

★ mom on a mission ★

AN AMAZING WOMAN DOING GOOD BEYOND MOTHERHOOD



Meg Zucker

Meg is gorgeous, successful—and different.

In fact, she was born with one finger on each hand and one toe on each foot. Not that her physical challenges have stopped her.

She has a HUGE job as a global anti-money laundering officer at a global investment company (yes, whoa!), and she's raising three kids—Ethan, 10; Charlie, 8; and Savanna, 6—with her husband in New Jersey. On top of it all, **Meg founded *Don't Hide It, Flaunt It!***, a blog and campaign to help parents and kids understand and love the differences they see in themselves and others. Love that.

MEG'S CALL TO ACTION

"Let's Empower Our Kids to Flaunt Their Differences and Celebrate Who They Are!"

Recently, my 10-year-old son, Ethan, was in the back seat of the car talking to a friend. "Are you going to play baseball this spring?" his buddy inquired. "No," Ethan said. "I'm playing tennis." It was a seemingly benign exchange, but loaded with implications. For Ethan, playing sports is not always a simple matter.

Like me, Ethan and his younger brother, Charlie, were born missing several fingers and toes, a condition known as ectrodactyly. (Ethan and I only have one finger on each hand, and Charlie has two.) This type of difference is all we have ever known, so it really doesn't occur to us that we are missing anything in life. However, people who first encounter us swiftly form opinions about who we are and what we can and cannot do.



Ethan's friend, however, had simply forgotten all about his physical challenge, which is why he assumed baseball was an option for him. That's a big step forward, and I told the boy's mother as much when I later learned he felt bad for seeming insensitive. Ethan, on the other hand, had thought nothing of it.

But what about kids who don't have the benefits of friendships that can teach them about differences? Or the kids whose parents don't teach them to be proud of their special traits? The best way to ease the stigma of being "different" is to help kids understand that each of us is unique in one way or another. And instead of something to be ashamed of, it's something to celebrate. That's why I launched "Kids Flaunt," a writing competition that asks kids to share what makes them different and why they embrace it. I'm excited to share excerpts from some of the winning entries—these kids will blow you away!

★ **ARE YOU A MOM ON A MISSION—OR DO YOU KNOW ONE?** We'd love to hear your story! Send us an e-mail about your passion. You could be featured in a future issue. Write to pcanswers@scholastic.com.

MEG'S HEADSHOT: CAREY KIRKELLA; FAMILY: MEG ZUCKER



★ Voices from Meg's Blog ★

5 OF MEG'S FLAUNTERS SHARE
"WHAT MAKES ME DIFFERENT MAKES ME ... ME!"

BY OLIVIA, 7

"My leg is different"

I have something in my right leg called Klippel-Trénaunay syndrome. Every year, I get a few surgeries. I had 14 surgeries so far. I started surgeries when I was 4.

I used to think I was the only one in the WORLD with KTS. But when I go to the hospital, I always meet someone who goes to the same doctor as me. I used to feel embarrassed when people saw my leg. I am different because you can see my veins on my right leg. I now know it shows that I am strong. I do a lot of sports like gymnastics, soccer, jazz, tap, softball, swimming, and cheerleading. A lot of people ask questions about my leg.

I just say I was born with it. I am the same as everyone else but my leg!



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAMILIES

BY HENRY VELOSO, 10

"I have Asperger's"

Asperger's syndrome! What on earth is Asperger? It sounds like a vegetable! It's caused by a problem in the brain. It makes people think and act differently from others. In 1944,

a German doctor named Hans Asperger discovered that some children behaved differently from the majority. He named it after himself (credit hog!). People with Asperger's have problems relating to others. They find it hard to understand what other people are thinking or feeling. And it's hard for them to say what they are thinking or feeling. When they explain things to you, they may leave important bits out. Often they find something that really interests them and they will become little Einsteins in that area and will tell you about that subject over and over and over again. In my case it's space. *Outer space.*

Unfortunately, Asperger's has its dark sides. I have had my fair share of punishments. Once I had to go cold turkey with electronics because I was addicted. A few weeks later, I was banned. In a nutshell, I asked my dad if I could use his iPhone at the regional spelling bee. He relented, and I nearly left my awesome jacket because I was distracted. Get my drift? Asperger's sometimes distracts me from what I need to do.

