coach and even after he stayed an additional year to

complete his associate's degree, I was able to help get him a scholarship to a four-year university so he could play ball and complete his education. When he was experiencing some problems at that school, he always called me for advice and I talked him through things. On his own, Coach Mike sent a letter to my school President thanking me for what I had done for him, not just on the basketball court, but off of it as well. It wasn't what I did for him that really mattered, thought, it was what he did for himself. You do not find a kid with the kind of loyalty and trust you see in Coach Mike very often; he is a special young man and has a lot to offer to the youth of America. ”

— Robert Starkman

OPPORTUNITY

At the beginning of the summer of 2013, just before going up to Lander University, I was looking for a job. My brother put me in touch with Ron Ziccardi, who runs a basketball camp and league for boys and girls in Broward County.

Coach Ron needed an extra pair of hands and he asked me if I was interested in helping train a few kids. In doing so, he opened the door to the opportunity of a lifetime for me.

Through that doorway I found the Golden Child, and learned the greatest lesson of my life.

In the beginning, Coach Ron had me working with kids in the third through fifth grades. In many ways it was as much a learning experience for me as it was for them.

I'd been part of a lot of basketball training camps over the years, but this was the first one without a single African-American child. These kids were not nearly as athletically skilled as I was used to, so I had to have patience.

A lot of patience.

The second, fifth, or tenth time I had to redirect

a child, or demonstrate proper shooting form, or retrieve a wild pass, I just reminded myself that I was there to learn, too, to learn how to be the kind of coach and teacher I knew I wanted to be.

Clearly, most of these kids didn't have the potential for travel ball, which is really competitive. What these kids did have was passion, supportive families, and a coach (Coach Ron) who truly cared for them.

So I took that opportunity and ran with it, and it soon led to an even bigger opportunity, one that changed my life forever.

LIFE LESSON #6

EXPLORE OPTIONS.

You don't know what's behind a door until you open it, and you don't know where an opportunity will lead unless you follow it.

From where I stand...

“When you love a game as much as we love basketball...”

By Ron Ziccardi - Basketball Camp Owner

“*I first met Mike through his brother Anthony, whom I had known for about eight years at that point. From the moment Mike reached out to me for the opportunity to work as a counselor at our summer camp, it was clear to me that he had a genuine passion for basketball.*

When you love a game as much as we love basketball, you want to be around it all the time and you want to

give it back to the next generation that comes along. Mike is a perfect example. Even when he experienced interruptions in his playing career, he still found a way to be involved and to share his gifts with others.

At our basketball camp we emphasize fundamentals, sportsmanship and teamwork. Mike fit in perfectly from the start, and he really took to heart our philosophy of

making the experience of learning basketball fun and positive for the kids. He immediately showed that he had an outstanding ability to relate to the boys. He was so very passionate and energetic that it was obvious that he had found his calling in teaching the game. ”

— Ron Ziccardi

CHALLENGES

In addition to working at the summer camp, Coach Ron asked me to work as a volunteer coach in his recreational league. Coaching is big step up from training. Not only did I need to make sure that the kids had the basics, I also had to look at the skill set and personality of each player and figure out a way to fit them together into a team and create a game plan that worked.

I had seven kids on my team:

Luke, who was really smart but slower than a turtle pouring cold syrup out of a bottle.

Sam, a flashy kid who would stop in a middle of a game to

clean a mark off his shoes.

Austin, my best player, but also a bit immature. He once asked during a game, “Coach, why is water wet?”

Zach, my youngest player, who tried hard but who would cry after every missed shot.

Nick, my tallest player, who could not jump over a nickel.

Noah, my pint-sized point guard with a huge heart and the hair of a Hollister model.

Ethan, whose energy would put the Tasmanian Devil in the shade.

I had to come up with practice drills that were fun but also helped the kids learn. At first, my kids wanted to skip the learning and get straight to the fun part. I had to push them in practice to work on passing, shooting and rebounding.

We lost one game, then another. The boys were losing confidence. Their parents were starting to complain. I spent hours on YouTube looking for plays and formations I thought might help. I prayed that I would find a way and not let these kids down.

