

As a young lawyer I had the privilege of representing Colby. He had been born healthy and was developing typically until he was about 8 years old. Then, he began regressing due to a rare genetic neurological disorder that affected both him and his brother. We were trying to get him the home health care he needed in his final days, so that he could die in his home with his mother. Ironically, his mother is a home health nurse by training. She is the kind of person they make movies about: courageous, strong, loving and passionate. Her laugh is easy and infectious. She would do anything for her children. His father had left when the boys got sick and his brother had died two years before. When Colby died at the age of 16 we went to the visitation in Weakley County. The entire community was at the funeral home embracing his amazing mother in love.

At the visitation, I noticed there were no pictures of her family, and I asked his mom about it. She said, “Oh honey, there was never time or money for that.” That’s when the idea of TJC’s Mothers of the Year was born. At TJC, every day we get to talk to mothers who have chronic illnesses or whose children do. Their strength and courage overwhelm us. If more Americans could hear the stories we hear, our country would be stronger, more compassionate. Perhaps we’d sweat the small stuff less. Perhaps, we’d remember that what unites us is so much greater than what divides us.

Since 2000, we have honored a few mothers each year by getting volunteer photographers to take family portraits. The pictures are beautiful and their stories equally powerful. We share their stories on our website, with the local media, and for a few years at a downtown reception. The award means so much to the mothers. One year we honored a single teenage mom who had shared her story and made the system better for other families. She was an honor student and held down a part-time job. When we told her we wanted to name her a “Mother of the Year,” she burst out crying. She said, “No one has ever told me I succeeded at anything!”

The pictures also mean the world to us at TJC. They remind us who we are and whom we represent—and the inherent value of standing with these everyday heroes, regardless of external pressures. Their stories inspire us even on difficult days. The pictures are a way for us to inject their goodness and strength into our communities to make them better, stronger, more supportive. So [read](#) about these moms and share their inspiring stories!