It also helps me in school. As you may recall, my Asperger's interest is outer space. I also excel in math and science and similar subjects. My reading level and vocabulary are beyond average, giving me an edge in grammar. Some call me "Conan the Grammarian!" Topic adaptation is one of my many skills, too. Give me a few minutes, and I can figure out anyone's favorite topic! In short, Asperger's enables me and disables me in many ways. For all of you with Asperger's out there, it's not a disease. It's a gift.



BY ZOE MAY SMITH, 11

"I have a special arm"

Some people (the ones who have no idea what they're talking about) say that they feel sorry for me. That is ALWAYS before they get to know me. Whenever someone says that, I tell them that I wouldn't be quite the same person if I had 10 fingers. Having one arm has done many things for me. I am very self-confident, for example. I can say to people "This is who I am, take it or leave it." My special arm gives me strength to do things, especially when people tell me they might be hard for me. Recently, I learned to ride a horse. My motivation? To prove that I can. It turns out, I love horseback riding. I wouldn't want a full left arm if I could have one. Know why? Because I love my lucky fin!



BY EMMA, 10

"My parents are divorced"

I am a fun 10-year-old girl. I have three sisters and two brothers. But I did not always have them; I only had my brother Alex, and this is why: My parents got divorced in 2009. We were at Applebee's, and after our dinner, my mom said to me and Alex, "I have something to tell you guys." We were scared! Then my dad said, "Your mom and I are getting divorced." Alex was crying and crying, but I did not understand what "divorced" meant! I asked and Mom said, "It means we are breaking up." Then I started to cry. I thought my mom and dad would be together forever!

When Dad had to go, he blew me and Alex a kiss. That made me cry even harder. When we got home, I ran into my room, crying my heart out. I already missed my dad. My mom told me that I would see him every other weekend. I also did not know what that meant until she explained. But soon I started to get used to my parents being divorced. I pretty much forgot what it was like

to have them in the same house. I know that might sound weird, but it isn't. Now in 2013, my dad got married, and my mom did, too. They are happy with what they have. People might say, "I would hate it if my parents got divorced." But they don't understand that if they didn't, it would be so much worse, so it is better the way it is.



BY RILEY JANORA-KOCH, 10

"I have one arm"

My first karate class was on August 2, 2006. I was just 3 years old. I had a blast! From that day on I was on a "quest to be my best," which is a motto at Action Karate. Some of the techniques were difficult at first with my limb difference, especially push-ups. It was hard doing one handed push-ups when I first tried, but not anymore. Mr. Kraus and the other instructors helped me a lot and encouraged me to keep practicing.

One of my favorite memories was earning my first trophy at a tournament when I was 4 years old. I was so excited that I slept with the trophy in my arms that night!

As the katas got longer and more difficult, I realized I had to challenge myself every day. When I started board-breaking, I had no idea I had it in me to break a wooden board in half with just my hand or foot, but I did it! I learned that I had more strength in my body and my mind than I had realized.

Year by year, with a lot of practice, I got better and better, until finally I made



it into black-belt training. When I first started sparring, I thought I was going to die! *Why do we have to wear all the gear if it is not going to hurt?* I thought to myself. But now I know that it is a healthy competition in a friendly environment.

I was pumped when I got to use my first weapon in class. It was an Arnis stick. Arnis sticks are basically small poles of wood that you can twirl between your thumb and fingers. I was worried that I would have trouble using both Arnis sticks with just one hand, but Mr. Kraus helped me modify the kata. The staff is my favorite weapon because you can do everything with it using just one hand.

In December, I got my junior black belt in Chinese kenpo karate. Now I will always be on a "quest to be my best."

★ TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT WHAT MAKES HER . . . HER Visit Meg's site, Don'tHideItFlauntIt.com, and read more inspiring essays by kids. Then encourage your child to think about the things that make her unique—and what those qualities might be in the people she knows. As Meg puts it: "It's not about telling children what to think about people who seem different from them. It's about having kids feel that difference is a relatable subject"—and one worth talking about.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FAMILIES