

Gonzaga Spirit Parent Contest

Nominee: Russ Aley, 1992 GU graduate

Nominated by: Lynn Aley (spouse)

Children: Helen (9 years)
Emma (9 years)
John (6 years)
Nicole (3 years)

Russ Aley is a 1992 graduate, who is a terrific example of a Gonzaga Spirit Parent. After graduation and marriage, we found we were unable to have our own biological children. At this time, Russ prayerfully considered all alternatives and felt a strong yearning to be a parent, although it would not be through the usual route. After researching different avenues for adoption, we settled on a local adoption agency, filled out reams of paperwork, had a home study completed, and suddenly, within two weeks brought home newborn twins! Russ rose to the challenge of instant fatherhood, even using Family Medical Leave to take 12 weeks off work to be a stay-at-home Dad once my maternity leave was completed, which was unheard of in the business industry where he was employed. His commitment to Emma and Helen grew and he became increasingly frustrated with the lack of schedule flexibility and family emphasis once he returned to his job. At this juncture, with some serious prodding by the Holy Spirit, he returned to full time school to earn a degree in Elementary Education. His desire to help children, at home, as well as in his community has led him to teach at a lower income school for the past six years. He also has remained committed to mentoring Junior and Senior High School students through our local church and regional denomination, working as a Youth Group Leader, Camp Counselor, and Regional Youth Leader for the past 15 years.

Russ' commitment to children of all ages has been tremendous. He has shown over and over how he values their individual worth, each being created in God's image. But this was not enough! God has recently called him to an even greater challenge. Three years ago, a call came from Child Protective Services,

asking if we would be willing to adopt the two younger half-siblings of our twin girls. These two children were currently residing in separate foster homes. After much prayerful consideration, we brought John and Nicole into our home and our hearts. They are the product of severe neglect, causing John to have significant developmental delays with the need for therapy, school district IEP meetings, counseling, and challenges as a parent that were never dreamt of. Russ has again risen to his calling, taking a very active role in parenting these anxious, challenging, and fragile children. They are thriving with his consistent, loving parenting. Values, such as being spirit-led, open minded, and the worth of each individual, that prepared Russ to trust God and make these life-altering decisions were initially instilled in him at Gonzaga. These values have launched Russ down roads he never imagined being on as a parent. What an adventure!

I leave you with quotes from Russ' four children regarding what makes him such an awesome Dad. John (6) says that he is a "good, safe Dad who wants us to be happy and strong". Nicole (3) states that he "always hugs me and kisses me and tucks me in at night". Helen (9) describes her Dad as "knowing how to take care of us and being a good leader because he teaches us how to be kind, respectful, and responsible". And Emma (9) gets straight to the point summarizing the key to his parenting, "he is the best Dad because he loves us all so much". They also want you to know that their Dad is Gonzaga's biggest basketball fan encouraging them to watch every game on TV with him!

Thank you for the opportunity to allow us to brag about our husband and father and for the life-long lessons that he learned as a student at Gonzaga.