

Jackie Rettig Memories

Mom's Determination: A Mother's Advocacy

The first story we remember about Jackie is after being home our parents noticed Jackie did not cry, she would stick her tongue in & out of her mouth. After a return visit to the doctors, Mom and Dad came home. Mom was crying and told us Jackie had Down Syndrome. When the doctors suggested our parents place her in an institution "for the sake of the family." Our parents gave a firm answer: **"No, we'll take our baby and go home, thank you very much."**

For years afterward, our parents—with our mother leading the charge—continued to say **"no"** to any barriers to Jackie's development. Once a professional challenged our mother, warning her that she would **"run into a brick wall"** if she kept seeking **"out-of-the-box"** opportunities for Jackie.

Mom's reply was simple and defiant: **"If I hit a brick wall, I'll just start removing bricks."**

Early Milestones and Overcoming Challenges

First, mom chose the name Jacqueline after the First Lady, Jaqueline Kennedy. Mom had ambitious standards and expectations!

When Jackie was a young child, her family worked tirelessly to support her development. In those early years, there was a shared dedication to helping her reach physical milestones. Mom and Dad spent countless hours on the floor with her, gently encouraging her movements and helping her build strength. Even feeding time was an opportunity for growth; the family would hold the spoon above her head, encouraging her to look up and strengthen her neck muscles. Through this persistent love and effort, Jackie reached significant milestones, including learning to crawl and sit up independently.

During her early childhood, Jackie also faced health challenges common for children with Down Syndrome at the time. A serious respiratory illness led to a hospital stay and a life-saving medical procedure **tracheotomy**. While the experience was difficult, the medical care she received allowed her to recover and continue growing, a survival outcome that was becoming more common for babies with Down Syndrome during that era.

As Jackie grew into a woman who took immense pride in her appearance, she remained mindful of the small physical reminder of that recovery: the **tracheotomy scar** on her neck. To cover it, she often chose to wear high-collared shirts or turtlenecks, a style that became a signature part of her look. She was deeply attentive to her hair and clothes, defining her journey with a combination of vulnerability and a quiet, determined grace.

Breaking Through: The Montessori Discovery

Mom soon discovered a new educational approach called **Montessori**, which was just arriving in the United States. She was immediately intrigued—and the fact that the system's creator was Italian only strengthened her faith in it. (mom was first generation Italian). Mom even made a trip to Italy to see Padre Pio and seek his blessing.

Determined to give Jackie a chance, mom set her sights on a prestigious private Catholic school in Cincinnati. Although the school had never done anything like this before, Mom successfully "wrangled" them into accepting Jackie into their new Montessori program.

The impact was immediate. When Mom went to pick Jackie up after her very first day, she witnessed a small miracle: **Jackie put on her own coat**, something she had never been able to do before. Through the Montessori method, Jackie also developed the **lifelong** habit of laying out her clothes every night for the next day (and everyone else's). She loved order.

These "foundational blocks" became the cornerstone of Jackie's personal and educational growth. By securing this opportunity, Mom had successfully **removed the first brick from the first wall** she had encountered.

The Fight for Inclusion



Educational opportunities remained a constant uphill battle. Despite living in a wealthy, well-funded school district, the reality for students with disabilities was disheartening. Special **education was relegated to off-site trailers**, separated from the rest of the student body.

Mom refused to accept this segregation. She wanted Jackie in a regular classroom, a practice we now call **mainstreaming**. To make this a reality, Jackie attended a local Catholic elementary school, Saint Gertrude, from 1970 until she graduated in 1977, later transitioning to a public high school. While the specific details of the legal and bureaucratic battles Mom fought have faded with time, their intensity is undeniable.

Jackie herself shared this determination; she never wanted to be in classes for "special education" students. She was perceptive enough to recognize the difference and sought to be among the "normal" peers.

We do not remember all the battles my parents fought but we know it was not easy. Jackie's academic success was a testament to her hard work and mom's advocacy:

- **Academic Achievement:** She surpassed many high school graduates in her ability to read, write, and spell.
- **Milestones:** She successfully graduated from high school, a feat once thought impossible.

