

# *Silent-Strength*

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*“Today, my positive actions will  
speak louder than all of my  
words.”*

### **Silent-Strength**

In loving memory of Chris Reavis.

## *Introduction & Dedication*

This book is dedicated to my Mom and Dad who, for 41 straight years, spent every day of Chris Reavis' life caring for him and loving him. Because of their love and dedication, along with that of numerous other family members, friends, teachers, and medical professionals, we were blessed to have Chris in our lives for 25 years longer than doctors expected him to live.

Because of this, Chris was able to have a profoundly positive impact on a countless number of individuals that he came into contact with during his lifetime. In addition, he dramatically changed my life for the positive forever.

The words and pictures in this book are an effort to display but a small fraction of the positive messages that Chris' life displayed to everyone who knew him – and to the many that didn't.

Never in my life have I come close to witnessing anyone who represented and taught the meaning of unconditional love the way that my little brother, Chris, did. Yet he did it all without ever uttering a single word... Silent-Strength.

*“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*  
- Matthew 5:5

## *Special Needs Children & God*

In 41 years, my little brother, Chris Reavis (profoundly mentally handicapped since birth), never uttered a single negative word about anyone, never hurt another soul with any of his actions, and never asked for a single thing for himself while all the while loving each and every person who would simply sit and talk with him - no matter who they were (and without judging them) - just unconditional love.

Chris did this for 14,971 straight days. Yet on the night he passed away, all I could think was... I don't know if I could do it for a day.

In the eyes of the world, Chris (and many Special Needs children like him) was seen as "handicapped"... "a slow learner"... "retarded," while I was considered "normal." But after he was gone, and after truly examining the incredibly positive impact that his life had on a countless number of individuals, I began to wonder if - maybe - Chris didn't have it all "figured out" and that, perhaps, I was the one who was "handicapped."

What caused this reasoning? It was the simple "life comparison" I guess we all sometimes make when someone we care about passes on, and the only thought that kept rolling through my mind upon Chris' passing, was the fact that Chris had so

little - yet he gave so much. While I have been blessed with so much - but often choose to give so little. Or, even worse - choose to use my gifts in a negative way.

So, as is sometimes customary for many of us in a time of mourning, I went to my "life compass" (the Gospel books of The Bible) to see if I could find some comfort. (I like the Gospel Books, because they have the "red words" of what Jesus himself actually said). And, as I'm sure many of you may have experienced at some point, I felt he was talking directly to me... about my thoughts on Chris. This is what I was "hearing" Jesus say to me about my little brother whose lifelong mental capacity was that of a 6 month old child:

*"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." - Matthew 5:5*

*"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." - Matthew 5:8*

*"Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." - Matthew 18:4*

*"But many that are first shall be last: and the last shall be first." - Matthew 20:30*

*"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." - Mark 10:14*

*"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." - Luke 14:11*

*"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." - Matthew 22:42*

*"Thou shalt love thy neighbour... there is none other commandment greater than these." - Mark 12:31*

As I put the book down after several weeks of reading, a peace came over me like never before. My thoughts were confirmed... I believe Chris had it "figured out" all along. I only pray that I one day get to see him again. Thanks for the lessons, Chris. We miss you, "Little Buddy."



Regardless of who you were or what you had done, Chris was simply going to "Love You"... NO QUESTIONS ASKED! Positive actions speaking louder than words... Silent-Strength.

*(Picture: Chris loving on his Great Uncle Sam)*



Regardless of political persuasion or religious affiliation, if anyone sat on that couch, Chris was going to treat them (and their opinions) the exact same way – with love, kindness, and respect... no questions asked and no judging. Chris took this same stance on all political and all religious issues. I hope God was proud of him.

*(Picture: Dad and Chris on that couch!)*



Somehow, Chris crawled over to her wheelchair. Though he was incapable of verbal communication... perhaps enough was still being said.

*The Silent-Strength Pledge*  
*(In honor of the life Chris lead)*

*"Today, my positive actions will speak louder than all of my words"... Silent-Strength*



Mentally handicapped... lying in hospital bed with compound fracture... half body cast... in and out of violent seizures... and still smiling. What's our reason for hiding our smile from the world?

## *A Hero Named Mom*

Wikipedia defines a hero as, “a character who, in the face of adversity... displays courage and the will for self sacrifice.” Have you ever known a true hero? I have.

Mine started her reign in 1971. This wasn't the year of my Mom's birthday. Rather, it was the year she gave birth to her third child, Chris. Most importantly, however, it was the year she also found out that Chris was born profoundly mentally handicapped and that he probably wouldn't live to see his teenage years.

Upon discovery of his severe condition, doctors immediately began to “council” Mom about the “problem” she had in having a son like Chris. They recommended she give him up to an institution immediately - before she “became too attached to him,” or before “the stress of trying to care for him” were to tear her family apart. In addition, as a young mother of three boys in diapers... well, the situation would probably be considered as a form of “adversity” in most people's book.