It was hard.

LIFE LESSON #7

**DON'T BE
AFRAID OF
FAILURE.**

Failure, or the prospect of failure, can be discouraging, but it doesn't have to be. The most meaningful growth can come from the hardest struggles.

From where I stand...

“The status of leader is something you earn.”

By Ron Ziccardi - Basketball Camp Owner

“After that first summer working as a counselor at our basketball camp, I asked Mike if he would like to work as a coach in the Southwest Broward Youth Basketball League. I could see from the great rapport he had developed with his group at the camp that he had the ability to help the boys with the mental as well as the physical aspects of the game. When you’re as positive

and enthusiastic about the game as Mike is, even the setbacks don't keep you down for long.

I'm a firm believer that the status of 'leader' is something you have to earn, instead of something that's given to you. During his tenure as a coach, Mike has truly earned the status of leader, mentor and role

model. The parents and kids respect and admire him, and that doesn't happen every day. Mike gets along with everyone... but his connection with these kids is something unique in my experience. ”

— Ron Ziccardi

AHA! MOMENTS

Heading to camp one morning after that second defeat, I listened, as I usually did, to the Rickey Smiley show. His guest that morning was Dr. Freddie Haynes, a well-known Baptist pastor based in Dallas, Texas.

Pastor Haynes' message that morning was simple... and powerful. Each person is put on earth with a mission, and God gives the hardest battles to the strongest soldiers.

He also said something that really stuck with me...

“Success isn’t just about what you accomplish in life. It is about what you inspire others to do.”

I realized I had an opportunity to inspire, to be a role model and have a real impact on young lives. I felt God was sending me a signal.

And I was about to figure out why.

That morning at camp, I was at my usual texting spot behind the bleachers when I noticed a very large man and a very small boy lingering at the entrance. I paid them little attention until Coach Ron walked up to me with the boy, and introduced him as Max Klauber.

I wasn’t sure my group had room for another kid, and, like I said, Max was on the small side. But Max had the biggest smile ever, and I instantly knew that he really, really wanted to be there.

Listening to Pastor Haynes that morning had given me a sudden flash of insight... an aha! moment... that I knew what I was supposed to be doing.

As I was about to find out, meeting Max would give me extra motivation to do it.

LIFE LESSON #8

**INSPIRATION
CAN COME
WHEN YOU
LEAST
EXPECT IT.**

The inspiration you get from others may take you by surprise, just as you may be surprised at how you are able to inspire others.

From where I stand...

“Friendship comes in many shapes, sizes and colors.”

By Ron Ziccardi - Basketball Camp Owner

“*When Max first arrived at camp, we placed him in Coach Mike’s summer group. From the moment he walked onto the court I could tell that Max was a very positive, energetic and hard-working kid. He and Mike hit it off on that first day, and you could see that it was the beginning of an unbelievably close and special friendship.*”

Despite the huge differences in their backgrounds and where they come from, Max and Coach Mike have many qualities in common... energy, perseverance, a positive outlook on life and basketball, and the ability to inspire and motivate others. They quickly developed genuine respect and admiration for each other. It's like when

you're with another person all day, every day, and you think 'I see a lot of myself in him!' That was how Max and Coach Mike found their bond with each other. To this day they are still really tight, and I can see the relationship just getting stronger. ”

— Ron Ziccardi

JOY

Once I got Max out onto the court and started running my group through the practice stations, I immediately realized that his shooting form was close to perfect for a nine-year-old kid.

By the second day I was talking to Max as if he were my oldest and closest friend. He had become my second shadow.

He was full of life and joy... and questions... so many questions...

“Coach, why is your hair so soft?”

“Coach, why do you talk so fast?”

“Coach, how many tattoos do you have?”

After lunch on the second day, I asked Max to come for some extra shooting practice.

The first shot... *swish*. Nothing but net.

The second... the third... the fourth... the fifth... all net.

I quickly found Coach Ron and asked if Max could join my rec team. Then I asked Max if he was interested, and

the smile my question put on his face was all the answer I needed.