- **Lifelong Ambitions:** Even after graduation, Jackie never stopped dreaming. For the rest of her life, she held onto two major goals: **attending college and finding a fulfilling job.**

An Unstoppable Spirit: The Great Mall Escapes

Jackie was famously curious and adventurous. Every one of her siblings has a story about the time she wandered off in a mall. All it took was the slightest opportunity, just a quick turn of the head—and she was gone. The family spent many anxious hours scouring every corner of the mall before finally finding her.

- **The stores**
- **The fountains**
- **Every hidden nook and cranny**

Even at an early age, Jackie was fiercely determined to be independent. Jackie was not just "lost"—she was exploring the world on her own terms. For the rest of her life, the rest of the family was simply trying to **keep up with her.**

Work, Voice, and Advocacy

Jackie's determination to find a job was unstoppable. She successfully entered the workforce, holding positions at a **local Friendly's ice cream parlor, Steak & Shake, and Kroger.** While she loved her work, her time at the restaurants brought a new challenge: her love for food led to weight gain, an issue she would navigate throughout her adult life.

Beyond her physical health, Jackie also managed a significant **stutter.** Those close to her believed this stemmed from her constant striving for perfection—a poignant irony, as to her family, she was already perfect.

Eventually, Jackie found a powerful way to use her voice. As an active member of the **Down Syndrome Association in Cincinnati,** she educated herself on the science of her condition, specifically the "extra chromosome" that defined it. This knowledge transformed her into a **public speaker.**

She began visiting: *** Elementary Schools * Girl Scout Groups * Special Ed College class.** In these settings, Jackie would share her "little talk" about living with Down Syndrome. By explaining her life and her journey, she continued her mother's legacy—not just removing bricks from her own walls, but helping others see past them, too.

From Speaker to Author

Jackie's public speaking naturally sparked a new ambition: **she wanted to draft a book.** Working together, the family helped her bring that vision to life. The final work was titled ***My Life with Down Syndrome – Wishes, Hopes and Dreams***

To share her message even further, launched a companion website. At that point in her life, Jackie had achieved an incredible trifecta—she was a **public speaker, a published author, and a website creator.**

Her "craving to learn and do" was truly insatiable. Jackie eventually joined a local women's writers' group, where the women welcomed Jackie with open arms. The members absolutely loved her, moved by her unique perspective and her relentless drive to keep growing. Because of Jackie's success, the organization opened the opportunity to other folks with limitations.

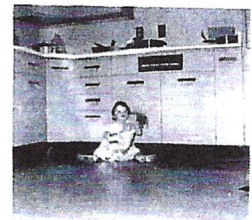
Joy, Joy, Joy – Dancing, Bowling, Singing, Traveling, Cooking, Painting



Oh my, did she love bowling. She excelled at it. Fortunately, our parents were from the generation that also loved bowling. They spent time with Jackie teaching her the "tricks of the trade". She bowled weekly for years, and was proud to have her own bowling ball and shoes. She proudly displayed her many trophies and awards.



It was Jackie's limber joints that allowed her to dance any dance from the twist to the jitterbug. Once a week, she was with a dance group – except she only wanted to dance with the volunteer parents ("normal") not the folks who had disabilities. She could spread her legs and touch her nose to the ground – not trouble at all. Her ballroom dance class was her favorite (Arthur



Murray) because it was all "normal" folks.

Mention travel and she's packing her suitcase. She went to Down Syndrome conferences throughout America, enjoyed San Diego with her sister, Atlantic City (loved casinos when they had coins, not the new ones with paper receipts of winnings), white water rafting – she was game for anything but escalators and elevators.

For quite a while baking and cooking were her hobby. She took Wilton cake classes. – and she knew fondant from regular icing, how to use the decorating tools, how to make a cake design for any occasion. In addition, with an introduction by her Friday life skills class, she had recipes from which she made dinner for mother and family. She was so proud of herself.

