

Matthew Rybak



Describe how your personal goals, challenges or commitments exemplify or are inspired by Michael Rothberg's legacy.

It is clearly evident that Michael C. Rothberg was an extremely caring and giving individual. What sets him apart from so many others though was that he didn't just give his money to others or give gifts to those around him, he looked to give the intangibles. Michael Rothberg gave people gifts that not everyone can give, the gifts of friendship, hope, joy, and happiness. In sticking with this theme, I feel that my commitment to Lids for Kids truly exemplifies Michael's constant desire to give the gifts that you can't touch, taste, or smell, but the gifts that you can feel deep inside of you.

Four years ago I started a program called Lids For Kids, in memory of my aunt who had passed away from Lymphoma. This program involves collecting and distributing new baseball and winter hats to local area hospitals and medical clinics to children undergoing cancer treatment. It is my hope that through receiving and wearing these hats, these children will be able to confidently and proudly go out in public without feeling embarrassed because of the effects of their treatment. Although I am always a bit emotional when I visit the hospitals with hats, a recent trip to a Boston hospital had a tremendous affect on the way I look at others and myself. Usually I do not receive a tour of the facilities, but this time I was shown around the small Oncology unit. Many of the courageous patients were energetic, running after each other and just fooling around. As I was walking

around, one doctor thanked me for coming in. She said that I was not only giving these children new hats but also giving the children the gift of choice, the opportunity to pick a hat they wanted. Initially, this comment confused me, then it made me think. So many children suffering from cancer have been stripped of freedoms taken for granted every day, especially the ability to choose. Because of their illness, these children are usually prevented from making many choices due to either medicinal restrictions or physical restrictions. Many must limit their activities to accommodate their treatment and many more simply cannot physically do the things that other children take for granted. I had never really thought about how many choices I make without a second thought, simply because I am healthy. I continue this project not just to give these great children new hats, but to give them something many others can't give them, the intangible gift of choice.

How have acts of terrorism around the world affected your life and your outlook on the future?

Acts of terrorism around the world have affected my life tremendously and helped me to create an entirely new outlook on life. September 11th and other acts of terrorism didn't cripple any hopes or dreams for the future, these events were a wake-up call, messages saying that so much more needs to be done. Prior to September 11th, I seemed to be living a simple and easygoing life, without a care in the world whether or not terrorism existed. Terrorism didn't seem to affect me, maybe because it didn't hit close enough to home or maybe because I was naïve to think that I was invincible along with the United States of America. When I saw the planes hit the towers on television something finally clicked in my head. As I sat in my classroom at school I realized that what was happening on that horrific day was making history. Fifteen years from now maybe my children will be reading in history text books about this event. Instead of students looking at the Vietnam War and asking how it has shaped history, students will be looking at the War on Terrorism and be asking themselves how it shaped history. The greatest impact September 11th had on me though was the idea that I have the power and opportunity to shape the future. The future, which I keep questioning, the future, which has forever been changed, can be shaped by my actions. My generation will in time possibly will put an end to terrorism and I have a say in what happens. When two military aircraft shot over my house as I was eating dinner on September 11th a change occurred, I no longer cared how terrorism affected just me, I cared how terrorism affected and would affect the world for generations to come.