And thus, her hero reign began. Forty one years later, Mom and Chris were still inseparable. For 14,971 straight days, Mom fed Chris all of his meals, changed him, coordinated his laundry list of daily medications, and most of all – LOVED

him. Yet all the while, she simultaneously spoiled me and my little brother, Mike, with overwhelming care, affection, and support.

In addition, it was through her actions on a daily basis, that she taught and showed us how to have compassion for others... no matter what their situation in life. She, like Chris, is the definition of the Silent-Strength Pledge (“Today, my positive actions will speak louder than all of my words.”)

Yet through it all, I cannot recall a single time that Mom EVER asked for anything for herself. It didn't matter whether she was on a week without sleep while tending to Chris' side in the hospital (not knowing if he would make it through the night or not) or whether she was choosing to stay home with Chris while the rest of us went somewhere to have fun, yet again. Regardless, she never asked for a thing for herself.

Have you ever wondered why some people are like that? What drives someone to give their life up for others? I'm not really sure the answer, but it may have something to do with faith. Perhaps it's the belief that there's a “reason for everything,” that “God has a bigger plan than what we can currently see,” and that “doing unto others” IS what it's all about. I don't know. But a few years ago, I did find the following among Mom's favorite things in an old scrapbook of hers.

Perhaps this helped to provide her with some comfort in seeing her life with Chris as more of a “gift” as opposed to a “problem.” It was simply a copy of a poem, and here is what it read:

### *Heaven's Very Special Child*

*A meeting was held quite far from Earth!  
It's time again for another birth.  
Said the Angels to the LORD above,  
This Special Child will need much love.*

*His progress may be very slow,  
Accomplishments he may not show.  
And he'll require extra care  
From the folks he meets down there.*

*He may not run or laugh or play,  
His thoughts may seem quite far away,  
In many ways he won't adapt,  
And he'll be known as handicapped.*

*So let's be careful where he's sent,  
We want his life to be content.  
Please LORD, find the parents who  
Will do a special job for you.*

*They will not realize right away  
The leading role they're asked to play,  
But with this child sent from above*

*Comes stronger faith and richer love.*

*And soon they'll know the privilege given*

*In caring for their gift from Heaven.*

*Their precious charge, so meek and mild,*

*Is HEAVEN'S VERY SPECIAL CHILD.*

**By Edna Massionilla, December, 1981, The Optimist –  
newsletter for PROUD, Parents Regional Outreach for  
Understanding Down's Inc.**

Mom and Chris were “glued to the hip,” for Chris’ entire life, and it was by no coincidence that she was by his side when Chris passed away in the living room this past January - on his favorite spot on the couch. After giving her life to him for 41 years, she was there to say good-bye to her very best friend.

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay  
down his life for his friends.” – John 15:13*

From January 14, 1971 to January 21, 2012, Mom laid down her life for Chris. Between Wikipedia and the Bible, it’s official – our family has had a true hero in our midst, and I am proud to share her story. Thanks, Mom.

Dad shared the following article with me after Chris had passed. He said that Mom had always cherished it.

### *The Special Mother*

by Erma Bombeck

Most women become mothers by accident, some by choice, a few by social pressure and a couple by habit. This year nearly 100,000 women will become mothers of handicapped children.

Did you ever wonder how these mothers are chosen? Somehow I visualize God hovering over Earth selecting his instruments for propagation with great care and deliberation.

As he observes, he instructs his angels to take notes in a grand ledger.

"Armstrong, Beth, son. Patron Saint, Matthew."

"Forrest, Marjorie, daughter. Patron Saint Ceila."

"Rutledge, Carrie, twins. Patron Saint...give her Gerard. He's used to profanity."

Finally he passes a name to an angel and smiles, "Give her a handicapped child."

The angel is curious. "Why this one, God? She's so happy."

"Exactly," smiles God. "Could I give a handicapped child a mother who knows no laughter? That would be cruel."

"But does she have the patience," asks the angel.

"I don't want her to have too much patience, or she'll drown in a sea of self-pity and despair. Once the shock and resentment wear off she'll handle it."

"I watched her today. She has that sense of self and independence so rare and so necessary in a mother. You see, the child I'm going to give her has a world of its own. She has to make it live in her world, and that's not going to be easy."

"But Lord, I don't think she even believes in you."

God smiles. "No matter. I can fix that. This one is perfect. She has just enough selfishness."

The angel gasps. "Selfishness? Is that a virtue?"

God nods. "If she can't separate herself from the child occasionally, she will never survive. Yes, here is a woman whom I will bless with a child less than perfect. She doesn't know it yet, but she is to be envied. She will never take for granted a

spoken word. She will never consider a step ordinary. When her child says, "Momma" for the first time, she will be witness to a miracle and know it.

