

Extreme Generosity: 10 Years and WHEELS OF LOVE Still Inspires

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As the world struggles to cope with the realities of a depressed economy, hundreds of people put their lives on hold to be a part of [WHEELS OF LOVE](#) – Israel’s largest charity sporting event. This was the tenth WHEELS OF LOVE international bike ride and it is almost impossible to comprehend the growth that resulted from this fortuitous accident. After all, how did nine Israelis cycling through Israel morph into more than 400 people from around the world gathering for five days to ride 400 miles – all to raise money for the children of [ALYN Hospital](#)?

The five days spent on the saddle are beyond breathtaking. But all riders would agree that the most remarkable part of the ride is seeing the hospital in action.

For first time riders, this is their opportunity to finally see ALYN – the premiere comprehensive rehabilitation center for physically disabled children and adolescents – and to meet some of the courageous children for whom they ride. For returning riders, touring the hospital is a chance to see how ALYN spent the money they raised the previous year. Taking the riders through ALYN is the highlight of the ride for me, as well. Seeing the hospital’s innovations and advancements constantly amaze me. This year at the end of each tour, I took everyone to the roof of ALYN’s Sports Center and showed them a pipe that was just installed. At first look, this 3-foot high pipe seemed useless. That is, until I explained that it was part of ALYN’s brand new ZIP LINE – at which point, everyone’s jaw dropped.

Being at the forefront of innovation is nothing new for ALYN, but really – a ZIP LINE? Just writing it sounds absurd. But where else in the world but at ALYN would a child with an extreme handicap be able to experience an extreme sport? The image of a child in a wheelchair flying down a zip line is pretty amazing, isn’t it?

Amazing is a great synonym for both ALYN and for the WHEELS OF LOVE ride – and this year’s ride proved to be just that. Each rider and volunteer had a chance to meet children and their parents whose lives have been forever changed because they were treated at ALYN. At a presentation one evening, we were introduced to a mother and her 6 year-old-son, Idan. Idan suffers from Brittle Bone Disease. In his short life, Idan has already had dozens of fractures. Yet, a stiff walk was the only indication that this little boy had special braces hidden beneath his jeans to protect his legs from fractures.

Knowing she was ill-equipped to face a lifetime of serious health issues for her son, Idan’s birth mother “discarded” him when he was only 2 months old. The remarkable woman who stood before us (and her husband who sat in the audience with their three other children) adopted Idan — knowing what difficulties the future might hold.

Idan’s mother presented us with a gift certificate to Toys R Us to buy toys for children who come to ALYN. Idan’s mother thanked us for helping her – both in the past and in the future – since there will be much help needed in Idan’s future because brittle bone disease is progressive. I have been humbled many times in my work with ALYN, but this gift really affected me. What sacrifices did this family make to give us the certificate? They are struggling with not only the challenges of a disabled child, but with the same depressing economy the entire world is battling. Yet, they remain hopeful and they remain generous.

So when people tell me that fundraising is more difficult this year than it has been before – I am not as sympathetic as I was before meeting Idan and his mother. I understand the realities of this economy. But I also understand the realities of ALYN and the responsibilities we all have to help those less fortunate. The five days of the 2009 ride are over, but the work at ALYN continues. The need continues. So although times may be tough, I hope others will follow the lead of Idan’s mother and zip down the line of extreme generosity — the reward is priceless.

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