



Proud Aspy Mom Newsletter  
May 2024

## Knowledge Is Power



*I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go. - Langston Hughes*

## Life is for Service, "Mister Rogers"

I am in a space of reflection and gratitude as I prepare this month's newsletter. It has been an incredible month and quite frankly I am beyond overwhelmed. Our daughter, Emersen Jackson graduated from St. Petersburg Collegiate High School, **cum laude** and from St. Petersburg College, **magna cum laude**. The month was filled with celebrations as family and friends traveled to our city to give our daughter love and

acknowledge her accomplishments. AND- as soon as we thought it was over our daughter received additional and much appreciated scholarships from the Pinellas County Urban League and the Youth Development Foundation of Pinellas County. The journey is not lost on our family. We are keenly aware of the sacrifice, time, medical, mental and physical support, community resources and fiscal sacrifice it took to arrive here. There are not many words that come to mind other than thank you.



**THANK YOU** to the educators at St. Petersburg High School who genuinely worked hard to set a foundation for Emersen and saw her potential.

**THANK YOU** to my faculty peers who have NO idea they were teaching my daughter. I witnessed your excellence, and I am in awe of your pedagogy.

**THANK YOU** to the extended academic leaders and staff at St. Petersburg College for living to the mission of a Community that CARES!

**THANK YOU** in particular to Dr. Athena Richardson and Dr. Ena Andrews for supporting and saving our daughter's life- MORE THAN ONCE!



**THANK YOU** to the many, many, MANY, speech, occupational and pragmatic therapists that taught our family how to LISTEN to Emersen and truly HEAR her!

**THANK YOU** to the magical personal caregivers that allowed me to breathe, Lynn Watson, Caprice Edmond, Hydeia Thomas, Sharon Davis, Suzanne Pomerantzeff, Cynthia Mettling and Vanessa Fox.

**THANK YOU** to the various mentors of the Zeta Upsilon Omega Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha who gave Emersen a voice and too much more through the AKA Akademy program.

**THANK YOU** to our matriarch, Geri Griffie for pouring into our family.

**THANK YOU** to our extended village who prayed, listened, and cared for our spirit.

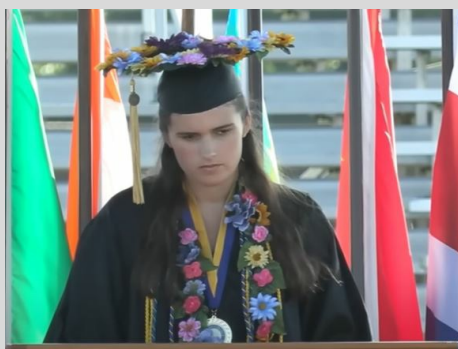


"It's an Extraordinary Journey Back to Ordinary"

Watch the Video

It is truly difficult to express in words what it feels like when someone tells you are not enough and will never thrive. If I can share any words with families who support a loved one on the spectrum it would be - do not listen to the noise.

**LIFE IS FOR SERVICE!** We do not know anyone's potential until we take the time to listen. I shared this video of Elizabeth Bonker some time ago and it is appropriate to share again. Elizabeth's speech echoes the sentiment that life is worth living for everyone. As she notes so appropriately - we should all seek to find a place where kindness lives.



**Be the Light: Elizabeth Bonker's 2022 Valedictorian Speech at Rollins College Commencement**  
Elizabeth Bonker is affected by non-speaking autism and communicates solely by typing, urges her fellow graduates to use their voices, serve others, and see the value in everyone they meet in her valedictory address.

