

Blog-a-thon- Day 7

Wow, is it day 7 already? I hope you are enjoying this blog-a-thon as much as I am.

What do people do for exercise during the brutal heat of the Phoenix summers? Well, if you are like me, you go early, put on a hat, lots of sunscreen, and as little clothes as possible and get up on the mountain anyway. If it's somewhat early, it's not that bad. And all that sweating feels really great. I've decided the more you sweat, the more endorphins you release. You can never have too many feel good hormones circulating in your body.

Kyle, however, doesn't buy into this and usually will not walk in the extreme heat. So, in the summer, we often head to the mall. Before the stores open, the local mall is open for walkers. Most, though not all, of the walkers are seniors.

Before the stores open, the mall actually feels somewhat peaceful, in a mall type of way. The lights are turned down, the stores are closed, quiet, and dark, and the music is somewhat soft. Air conditioning is cranked up and there is a completely different energy to the place. There are serious speed walkers and stroll-ers and everything in between. Most voices are hushed.

Hushed until Kyle enters the mall, that is. For some reason for the first few minutes we are there, he is nearly always LOUD. Kyle may not talk, but he sure knows how to use his voice. Often his energy comes out through his voice. So if he is energetic and really needing to walk, he may really need to vocalize too. Kyle lets the mall know "I'm here!". Heads usually turn immediately upon our entry.

Another important detail to note is that people tend to walk in laps around the mall with the stores on their right side. This seems to be the unspoken, yet agreed upon, direction of the flow of traffic. Kyle, however, prefers to walk with the stores on this left and I choose to allow this. This way, I don't spend a lot of time trying to redirect him to walk on a less comfortable side, and can focus on encouraging him to walk as fast as possible burning off some of that energy.

So picture this. Here is Kyle, age 26, at six feet plus with a somewhat awkward gait. His loud deep man's voice is bellowing out a cacophony of sounds and he is walking either very fast and steady into the oncoming traffic of seniors OR walking erratically by stopping and starting frequently, spinning in place, etc. despite my efforts at guidance. He does not reference the people he is walking toward though they desperately attempt to reference him.

We walked at the mall this past Saturday. I was very mindful of the reactions of the other people in the mall.

Mall Talk

Written by Gayle Nobel

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I've decided there are five types of reactions and three of them come from a place of discomfort. I try not to judge as this is certainly understandable for those who have had little experience with people who are this different. Seniors often come into this category. Back in "the day" people like Kyle did not go out in public very often.

Picture this:

Kyle is walking either steadily or erratically and the person we are walking toward:

1- makes an effort "not" to look at us

2- looks, or even stares at us in disbelief, trying to figure the situation out

3- appears frightened (This is not as frequent a reaction, but sometimes little kids or very old people act scared.) I feel sad that anyone would be afraid of Kyle because I know how gentle he is but I do understand that his size plus his behavior might scare some people.

4- smiles at me and gives me a knowing look as if to say "you guys are doing great" (I imagine this person might know or work with someone with special needs.)

5- smiles at me the way they would if Kyle were typical and we were just two people connecting briefly as we walked past each other (This is my favorite. Now we are just people walking in the mall.)

It's kind of fascinating to observe people. Obviously, I prefer reaction 4 or 5. I feel more at ease and less self conscious. But I understand where the other people are coming from too. I am also keenly aware that as they use me as a reference point so my behavior is important.

Sometimes, I conduct an experiment by initiating a look and smile to every single person we walk past. This often seems to put the majority of people at ease though there are still a few

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who ignore us.

Aren't people interesting? Have you had similar experiences with your child?