The last step was to talk to Max’s dad, Adam. Adam is huge where Max is undersized, scary-looking where Max is open and happy. He is also one of the coolest, funniest, most down-to-earth people I’ve ever met. (In fact, I like to joke that the only problem I have with Adam is that he is a graduate of Dillard’s crosstown rival, Ely High School!)

Adam was all for Max playing on the team.

From that point on, we were a different team.

LIFE LESSON #9

**APPEARANCES
AREN'T
EVERYTHING.**

You have to get beyond your first impressions to get to know people and the gifts they can bring.

From where I stand...

**“A new door
opened.”**

By Adam Klauber – Max’s Father

“ I remember walking into the first team practice with Coach Mike, noticing the skill level of the kids and wondering whether or not I had made the right decision. Max had been playing in a recreational league of 3rd and 4th graders. He was a little on the tall side for his age and one of the better players in that league. Coach Mike’s team was 4th through 6th grade, and a few of the kids looked a whole lot more developed than Max, both physically and with their basketball skills. Without showing my cards, I looked over at Max to try and read what he was thinking. Before I said a word, he looked up at me, smiled big and said ‘Dad, I know everyone on

the team!’ Max took the ball and ran over to Mike to get started. He still hasn’t looked back.

I went over, shook Mike’s hand and thanked him again for giving Max (and the rest of my family) this opportunity. I didn’t know much about Mike but I knew Max couldn’t stop talking about him and I knew he was a baller. I didn’t think that because he was black, tall, had tattoos and wore long shorts. I thought it because I watched him throw the ball between his legs and behind his back a few times while he was talking to someone at camp. It’s hard to explain, but you just know it when you

see it. He had clearly done that many thousands of times in his life.

When practice started, I sat on the sidelines close to the team so I could watch, listen and get a feel for Mike’s style. I’ve been coaching kids for a lot of years and, just like I know a baller when I see one, I know a good coach when I hear the first few things come out of his mouth. To me, the hardest part of coaching is figuring out how to discipline and demand without being demeaning. If you can figure that out, then you can get players to believe in you and they start to see what they can be, not just what they are. I watched Mike inspire the kids with motivation

and praise and from what I saw it came naturally to him. That's just who he is. Now that I've known him a few years I know why. To Mike, it doesn't really matter where he coaches or who he coaches... what matters most is why he coaches and that's what makes him great at it.

That first practice went well for Max. Mike helped him get caught up with the schemes they were running and I could see that Max was enjoying what he perceived as moving up to the next level. I also learned a few things because Mike's understanding of the game was way beyond mine. When we got in the car, like always,

we talked about practice. Max loved it and I didn't really care about anything else but that. A new door had opened and Max was excited about what he found behind it. ”

— Adam Klauber

PURPOSE

Max had no trouble with fitting in with the team. He was far from the biggest, fastest or strongest kid, but boy could he shoot. And he loved being part of the team.

For the first time, I felt that my team was truly happy.

That Saturday, we won by ten points. The sheer joy of that moment reminded me of Pastor Haynes' words and the realization that I had made an impact was a true blessing.

That taste of winning lit a fire under my team that they didn't want to lose.

They worked hard in practice... dribbling, passing, shooting and rebounding.

It worked.

We won our next five games by an average of 15 points and earned a spot in the championship game against the best team in the league. For the week prior to the game all I could think about was what I could do to help these boys win that game.

The night before the game I told all the parents via a long text message how proud I was of the team and

what pleasure I took in coaching them.

They thanked me warmly for being so patient with the kids and told me how much fun the season had been for them. These messages reinforced to me that I had found my true purpose in life.

Then I got Adam's response, and that purpose came into sudden, sharp focus.

LIFE LESSON #10

**EVERYONE
HAS
PURPOSE.**

It may take a while, years even, to find your purpose. But you will find it if you give it enough time.

From where I stand...