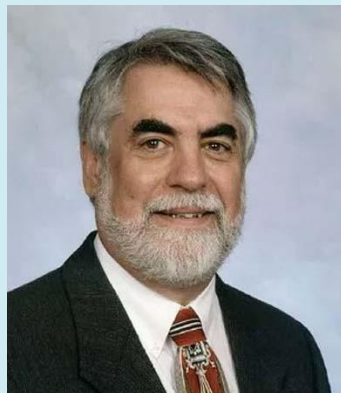
Watch Video of Elizabeth's Speech

Read More About Elizabeth's Story

## COPAA helps you HELP yourself!

I have been affiliated with the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, (COPAA) for some time. <https://www.copaa.org/page/board-of-directors>. While I have shared this story before, it is worth repeating. An amazing Special Education attorney, Mark Kamleiter entered my life at a crucial period when I was losing hope. At the time I was still actively practicing law and contemplating the difficult decision to

leave my practice to support our daughter. I was quite frankly distraught. Mark listened to me intensely and told me he would not take my money and instead would teach me how to advocate for my daughter on my own. He would not take no and insisted that as an attorney I had an obligation to learn and share. Mark introduced me to COPAA. The organization helped me re-focus because for the first time I understood the gravity of supporting persons with disabilities. COPAA's expertise and resources are VAST! Mark opened pandora's box for me because for the first time I had unlimited tools. Although he passed away, he leaves an amazing legacy. His firm and work live on:



**DO YOUR CHILDREN HAVE  
THE SUPPORT THEY NEED?**

**SPECIAL EDUCATION  
LAW & ADVOCACY**

[Find More  
Information](#)



If you are a parent, or someone who cares - COPAA is worth checking out.

[Read all About it](#)

## Transfer THAT Knowledge!

Many parents have a hard time letting go as their young adults make their way to college under ordinary circumstances and for parents with emerging adults on the spectrum it is not any different. We have the same concerns.

- **How will they navigate housing?**
- **How will they manage finances?**
- **What if there is a medical emergency?**
- **Will they handle social issues and if not, who can they ask for help?**
- **Transportation?**
- **Relationships!!!!**



It is all too much, BUT it is important to TRANSFER THAT KNOWLEDGE to our loved ones, particularly when they have to learn for the first time to

advocate for themselves. I honestly do not know where to start because a teenager's priorities are far different than adults, but the basics are important. (1) Know the law, (2) Research and (3) Ask for help!

Understanding the differences within the law is difficult and as a parent you likely still need to help your loved one navigate those issues. However, you can encourage your family member to research and most importantly ask for help. If your young adult is headed to college, they should know what college accommodations they have a right to, how to ask for them and what to do if their needs are not being met. It is certainly a lot of information to transfer but a necessary skillset to send them off.

*"Education and especially literacy can foster power; therefore, equitable access to education and literacy is equitable access to power."* - James Baldwin



**ADA.gov**

U.S. Department of Justice  
Civil Rights Division

### Guide to Disability Rights Laws

[More Information](#)



### College Guide for Students with Disabilities

[Read Guide](#)



U.S. Department of Education

### Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education:

[Find More Information](#)



U.S. Department of Education

Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education  
This pamphlet contains information for high school students with disabilities who plan to continue their education in postsecondary schools.

[Read Article](#)

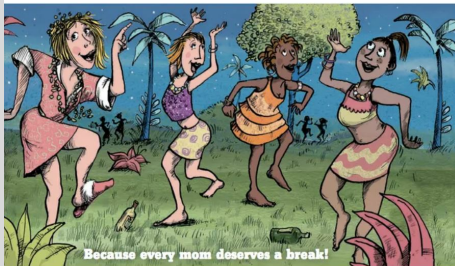
## Where the Wild Moms Are HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

If you have not heard of Where the Wild Moms Are by Katie Blackburn, you are truly missing out. My older daughter Chloë gave it to me as a

gift some time ago. I keep the book in my office as a reminder that moms MATTER. I will not spoil the plot but in essence it is a reminder that moms are humans too. To all of my sister mothers who make the bed, clean the laundry, cook, keep house, care for kids, spouses, loved ones and ALL while being their fabulous selves- HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY! I see you.



## WHERE THE WILD MOMS ARE



KATIE BLACKBURN SHOLTO WALKER

'Where The Wild Moms Are' Gives Classic Kids' Book A Parenting Twist

"I think most new moms need a night off to let their hair down."

[Read All About It](#)

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