

Can you please share a small overview of the backstory of Jody's Little Angels?

Sure. So I am Mr. Angelino, obviously. The backstory on Joey's Little Angels. So, my wife and I have a son named Nicholas, and then 15 months later, we had Joey. At about five or six months old, Joey had a little bump on his back. We brought him to the doctor. And long story short, he was diagnosed with a rare genetic disease. Which forced my wife and I to leave our teaching positions. We moved to North Carolina, where he was treated at Duke University Hospital for a disease called Hurler Syndrome, which is a very rare genetic disease. And he ultimately passed away at 15 months old. And after he passed away, I myself did not see a counselor, I never spoke with a psychiatrist, I never spoke to anyone, to be honest with you. And I started this nonprofit organization called Joey's Little Angels. Joey, obviously comes from his name. Little Angels comes from Angiolino, which means Little Angel in Italian, so that's where that came from. And our mission has been to support families with a child undergoing medical treatment. So we started very small, but we've grown tremendously over the past, you know 14,15 years.

On your website, you mentioned that during Joey's time in the hospital, your motto became motivation, perseverance, and strength. How have those three words inspired your family?

So, it's MPS. So if you look at motivation and perseverance and strength, MPS, it's actually an acronym for disease he has. It's called mucopolysaccharidoses. That has a very long hard word to learn and to spell, but that's where motivation, perseverance, and strength came from. We felt that those three words, we were obviously very motivated to get him better, to persevere means to rise above, and it took incredible strength to do what we did and what he did. So they're kind of words that we lived by while we were down at Duke University Hospital.

What gave you the strength to endure Joey's diagnosis and treatment?

We would have gone to the other side of the world to save his life. You know, when you become a parent, your purpose in life is to live, while we live, for our children. And we would have done anything for him. *He* gave us the strength and also our faith was very big in getting us through a very, very difficult time. When he was sick, and ultimately when he passed away as well.

What's a moment that stuck with you and really changed the way you approached life and your mission?

You know, being a father and being a husband when my wife and I were in North Carolina. There was one day—my wife and I used to switch shifts. She would do like one shift, then I would come and do the other, because it was a lot to live in the hospital—and there was one night where Joey did, he coded, which means his heart stopped and they came in and they it was a very traumatic experience for me because it was my shift. I was there alone. Whereas in the

past, anytime something happened with my wife and I were there, that specific day is when he took a turn for the worse. And it really gave me a different appreciation for not only what the doctors and nurses do to help these innocent kids, but how they supported our family through this very difficult time. And it kind of just gave me a different perspective on life, and it made me, it made us, feel like we wanted to give back to those people who were so supportive when we were, you know, going through such a traumatic time.

And I've noticed that around school, everyone seems to be wearing Joey's Little Angels, merch shirts, hoodies. How have Joey's Little Angels and Notre Dame impacted each other?

So, you know, Notre Dame, years ago when COVID happened, I was just a coach here, Notre Dame. And we used to have our toy drive, our toy drive started 14 years ago. The first one, we collected 87 toys, we shipped the Duke, the next year got bigger and it got bigger and bigger and bigger every year. And then COVID hit, and we were kind of stuck, where are we going to have the toy drive this year? And Mrs. Barlow, Principal Barlow, who you don't know, I went to her and I said, "Hey, would you mind if we did the toy drive at Notre Dame?" And she said, "Absolutely." We did a drive through, and it was so impactful and so great for the school. And then I was hired two years later as a dean. And one of the things that I liked about Notre Dame—*love* about Notre Dame is the fact that we do so much service here. And Joey's Little Angels gives kids an opportunity to give back, you know, for example, the toy drive, we have over 100 volunteers working at our toy drive this year. You know, what better way of helping others and giving back than doing it in Joey's honor, in his name? So Notre Dame's kind of given us a platform to give back. And obviously, when people hear our story, kids hear our story, hopefully they're impacted by it and kind of learn to appreciate the little things in life.

And how does participating in events, such as a toy drive, influence the teenagers who volunteer, and what do you hope that they learn from it and take with them?

So, one thing that I think the most important thing that I want you to take away from this interview is this. I'm a firm believer in the secret to living is giving, giving back to other people, giving back to children, families, helping other people is the greatest thing you could ever do for anyone. You can't, you know, gifts are great and, you know, spending time with people is great, but giving your time to help people is ultimately the greatest gift in life, from my perspective.

And your website mentioned donating over \$100,000 dollars to Duke Pediatric Bone Marrow Transplant Family Support Program. What do you hope this money does for families that are in a situation that was very similar to your own?

So this number actually has grown tremendously. To date, we've given over half a million dollars away to families with a child undergoing medical treatment. This \$100,000 to Duke was specific to families at Duke, to help their kids, and to help the families that are going through a difficult time. Financially. So at the time, my wife and I were teachers. We did not have a lot of money, and we received so much help from our family, our friends, and our community, that we thought, what better way to give back than to raise money for these families? That being said, we've given over half a million dollars away to families with a child that is suffering from leukemia, or cancer, or an amputee, or whatever it may be, we're very proud of that.

What are some future goals and aspirations for Joey's little angels? And where do you see it yourself going?

So, at this point, my goal is to get to a million dollars given away, and for our toy drive, we are currently going to hit 60,000 this year. I want to get to \$100,000. That's my goal. You know, the bar is raised every year, and like I said, I think if we had a million dollars given away and 100,000 toys given away, that's 100,000 smiles that Joey's brought to kids who are fighting through the darkest times, to their lives, and if his life is able to impact those in a positive way, then we're doing what our intentions were from the beginning, is helping other people.

And what can we do to help you achieve those goals?

So I think I think more than anything, just giving your time and being kind and helping people, and I think the toy drive that we have, it's always a Saturday after Thanksgiving. We have one hour specific from 9 to 10 every year for kids that we've helped. To me, that's the most important hour of the year. And I think for kids, healthy kids, if they can come be a part of that and see how fortunate they are to be able to come to Notre Dame every day and have a healthy lifestyle and not have to worry about certain things. I think that's the biggest gift we can give to the kids here in their name. Just give them perspective on how good life is.

All right, thank you very much.