Although honestly, she could not carry a tune – she loved to sing. Yes, in addition to all the other enriching activities she took voice lessons from a professional coach. Her voice teacher taught her correct breathing which helped her sing more in tune. However, voice lessons alone were not enough. She somehow managed to become a member of the church choir. How she pulled that off – well, she faxed the pastor of the church (faxing was the texting of its era) she quickly became the most loved choir member. The point is – she wanted it, and as always, figured out a way to make it happen.

Paint-by-number kits. Oh my, how she loved to paint by number. She made gifts for so many people, and she chose a theme that was just so perfect for each person. If it was not a paint-by-number gift, then it was pottery. Her pottery and members of her pottery classes from Whistlestop Clay Works to Mad Potter provided her with such true joy. Giving gifts was one of the true pleasures and treasures of her life. So generous in spirit and action.

Always One Step Ahead: The Tech Genius

When cell phones became common, Jackie was an early adopter and quickly became an expert. However, she was often furious with her family because they would read her text messages—and Jackie was usually busy **scheming things** she did not want anyone to know about! She was adroit at using both the iPhone, a computer, texting and emailing.

One day, she called her sibling and asked for help:

- **The Question:** Did they know how to delete text messages? (she wanted to delete them before any of us read them)
- **The Little White Lie Response:** Wanting to have access to Jackie's texts, the sibling lied and said it was not even possible.

But Jackie would not be stopped. The very next day, she called back, absolutely delighted. **"I have great news!"** she announced. **"I searched the internet and found out how to delete texts. I can teach you how!"**

Even when the people around her tried to slow her down, Jackie was always **one step ahead**.

The World Wide Web

Jackie was a natural when it came to the internet. From the moment it was introduced, she was an early and enthusiastic user, gravitating toward everything the digital world had to offer. She used it for everything: **researching her interests, checking the weather, and shopping.**

Given her specific dreams, her family often joked that they were grateful she never used the web to hunt for her **"young, rich, handsome Italian man."** Then again, knowing Jackie's penchant for secrecy and her skill with a "delete" button, they realized with a smile, **maybe she did, and they'll just never know.**

The Challenge of Friendship

Jackie had a deep, heartfelt desire to be "normal," but this sometimes led to painful social situations. Occasionally, she would form a friendship with someone she perceived as a "normal" peer. In her excitement and intense longing for that connection, she struggled to maintain social boundaries.

During these times, the high emotional intelligence that served her so well in other areas of life seemed to falter. She did not always know how to pace herself, often hounding new friends with

persistent calls, texts, and requests. Sadly, in her eager attempt to hold onto a "normal" friend, she frequently ended up driving them away.

Taking Matters into Her Own Hands

Jackie never lost her "burning desire" for higher education. At one point, she decided she wanted to become a **masseuse**. Without telling anyone, she took full control of the process:

- She **downloaded the application** and completed it herself.
- She went to the bank and **withdrew \$25**.
- She obtained a **money order** and mailed it off to the school.

When a letter from the school arrived stating that Jackie had been accepted, her family had to step in. Because Jackie could not be held to a legal contract, they privately asked the school to tell her the class was full. Even then, Jackie's persistence was **unmatched**—six months later, she **applied all over again**. They had to again call the school and remind them she could not legally sign a contract.

She was tired of working at grocery store and wanted a more sophisticated job. **What she genuinely wanted was an office job – dress like a professional and go to work.** But for now, masseuse would do.

Jackie was enamored with the name Rebecca because of her fondness for a television star, so she chose to change her name TO Rebecca. She was adamant. When someone addressed her as Jackie, she would correct them or often would ignore the person until they used the "correct" name.

The IRS and the President

When Jackie moved on to her next project, she went straight to the top. After her tax refund was delayed, she wrote a letter of complaint to **President Obama** (which, of course, her family did not know about).

Soon after, a letter arrived from the **IRS** addressed directly to her. It essentially said:

"Dear Jackie, we are in receipt of your letter to President Obama. We have researched why you haven't received your refund. Just check this box, sign here, and we will issue it immediately."

Whatever "dressing down" Jackie gave the President, it certainly got the job done!

She had research via internet how to address a letter to the president. Wrote the letter and mailed it without telling anyone. She did not tell anyone because, as usual, she was afraid she would be stopped. Brilliant. She also wrote Jill Biden & Donald Trump.