I will permit her to see clearly the things I see - ignorance, cruelty, prejudice - and allow her to rise above them.

She will never be alone. I will be at her side every minute of every day of her life because she is doing my work as surely as she is here by my side."

"And what about the Patron Saint?" asks the angel, his pen poised in the air.

God smiles. "A mirror will suffice."



*(Picture: Dad and Chris at their favorite time of day... Popsicle Time!)*

**Chris lived the “Silent-  
Strength” Pledge for 14,971  
straight days.**

**Could you commit to doing  
it for a day?**

*"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue: but in deed and in truth."*

*- 1 John 3:18.*

**Thank you, Chris... for showing us  
how to love in "deed."**

*"I can't hear what you're saying...  
because your actions are speaking  
too loudly to me."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Character: Doing what you know is  
right... even when nobody is  
looking.**

*All people smile in the same  
language.*

- Unknown Author

**Our words have the power to  
breathe life into others or to kill.  
How much life can I breathe today?**

**We will NEVER be able to control  
what other people think, say, or do  
to us - but we will ALWAYS be able  
to control how we choose to  
respond to them.**

**Perhaps there's a reason God gave  
us two ears but only one mouth?**

**Don't tell us who you are... show us  
who you are.**

**Showing kindness to others is a lot like peeing your pants... everyone can see it, but only you know just how warm it makes you feel.**

*"The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt."*

- Frederick Buechner

There are 2 types of people in the world:

**ENERGY GIVERS** - who continually breathe life into everyone with their kind words, and

**ENERGY SUCKERS** - who continually drain the life from everyone with their constant complaining...

**BE A GIVER - DON'T SUCK!**

*"We make a living by what we get,  
but we make a life by what  
we give."*

- Norman MacEwan

*"I just like to smile. Smiling's my  
favorite."*

- Buddy the Elf

*"Love thy God... Love thy  
neighbor..."*

**Jesus said these were the greatest of all commandments. Perhaps there's a reason he used the word LOVE as an action verb instead of as a noun.**

**Wonder why Jesus admonished the Pharisees and praised the Good Samaritan? The Pharisees were often declaring self-righteousness with their words while the Samaritan just shut up and helped someone in need. Seems Jesus may have favored "walking the walk" over "talking the talk?"**

**Occasionally, the cat will jump into our laps craving positive attention.**

**And, if it gets it - it will purr with happiness. People are the same way.**

**Everyone needs to be "purred" once in a while. Let's see if our words can make someone "purr" today.**

**We should treat every day with our  
loved ones as if it's our last...  
because one of these days, we will  
be right.**

The physical body and the spiritual body seem to be somewhat similar.

**PHYSICAL BODY:**

- Input positive food & drink = increase positive physical results.
- Input negative food & drink = increase negative physical results.

**SPIRITUAL BODY:**

- Input positive words & images = increase positive spiritual results.
- Input negative words & images = increase negative spiritual results.

**The person we are is determined by the choices we make.**

**Life is a lot like Baseball - We often  
strike out and make errors... but the  
ultimate goal is to find our way  
Home.**

**In football (as in life), there is no dishonor in getting knocked down - it's staying there that's the problem.**

**Great "teammates" in football (as in life) extend their helping hand to those who have been knocked down. Perhaps we could be a great "teammate" for someone else today.**

*"The best things in life aren't  
things."*

- Art Buchwold

**It would seem that God created we humans as 'The Great Oxymoron... Our earthly instinct is to try and get more for ourselves in order to make us happy, yet it's the opposite of that - giving more to others - that seems to truly accomplish this goal.**

*"Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve others. You don't have to have a college degree to serve.*

*You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace - A soul generated by love."*

*- Martin Luther King Jr.*

**"It" is patient, "it" is kind. "It" does not envy, "it" does not boast... "it" does not dishonor others, "it" is not self-seeking, "it" is not easily angered... "It" does not delight in evil but rejoices with truth. "It" always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."**

**Is the word "IT" describing the Bible's definition of LOVE or is "IT" the definition of a SCHOOL TEACHER?!**

**Perhaps God IS in our schools...  
May God Bless our Educators everywhere, as they continue to positively influence lives forever!**

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you make my favorite cake for me, and I knew that little things are special things.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you say a prayer, and I believed there was a God I could always talk to.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me goodnight, and I felt loved.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's alright to cry.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.

When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked... and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.

