

# The Consumer Advocate's Voice



## Brad Thompson: The HALI Project's Inspiration

The Brad & Karen Thompson family was about as average an American family as one could imagine – until September 13, 1989. That was the day Hali was born. The second of our two children – our son Justin is 18 months older – Hali would soon put us in one of the smallest minority groups in America. Families who have children with special needs represent somewhere around 10% of the population. That we have a child with special needs and have been married for over 25 years places us in an even smaller group.

We consider ourselves truly blessed to see the redemptive power of the Father in making our lives with Hali more than we could have ever imagined. At the same time, there have been some seasons of life that have been incredibly difficult and painful.

When Hali was born, we had no indication that she would be anything but "typically developing." But as time passed and milestones were missed, we started asking questions. Hali has a seizure disorder which we started seeing around her 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. Because she was slow developing, she was placed in Early Childhood Intervention where she would eventually be tested. Those tests placed her in the "Moderately Mentally Retarded" range (this was the clinical term in the early to mid-1990's – and an accurate descriptive term when not used as a slur or means of identity – just my opinion). We know that the label has changed names multiple times since Hali was tested in the name of political correctness. I will tell you that it doesn't matter what you call it – the name will not change the pain in a parent's soul when he/she hears it in reference to their child.

Hali was also born with a Chiari malformation, which seemed harmless enough (and a couple of

doctors confirmed that for us) until the tip of a cyst in her spine that turned out to be 10" long was discovered in an MRI when she was 15 years old. Five operations between December 2005 and the end of January 2006 to try to halt the effects of Syringomyelia as a result of the Chiari malformation changed the physical quality of Hali's life going forward, but it has not affected her incredible spirit and enthusiasm for life.

Hali graduated from Canyon High School in 2008, where she served as manager of the volleyball team and served on the student council. As a senior, Hali was chosen by her classmates as the "Most Spirited Girl" at CHS. And we consider ourselves extremely blessed to be able to say that Hali's school years were not her best years.

Hali has a passion for children. In line with that passion, she has worked at the Southwest Montessori Preschool/Daycare since 2006. She also serves as a faithful volunteer in the Southwest Church of Christ's Children's Ministry.

Hali loves chatting with her friends on Facebook and will be happy to add you to her list of friends in her attempt to have more "friends" than anyone she knows. She also enjoys one of the greatest collections of Disney movies around.

Hali is the namesake and energy behind The HALI Project, which her parents started in 2000, to provide opportunities for individuals like her to share their gifts in their communities, but more importantly to give her a chance to share her incredible joy to everyone she meets.

In September, we are thrilled to be able to celebrate Hali's birthday. We are also thankful to have this opportunity to share her/our story of hope for a bright future, even though it looks nothing like we thought it would on the day she was born.

Brad Thompson is the Director of The HALI Project – a non-profit organization that provides counseling and education services for communities who seek to be more inclusive of individuals with special needs. That work includes working with families, the education system, and the medical system. Brad has been married to Karen for almost 28 years and they have two children – Justin (26) and Hali (25). Hali deals with the challenges of multiple special needs, both physical and cognitive, and is the inspiration for their work. Brad has a Masters Degree in Counseling from West Texas A&M University and operates a private marriage & family therapy practice, which supports his nonprofit habit. Brad and Karen have 25 years of experience working with families. In 2009, they began offering marriage weekend retreats specifically designed for couples who have children with special needs.