Setting Her Sights High: The Dream Wedding

In addition to her college aspirations, Jackie had another clear goal: **she wanted to get married.** As with everything else in her life, she refused to settle for anything less than her ideal. She was not interested in marrying someone just because they shared her "special needs" label, nor was she interested in anyone she did not find exceptionally attractive. True to form, Jackie set her sights remarkably high. She knew exactly what she wanted, famously declaring her dream: **"to marry a young, handsome, rich Italian man"** – nothing less would meet her exacting standards.

The Fight for Safe Transportation

For years, Jackie used a special Metro Access van to commute the mile and a quarter to her job at Kroger (grocery store). However, during one routine evaluation, assessors determined that Jackie was **"too smart"** to qualify for the service.

To appeal this decision, her family took a practical approach. They mapped out the walking route Jackie would have to take: a dangerous path along a busy four-lane road with constant traffic turning in and out of parking lots.

When they did a "dry run" of the walk with Jackie, the danger became clear:

- **The Intersection:** Cars turned right on red, cutting across her path.
- **The Timer:** The crosswalk signal only gave her **13 seconds** to cross.
- **The Delay:** Because Jackie needed a few extra seconds to assess the traffic, the light would often turn red before she even reached the middle of the street.

During the appeal, the interviewer asked Jackie what she would do if the light changed while she was still in the crosswalk. In a rare moment of uncertainty, she stuttered, **"I'm sorry, I don't know."** Faced with the reality of the situation, the assessors realized their mistake, and Jackie's **special access was immediately restored.**

The Weight of Awareness

Jackie's higher level of intelligence and acute situational awareness were true gifts, but they also came with a burden. Because she was so perceptive, she was deeply sensitive to the fact that she was not always "on par" with those around her.

This high degree of **emotional intelligence** led to a bittersweet habit: Jackie was constantly **saying, "I'm sorry."**

This frequent apology seemed to be a reaction to:

- **High Expectations:** Mom sought for both Jackie and the system to reach the goal of surpassing the standards set for Jackie at that time.
- **Challenging Situations:** Being placed in demanding environments often highlighted the gaps Jackie worked so hard to bridge.

While this drive gave Jackie an incredibly full and vibrant life, the pressure to perform at such a high level often manifested in her **stutter**. In many ways, her "I'm sorry" reflected the constant effort she put into navigating a world that was not always designed for her.

Caregiver Extraordinaire

As her parents grew older, Jackie naturally stepped into the role of caregiver. Her high **emotional intelligence**—her self-awareness, empathy, and social skills—made her perfect for the job. She could "read a room" or sense a person's needs as accurately as any professional, and conflict of any kind deeply distressed her.

Jackie became the heart of the household's daily routine:

- **Nightly Prep:** Every evening after everyone went to bed, she prepared the morning coffee, set the table for breakfast, and wrote reminder notes for the next day.
- **Thoughtful Details:** She laid out clothes for the morning—not just for herself, but for her mother as well.
- **Caring for Her Father:** As their father became frail, Jackie was always there with food, snacks, or even a "secret" beer to cheer him up.
- **Household Manager:** After her shifts at the grocery store, she would instinctively buy the items she knew the house needed.

She managed these duties with sweetness and a kiss, extending that same devotion to her dogs by ensuring they were always fed and cared for. Jackie truly became the "**Caregiver Extraordinaire**."

The Brilliant Strategist

Jackie lived by a mischievous motto: "**Why tell the truth when a lie is better?**"

Any of her siblings will tell you the same thing—Jackie was a brilliant, persuasive, and highly adaptive liar. Despite society's label that she was "slow," she could craft a perfectly convincing story before you even finished asking her a question.

Once she committed to a story, she never backed down. In this way, she was like a child fiercely determined to control her own life and avoid consequences. To those who knew her best, her ability to think so quickly on her feet was nothing short of **truly brilliant**.

Financial Independence and Secret Adventures

Jackie took immense pride in managing her own money. For a long time, she cashed her paychecks and chose exactly how to spend or save her cash. She was particularly skilled at using ATMs and obtaining money orders to fund the "adventures" she wanted to keep secret.