**“A hard lesson
to learn.”**

By Adam Klauber – Max’s Father

“*When we got to the first game, which I think was the third of the season, we were a little early and the prior game was still going on. Three or four of the kids on our team were sitting on one end of the bleachers and as soon as we came in the gym they waved Max over to come and sit with them. As a parent, it’s always a great feeling to see that your kid is well liked and accepted. In some way, that’s a sign that you’re raising them the right way by teaching them how to build relationships.*

The boys won the game that day, but Max was disappointed that he didn’t play too much. The way he

perceived things, he was at the top of his game, had just stepped up to the big boy league and, on top of that, had new pink LeBron James high tops. In his mind it just didn't add up. On the way home we started to talk about it and he teared up... a lot. So we had a little discussion about how there are eight kids on this team, seven of whom had been working all pre-season and playing in the first few games. Max was the only late addition and I told him that even if he was the greatest player the league had ever seen, there was no way Coach Mike would have let him play more (or even as much) as those other kids. They earned their time and now Max had to earn his.

That was an entirely new concept for Max because in every other league he played, everyone was required to get some minimum amount of playing time in every game. Coach Ziccardi's league is like that too, but that rule can't apply to the kid who walks on the team mid-season. Now that I know Mike much better, I know for sure that he makes everyone earn that right, even on our traveling teams where the general rule is that you put your best players on the court. We've had kids join the team mid-season and they never play right away, even if they're better than a player who has put in the work.

As the weeks went on, Max earned the right to play and Mike gave him a little bit more time in each game. It's nice when things are handed to you but it's always a whole lot more satisfying when you earn it. He did earn it and Max has what it takes to make it on a lot of teams. He's a good player and he also does things that make the whole team greater than the sum of its parts. Today, I'm certain that he understands the MVP is not always the one who scores the most points. Sometimes, it's the guy whose purpose is to hold the team together off court. It takes a great attitude to work as hard (or harder) at practice and play less than the five kids who start. But,

if Max wants to be playing with the level of competition he's in now, that's his reality. This first experience on Mike's team, not playing as much as he wanted to, was the beginning of him finding that purpose and embracing it. ”

— Adam Klauber

COURAGE

In Adam's response to my broadcast text to the team parents, he told me that the opportunity to play on my team meant everything to Max.

Then he told me why.

Max has Cystic Fibrosis (CF), a serious genetic disorder that affects mostly the lungs but also other organs.

Kids with CF have trouble breathing. They don't grow as much as other kids. They come down with lung infections a lot. A lot of them don't play sports because they can't. And they can expect to live about half as long as kids without CF. I had never heard of CF before that moment, and after some

quick Googling, the full implications of Max having the disease sank in.

I was crushed. This could not be happening. Not to Max. Not to the one kid who had given the team the spark they needed to become winners.

There is no cure for CF now. There are only ways to manage the disease to make sure kids with CF have a decent quality of life.

For Max, playing basketball, being part of a team, being treated no differently from the other kids, and creating moments for his family to cherish... these are central to his quality of life.

And his courage is beyond anything I've ever known before or since.

I knew in an instant that I wanted Max to stay in my life. So I texted Adam back and told him that I had always wanted to start my own travel ball team, and that I wanted the Klauber family to be part of it. I also told him that I needed a sponsor and had been praying to find one. Adam immediately responded that my prayers had just been answered.

But first we had a championship to win.

LIFE LESSON #11

**TREAT
EVERYONE
THE SAME.**

People who live with disabilities or other differences don't want special treatment. They just want to fit in with everyone else.

From where I stand...

**“The kid with
the spark.”**

By Debbie Klauber - Max's Mom

“It's hard to describe Max in a few words, but I think Coach Mike captures it when he describes Max as the kid who gave the team the spark they needed. He's an easygoing kid who pretty much likes everyone, particularly if they chuckle at his jokes. If they laugh out loud, they've made a friend for life!

Before I ever knew Max had CF, I remember thinking that he was wise, one of those big-picture people who just sort of 'get' how things are, or how they ought to be. We didn't learn that Max had CF until he was

three, which I've always seen as a blessing in disguise because it allowed him to develop his personality without being labeled as the sick kid or treated as if he were fragile. Because of that, it's been natural for us, and everyone else who knows Max, to follow Life Lesson #11 by treating Max the same way they treat every other kid. As we've come to learn, everyone is dealing with something, lots of people have challenges and body parts

that don't work the way they are supposed to; it is how you face those things that shows what kind of character you have. Being brave in the face of adversity is what builds that character.

