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**Subject:** Wife of Fallen Hero Shares a Special Message

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2023



## My Friends,

As 2022 came to a close, we were thrilled to bring the families of our fallen military heroes together for our annual Gary Sinise Foundation Snowball Express event. This was the first time we were once again able to gather in person, after two years of virtual events.

For these special families, the holidays can be a trying time as they continue to grieve the loss of their loved one. Bringing them together for this magical event at Disney World in Orlando not only gave them a chance to connect with others like them, but also served as a reminder that we at the Gary Sinise Foundation are always here to support them.

The below testimonial is from one of the 1,867 family members who attended the event. Thank YOU, for helping us to remind them their hero is never forgotten, and they are never alone.

Your grateful American pal,



# SNOWBALL EXPRESS FAMILY TESTIMONIAL



I've been thinking of the words to express my gratitude and even still, weeks later, I can not find the perfect words to thank everyone for their time and effort in the Disney 2022 trip. I was filled with tears most of the trip because this is the first time, since my husband died in 2015, that someone was taking care of everything and I could just relax/breathe. I am welming up with tears, even now, as I am writing this. My husband and I had adopted a higher-level child (Miguel) and his needs have consumed every waking hour for the past 7 years (as he has gotten significantly worse since my husband passed). Our other child (Elysia) quietly sits by the side and misses out on quality time as all my energy, time, money and attention are on her brother. Everything has been about him (fighting with insurance companies, advocating for the care he needs, educating myself on what he needs). With Miguel's request to remain home, Elysia and I flew off to Florida. The kindness of everyone who donated their time and energy touched my heart in a way that I cannot even explain. I have such limited resources and support that just the kindness in the airport and on the charter was everything my soul needed.

The next morning, Elysia and I went to the Memory Garden and I again began to flood with emotion. I haven't had time to grieve the way I need and this beautiful display brought so much emotion forth and allowed me to spill tears that I have not allowed myself to shed in a while. It gave me a place where I felt like I was close to my husband again and could tell him all the trials and struggles we were facing and how scared, tired, and lonely I was without him. This was so needed in order for me to have the strength to carry the load our family has and there are no words to thank you for this.

As we left the memory garden, my daughter saw inside the resource room there were toys and asked to go in. I wasn't going to go in because I already have my ID card and insurance and thought that was all that was in there...boy was I wrong. There were so many resources for everything we are going through: advocates to help me find the resources my son needed, people with Rolodexes to reach out to people in that moment and get some things resolved, advice on how to get medical covered when insurance isn't paying 100%, resources to get my daughter into sports/activities when I am focusing on her brother's medical, tutors when I can't do it all on my own...and so much more. There are no words to describe the weight that was removed from my shoulders in this room. I did not feel like I was doing it alone...it felt like there was an "army" behind me.

I decided to focus on my daughter for the remainder of the time that we were there. To really connect with her and be present for her (not worrying about tomorrow, her brother, or everything else my mind is always abandoning her for). Oh, how my heart and soul needed this. I missed my baby girl so much. I use to be such a hands-on, attentive mom, and being a single mom with a high-level-needs child has robbed me of that quality time she desperately needs and my heart misses. I stared at her smiling, I held her, I really listened to her...I connected with her. She and I needed this so much. I can't tell you how grateful we are.

This was not just a Disney trip for us. You gifted our family resources we desperately needed; support and kindness that has been lacking for years; and quality time with one another that was the greatest gift anyone has ever given me and likely ever will. This letter feels so insignificant with how thankful I am and how much everything everyone did means to us. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

- Leah (Snowball Express Recipient)

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**SNOWBALL EXPRESS 2022: SAY THEIR NAME**



