

georgetownview

WE BUILD COMMUNITY

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A LIFE AND LEGACY OF *Grace*

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest upon me.
2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

God used the life of Gracie Kitz to inspire the beautiful community of Brookwood in Georgetown. She worshiped God with unbridled bliss and overflowed with His contagious joy. Her light will never dim. All who knew her were changed by her radiant smile and unconditional love.
May 17, 1992 - September 8, 2018

THE INSPIRATION—AND FUTURE—
FOR BROOKWOOD IN GEORGETOWN

The Life and Legacy of Gracie Kiltz



As the medical staff worked hard to resuscitate her, and this family prayed earnestly for God to heal her, Gracie went to heaven.

Twenty minutes is all she had. She felt awed by her new home. 'This is it, I have arrived to the most beautiful place. I thought life was good on Earth but this is really home.' She came face to face with Jesus, who gave her the option to stay or return to fulfill a special plan.

'If you will accept the mission,' he said, 'I know that thousands, maybe even millions of lives will be changed through your life.' Gracie exclaimed, "Yes, this sounds incredible!"

Jesus slowed her and said, "Gracie, it is going to be hard, there will be much brokenness, but through your brokenness, I will heal the lives of many.'

Without hesitation, Gracie accepted her calling and awakened in her hospital room surrounded by her family.

~Erin Kiltz Lunsford

The Inspiration Behind Brookwood in Georgetown

Emily Kiltz Lunsford believes, without a doubt, it was her sister's miraculous recovery at age 3 that allowed the beautiful life and legacy of Gracie Kiltz to begin.

BiG INSPIRATION

Gracie's life was spared at age 3—after a tragic accident, doctors had given her no chance of survival—but she was left with a brain injury, on top of Down syndrome.

In 1998, her mother, Erin Kiltz, was inspired by her daughter's fight against leukemia to start His Grace Foundation. This nonprofit organization provides physical, emotional, and financial support to children and their families in the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit of Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

The Kiltz family ultimately found their way to Georgetown where, a few years later, Gracie's beautiful smile and joyful spirit captured the hearts of her fellow students at Georgetown High School and she was crowned Homecoming Queen (photo at right). "Gracie was magnetic and, without a word, she had the ability to encourage others," Erin says. "You felt that unconditional love."

"Her brain was injured, but not her heart or her spirit," Program Director Adele Brown says. "She was fully dependent but only physically."

Despite those golden school years, Erin eventually discovered that there were no post-high school programs for adults with special needs, leading her to scour the country for a place where her daughter could belong. She found that place in The Brookwood Community, outside of Houston, which became a model for Brookwood in Georgetown (BiG).

BiG began in 2011 with eight adults with special needs, known as Citizens, at Georgetown Church of Christ, before moving to 905 N. Church St., which features a café, shop, greenhouse, and the Amazing Grace workspace building.

Today, BiG provides a vocational community for 80 citizens at three campuses—a main location and two satellites at Georgetown Church of Christ and Austin Ridge Bible Church. BiG also began a pre-pilot residential program for five ladies, and, next month, will begin construction on two homes for 16 citizens.

Reflecting on Gracie's legacy, Erin says she always knew there would be ripple effects from her daughter's life. "God sustained her life for such a time as this, allowing 80 citizens to have a beautiful life-giving community, a lasting hope to our families for the future of

their child," she says. "This is a little girl most of the world would consider a non-contributor. From the beginning, I knew there was a much bigger plan than being blessed with a child who had special needs. It was obvious God was leading in and through Gracie Kiltz for something so much bigger than the privilege of being her mom."

THE MOUNTAIN

On the second anniversary of Gracie's passing last month, Erin remembered their time in the ICU 25 years ago. The doctors informed her and her husband, John, that Gracie would not live. When Erin went to check on her son Riley, who was 5 at the time, she found him drawing a picture of Gracie climbing a mountain (right). "This is the most beautiful picture you have ever drawn!" she said. "Could this be God telling us Gracie is not going to die?"

Not only did Gracie live, she was determined to make Riley's picture become a reality. A friend of Erin's gathered a team of hikers who ascended 14,000-foot Handies Peak in Colorado with Gracie on their backs (photo facing page). They helped her climb the last 50 feet on her own and sang *Amazing Grace* on top of the mountain. "It was an emotional time, thinking she had no chance of living, and now she was ascending this 14,000-foot mountain," Erin says.