Although he hasn't said it out loud, I think Max might have started off a little surprised at the content of this book, at the concept that he could be inspiring someone

else. After all, in his mind, he's just an eleven-year-old kid who loves everything about basketball -- the game, his teammates and the coaches. But as he learns more about CF and listens to motivational speakers talk about their own challenges, and how hard work and determination have set them apart and allowed them to do things they never thought they could accomplish, I can see his wheels turning. He's taking it all in. He's applying it to his life and his challenges. He is a courageous kid, even if he doesn't know it yet. He will

have good moments and bad ones, days when he feels well and days when he doesn't. Facing a disease like cystic fibrosis is a lifetime struggle. But Max will be brave and have the courage to create the life he can see in his dreams, in spite of CF. He gets what is important, he knows what he wants, and I can't wait to see what he will accomplish. ”

— Debbie Klauber

INSPIRATION

Championship game day. The kids' nerves showed on their faces... and in their play. They missed easy shots and made some really basic mistakes.

By halftime we were down by 12 points. The boys were ready to give up but I knew we still had a chance to change the outcome. To help inspire the boys I passed around my high school state championship ring and gave them a simple message...

“Don't give up. Win today, and this will be the first championship of many. Leave everything you have on the floor, and rewards will follow.”

It was a different team that came out to play the second half. Playing from behind is never easy, I know, but the boys gave it everything they had.

Middle of fourth quarter... we were still down by five. Luke, my best defender, picked up his fourth foul. He sat, and Zach came in.

Less than a minute left... still down by five. Austin, my best player, was having a meltdown. I called timeout to give Austin a chance to cool off. In those frantic moments I made eye contact with Max, sitting on the bench. He hadn't figured much in the game, but I instantly felt that spark of inspiration telling me to put Max into the game.

After a few quick passes, Max got the ball... and he was wide open. He set, locked, and shot, a beautiful, slow motion arc that found the net. As he backpedaled towards the opponent's end of the court, a huge smile lit up his face. We tied the game and went on to win in triple overtime.

At that moment, I knew beyond any doubt that Max was put in my life for a reason, that I needed him as much as he needed me.

LIFE LESSON #12

**ALWAYS,
ALWAYS
GIVE YOUR
BEST
EFFORT.**

You may not always win, or even come close, but your best effort is not something that anyone else can take from you.

From where I stand...

“MY number is 25.”

By Max Klauber (age 11)

“*The summer of 2013 was when I knew that ‘my’ number was 25. I joined Coach Mike’s team after meeting him at camp and playing with his poofy hair. I knew every kid on his team from camp and was excited to be part of it. They lost the first two games but the rest of the season we were undefeated. The team we were playing in the championship game was pretty impressive. They had a great point guard who was little, but quick, and an awesome outside shooter. Our teams were pretty evenly matched but they led most of the game. At halftime, Coach Mike showed us his high school championship*

ring and passed it around while he told us to keep our heads up, give our best effort and finish strong.

When we were down by seven points, Coach Mike put me back in the game. I was a little nervous because this was a championship, we were losing, and I knew what Coach wanted me to do. My job was to get open and shoot a 3-point shot. I wasn't in the game long when I got the ball, locked in and sank a shot that started a run for our team. I was so happy hitting that shot that I backpedaled down the court with my hand still in the air. We tied

the score, got to triple overtime and eventually won the game. I didn't make the winning shot but Coach Mike always tells me that I made the shot that got my team going in the right direction.

I still have that trophy, my first jersey with #25, and a memory of our triple overtime victory. Little did I know, we would be making basketball memories, with some of those same players, for years to come. ”

— Max Klauber

REWARDS

After that game, everything changed.

Adam and I started talking seriously about launching a travel ball team. I had coaching skills and experience, but I knew I needed help with the business side of things.