When Jackie's workplace modernized and switched to **electronic direct deposit** Jackie was not happy. To her, this felt like an intrusion; now, the adults in her life could monitor her finances and see exactly how she was spending her money.

Despite her desire for privacy and her occasional "hoarding" of cash, Jackie was also incredibly generous, buying gifts for others gave her joy. She was a regular donor to the **American Disabled Veterans**, consistently sharing what she had with those in need.

The Pinnacle of Her Career



Finally, after years of dreaming and hard work, Jackie's long-held wish came true. Through her niece, she secured a position as an **office assistant** at a prestigious company.

This role was far more than just a job to her—it was a symbol of everything she had fought for. Having her own **desk**, a professional **title**, and a wardrobe of **business attire** represented the height of achievement. To Jackie, this was truly the **pinnacle of her life**.

There Is Sadness

When Jackie's father passed away, it was quite a loss. Focusing on comforting her mother allowed her to deal with his loss in a way that was not so painful to her. Having Jackie by her side was a great comfort for our mother.

After our mother's death, Jackie went to live with her sister.... a transition that was deeply difficult at first, but one that she met with courage and, in time, remarkable grace. There she created a life filled with joy, routine, and connection. She continued her nightly routine of making coffee so it would be ready for the morning and writing a 7-day weather report before doing her art work and going to sleep. She became a treasured member of the Eastside Ladies Group, a group of women with Downs Syndrome who met regularly and genuinely love one another, where she formed special friendships and found deep happiness. She also proudly participated in Special Olympics, embracing the joy of competition and the friendships it brought her. She was without a doubt the most loved and cherished volunteer at La Soupe, a non-profit rescuing food from local businesses and preparing meals for food insecure individuals.

She took pride in her independence, learning to use Uber, working at Merrill Lynch and later UBS, and enjoyed her favorite stop at Skip's Deli on the way to her office. She loved having her nails done and her hair colored, and her beloved dogs, Bear and Sammy

She embraced life fully: she voted, made her confirmation, served as a gift bearer at church...where in a quiet act of kindness, the priest would come down from the altar to her as **she was too nervous to walk up the steps with the gifts**. And while she would tell you she **did not** believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, she never missed sitting on their laps and giving them a big hug while telling them all she wanted for Christmas or Easter was her mom back, but she knew that was impossible.

Jackie had a special tenderness for little children, always waving, smiling, and offering a kind word. She had a way of making everyone feel remembered and special, whenever she ran into someone she hadn't seen in a while, she would hurry over, wrap her arms around them, and say with complete sincerity, "Oh I missed you so much." That same warmth followed her everywhere; at the doctor's office she would greet him with a bright "Hi Doc. how are you?" and a big, welcoming smile. She never lost her playful spirit if she spotted a handsome man, she didn't hesitate to announce, with a grin, "Now that is one hot dude."

She remained devoted to our parents, visiting their graves and speaking of our mother with enduring love. During her hospital stays with Crohn's disease, even while the hospital would not permit others to stay overnight, her sister remained in her room...because she was Jackie, and she was special. Her red blanket, her 5 nightlights & all her art supplies were permitted.

Even as dementia began to take hold, her gentle nature remained...she still carefully straightened the shelves during trips to Costco, smiles, always saying, thank you, please & I'm sorry. Through every season of her life, she has shown a quiet resilience, a loving heart, and a sweetness that blessed our lives.

Jackie was a blessing to everyone whose life she touched. But just as surely, she was blessed by so many who touched hers. First and always were her parents and then her brothers and sisters, who loved her deeply and made her feel, in every way, that she belonged never apart from the family but right at its heart. From teaching her things like riding a bicycle or using the computer to simple teasing she was everyone's favorite sister.

Jackie is now "home" with mom and dad. We can only imagine the smiles on their faces and the tears in their eyes, but she is missed greatly here.

If you look up the spiritual meaning of the name Jacqueline it is: "may God protect". It is associated with strength, determination, and perseverance. However, if you ask any family member, or anyone who knew her, the meaning of her name is – GIFT.