- Mohit Kalwadia

**We all have a list of regrets from our  
past... but our acts of kindness  
towards others will rarely fall on that  
list.**

**Why is it that we are often more fond of our pets than we are of some other people? Perhaps it's because our pets seem to display "Silent-Strength" all the time... they are always happy to see us and always seem to show us love - no matter what we've done and regardless of what we look like!**

**It takes almost twice as many muscles to make a frown than it does to make a smile. Some people are working themselves to death! Share a smile, they're contagious - help lighten their workload!**

Most of us have a moment or two in our past where we remember the positive impact someone else made on us with their kind words or positive actions. Yet, we never told them. Likewise, how many other people's lives have we impacted...or can we impact...with our kind words and positive actions? We may not ever know, but that is no matter...perhaps what truly matters is the fact that we choose to offer kindness in the first place.

*"If you want others to be happy,  
practice compassion. If you want to  
be happy, practice compassion."*

- Dalai Lama

The only time we should ever look down on someone else, is if we are helping them up. Because, though it's nice to be important, it's more important to be nice.

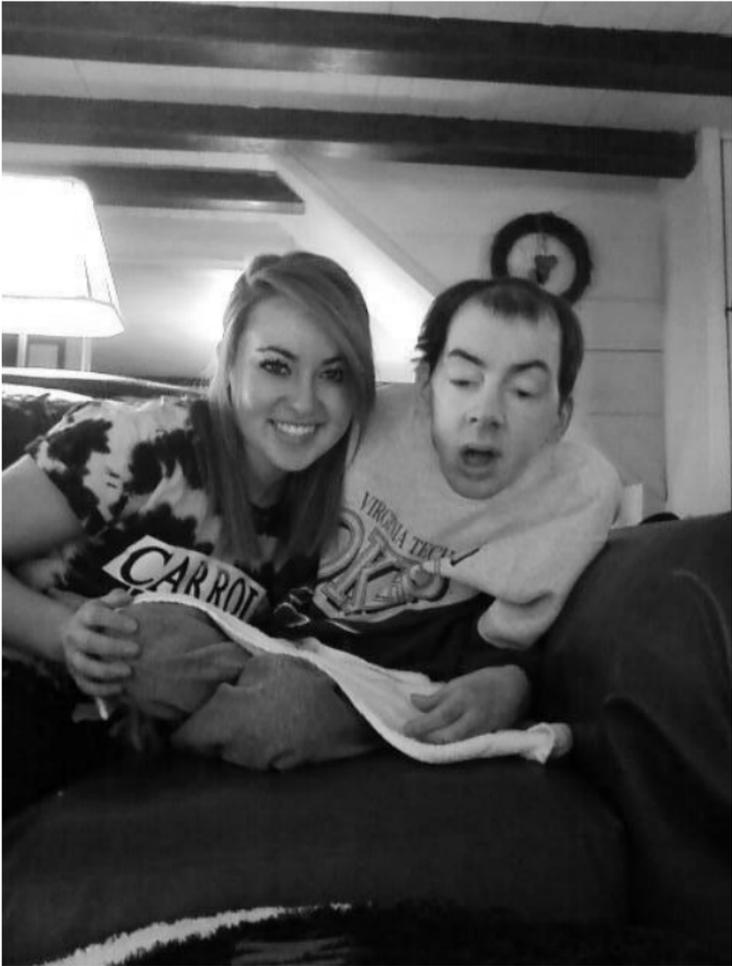
It may be impossible for us to change the entire world for the positive, but changing ourselves for the positive altogether is doable. And, if enough people ever chose this personal route, then perhaps the former would be closer within our reach than we think.

**The way other people see you can make you an attractive person. The way you see and treat other people can make you a beautiful person.**

**If a picture is worth a thousand words, then how many words is a sincere act of kindness worth - not only to the person receiving the kind act, but also to those who may witness what we are doing?**

*“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it.”*

- Charles Swindoll



*(Picture: Chris and his Niece, Ginny - the last picture we have of Chris) Though he was blind at this time... he still made people smile!*

*"Kindness is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see." - Mark Twain*



Brothers 1972



Brothers 2010



*(Picture: Our first family photo without Chris... physically)*

*"Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal."*

- An Ireland Headstone



Chris had an incredibly positive impact on the lives of countless individuals... yet he did so without ever speaking a single word.

*(Picture: Southwest Virginia Home Health Staff on their "Silent-Strength Pledge Day.")*



*In memory of our hero, Chris...the  
strongest person we ever knew.*

(Jan. 14, 1970 – Jan. 21, 2012)

## *About The Author*



Doug Reavis is Chris' older brother. A former two-sport All-American collegiate athlete and Rhodes Scholar nominee, Doug is a Professional Speaker who travels nationwide presenting the "Silent-Strength" Campaign in honor of the life that Chris led. The "Silent-Strength" Program has become a favorite among school systems and church Youth Groups of all ages as a part of their Anti-Bullying Campaigns.

For inquiries about speaking engagements, or to share your own "Silent-Strength" story or quote, please visit [www.Silent-Strength.net](http://www.Silent-Strength.net).