So it came to pass that in February 2014, when I returned from school in South Carolina, we started the **Team Swoop Youth Basketball Academy**.

Being a lawyer, Adam was able to help me form the business the right way.

Team Swoop is a charitable foundation whose number one priority is to positively impact the lives of young people. With that priority always at the forefront, we do three main things.

1. Support and develop amateur athletes for competition in state and national basketball tournaments;
2. Teach kids about teamwork and how it applies both on and off of the court;

3. Give back by supporting various charities and creating scholarships for players who would not otherwise have the opportunity to play travel ball because of the cost associated with it.

During our first full year, we had one fifth grade team that finished in the middle of state rankings. Not bad for a brand-new outfit!

During our second year, we started a new fifth grade team and our team from the prior year moved up to sixth grade. The stories I could tell about how many lives we've impacted and the ways we've done it would fill up another book. And, we're succeeding

on the court too. Both of our teams were ranked in the top ten in the State of Florida and we got a total of seven championships that season.

We also created and hosted a unique fund raiser called the Dream Team Fitness Challenge to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. In our first year we exceeded our goal by raising more than \$25,000. We plan to host many more of these events, in different locations, to help raise money for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and to help further Team Swoop's scholarship programs and its other charitable purposes.

This is my reward... to be doing what I love. I'm impacting lives every day. I am happier than I have ever been, and I am continually amazed at the path my life is taking.

And it's all because of Max.

LIFE LESSON #13

**NOTHING IS
IMPOSSIBLE.**

Nobody asks for adversity. But everyone has it in himself or herself to get through it.

From where I stand...

**“You can’t hide
from adversity.”**

By Adam Klauber – Max’s Father

“Every great leader will tell you that adversity paves the path to success. Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss is a stepping-stone. There is no other way. But I didn’t really know that when I found out that Max had cystic fibrosis. I just thought it was unfair. I also thought that when people said that adversity could be a good thing that was just something they said because they didn’t know what else to say. I guess I just hadn’t really experienced it yet. I read a quote once that said, “adversity causes some men to break... and others to break records.” Now I understand that completely.

Before Max was diagnosed, I weighed more than 300 lbs. I was the fat kid my whole life. I was in decent shape in college but always bigger than I should have been. I was also 6'2" which made it ok. I was just the big dude. But it always bothered me. I tried a lot of things to get in shape, some worked and some didn't. I always wound up right back where I started because I never had the right thing to motivate me.

After we left Max's doctor's office and got the news, I had the same thought over and over again. I kept asking myself how, and why, I had been taking my own health for granted for so long. If I was going to do anything meaningful to help in the fight against CF, I had to start with myself because I certainly couldn't promote good health when I was still trapped inside the body of a fat guy. I had recently made some progress with it but I still wasn't where I needed to be. This time would be

different though. Not only was I scared of losing my own health; I also had to set an example for my kids. They always learn more from what we do than what we say.

Over the next six months I lost about 85 pounds, changed my blood chemistry and my body composition significantly. I changed the way I ate, the way I trained and I made diet and exercise a part of my lifestyle, not just something I dabbled in from time to time. That was in 2007 and there's no way I'll ever go back.

I didn't ask for adversity but it found me. I think it happens to everyone at one time or another. If you handle it right, adversity will bring out the best in you; it will force you to search your soul and find out what you're made of. And when you do, amazing things happen. ”

— Adam Klauber

TEAMWORK

“Together We Stand, Together We Fall... All For One, One For All”

That phrase started as Team Swoop’s motto. Now, it’s who we are. We yell it out loud and proud before and after every game because we want everyone to know that our unity is our greatest strength.

It also explains what Adam, Max and I mean to one another. Together, we’re standing in a way that none

of us could without the other. And, we're impacting the lives of young people... making a difference.

Let's face it, it's an unlikely scenario for a middle-aged white Jewish lawyer and a 20-something African American guy from the 'hood being as tight as Adam and I are. There's a lesson in that for everyone.