On September 8, 2018, at 26 years old, Gracie peaked a different and everlasting mountain and, last month, Erin and a group of friends who were instrumental in Gracie's life made that same climb to honor her. Her departure is commemorated by a statue outside the Amazing Grace Building at BiG that captures the moment Gracie stepped out of her wheelchair with a look of pure joy on her face as she was welcomed into her heavenly home. Finally, she had completed her life's mission as her legacy continues to live on through BiG. ▶



Gracie Kiltz's passage into Heaven was immortalized by a sculpture (cover photo) and plaque (above) to honor her legacy in front of the Amazing Grace Building.



BiG Happenings

The coronavirus pandemic has meant a 100 percent pay cut for Erin Kiltz, founder and executive director of Brookwood in Georgetown (BiG). That's because she gets paid in hugs. "It's very hard to work without those hugs," she says. "But Citizens make up for it with air hugs, as well as an ongoing resilience and gratitude during a difficult situation.

"I feel like they could be an example to the entire world for their grateful hearts, and overcoming the obstacles of COVID. They just adapt and press on," Erin says. "They're more thankful than ever for their community and a job at BiG. It's so humbling and honoring to see that our Citizens truly understand what's important in life, and that no matter what, we always have something to be thankful for."

A few of those blessings include a growing Citizen population, new workspace building, and some sweet enterprises for BiG.

BIGGER FAMILY

The Amazing Grace Building at 905 N. Church St. opened at just the right time in mid-March, as the Citizens had a new workspace waiting for them that allowed for social distancing and less interaction between work groups. They've even enjoyed seeing several new faces, as six Citizens have joined the BiG family.



For the first time, all 80 Citizens have been able to communicate across the three campuses with each other via Zoom. The success of these virtual interactions and online programs sparked what Erin calls the greatest discovery for BiG during COVID—the ability to replicate the organization's model virtually through Zoom and YouTube videos.

BiG also plans to begin construction on the first two homes for Citizens as soon as they receive the building permits from the city. "Our families are ready yesterday for those homes to be built," Erin says. She hopes the homes will start welcoming residents in July or August 2021.

Above: A little taste of the BiG Honey Company. · Below: Customers enjoy a bit to eat at the BiG Café. Facing page: Customers browse the BiG shop and art gallery.



BIGGER FUTURE

As for the future of BiG, Erin says she has a desire to establish “Grace Place”, a residential and vocational community for the long-term future of the Citizens. It was her vision from the beginning, inspired by this sobering fact: The number one fear for a parent of a child with special needs is *what happens to my child when I am no longer living?*

The BiG team is open to a land donation in exchange for a generous tax write-off. They are searching for 75-100 acres of land that would feature a pet resort, chapel and wedding venue, amphitheater, drive-in movie theater, putt-putt golf course, as well as three living options for the Citizens—an independent living facility, a duplex option for Citizens who need more support, and a traditional family-style home with house parents. Please contact Erin at Erin@bigtx.org if you are interested in helping make this dream a reality.

SWEET SPOT

HELPING OTHERS NEVER TASTED SO GOOD

Thanks to the recent introduction of The BiG Pie Company, folks with a sweet tooth can swing by BiG to pick up honey or a pie. Susan Beck, a volunteer and former pie business owner alongside Adele Brown, BiG’s program director, are leading this new endeavor. Pies, honey, and much more are available in the store, or through BiG’s online shop for shipping.

Erin encourages everyone to please keep BiG in mind for holiday shopping. They will even offer late-night shopping on Thursdays beginning mid-November.



BiG’s honey program has been in place for years, with eight hives and beekeepers who harvest honey for the organization. Citizens extract and bottle the honey at one of BiG’s satellites, BiG LIGHT at Georgetown Church of Christ. BiG Honey was started by one of the citizen’s moms, Linda Russell, who wanted to help raise money for BiG, and decided to do so by fulfilling her dream of becoming a beekeeper and providing honey for BiG. “It shows the power of desperate moms on a mission, and what we’ll do to ensure a beautiful future for our children with special needs,” Erin says.