A lot of what I knew, or thought I knew, about white people, I learned from the streets. In fact, I once told

Adam that I never thought I'd be able to trust a white man. I was wrong.

But I know that God brought the Klaubers into my life for a reason. I look up to Adam as a friend, a family man and as a hard worker, humble in spite of what he's achieved in life.

LIFE LESSON #14

**WHAT YOU DO
AND HOW YOU
ACT MATTERS
MUCH MORE
THAN WHERE
YOU'RE FROM
OR WHAT YOU
HAVE.**

No matter your color, your address,
or the size of your bank account,
you'd be amazed at what you
might have in common with people
you think are nothing like you.

From where I stand...

“What’s inside?”

By Emma Klauber – Max’s Older Sister (age 12)

“*You should never judge a book by its cover. Instead, open it and read a chapter or two to see what’s inside. It is true that you can find things in common with people who you think are nothing like you. Through Team Swoop I have met people who have different color skin than mine, people who live in giant houses and people who live in small ones, but we’re all the same on the inside. When we are traveling together and having*

a rap battle in a hotel room, hanging out in the pool or celebrating winning a tournament, we are just one team. I know that it is wrong to judge people by the way they look or what they have or don't have. Instead, you should always appreciate what you have and, when you can, share it with others. It is also important not to make

decisions based on what people look like or act like on the outside. You should take the time to get to know what they are like on the inside. That's how you find out the things that matter the most. ”

— Emma Klauber

A Few Last Words...

I don't see Max as a kid with a chronic disease.

He is so full of life, brings me so much joy, and makes me feel that life can never be too hard.

Max gives me the strength to fight through the adversity in my life so I can find the rewards on the other side.

He is one of my best friends.

He is my little brother.



He is my
**Golden
Child.**

Having talents that promise great success.

THE CREATION OF TEAM SWOOP



Team Swoop Youth Basketball Academy, Inc. is a 501(c)(3), charitable organization based in South Florida. Our mission is to impact the lives of young athletes by developing their character and skill in a program that competes in state and national amateur basketball competitions. The portion of the proceeds from the sale of *The Golden Child* that will be donated to Team Swoop will help fund a scholarship program for players who would not otherwise have the opportunity to play for a travel basketball team. To determine who will benefit from the scholarship program, the Board considers issues like poverty, welfare dependence, a low level of parental education, a large number of children,

not owning a home, single parenthood, family dysfunction, abuse, parental mental or physical illness, parental substance use, and other family discord. We know that, through a program like ours, we can impact these players' lives by giving them opportunities, role models and life experiences they would not otherwise have. In just a few years, we can already see that Team Swoop is making an impact on all of its players. We lead by example and create opportunities where they otherwise do not exist. Our program has fostered friendships across racial, cultural and socio-economic differences, created the Dream Team Fitness Challenge that raised more than \$25,000 to benefit Cystic Fibrosis,

won seven championships in 2015, completed the season ranked #5 (5th grade) and #7 (6th grade) in the State of Florida and, most importantly, finished the 2014-2015 school year with a combined grade point average of 3.5. It is our goal to continue giving back to these deserving young athletes and the South Florida community as a whole.

Together We Stand, Together We Fall... All For One, One For All.



Cystic fibrosis (CF) is an inherited chronic disease that affects the lungs and digestive system of about 30,000 children and adults in the US. A defective gene and its protein product cause the body to produce unusually thick, sticky mucus that clogs the lungs, obstructs the pancreas and stops natural enzymes from breaking down and digesting food. Thanks to research and medical care the median predicted age of survival is now approximately 40 years, which is more than double what it was 25 years ago. In the past few years the FDA has

approved two new drugs, Kalydeco and Orkambi, which both treat the basic defect in CF instead of just treating the symptoms. These drugs are effective but they do not work for about two thirds of the patients with the disease. So, research and funding are still necessary for the development of drugs with more widespread application that will, we hope, add decades to the lives of every person with CF.

A portion of the funds raised by your purchase of *The Golden Child* will be donated to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in an effort to contribute to that research so that Max can see **a cure in his lifetime.**

SUPPORTERS

Supporters 173

