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EDITORIAL

COMMUNITY VOICES

One woman's positive philosophy leads to a succesful business

Robyn's Hood
By Robyn McCloskey

One of the more memorable recurring Saturday Night Live skits of the mid-'90s featured Stuart Smalley, the insecure, beaten-down former fatty with major parental baggage — not to mention some serious sexual-orientation confusion — who hosts a self-help television program.

Stuart was played to sardonic perfection by Al Franken, the comic and SNL writer who ventured into politics and remains mired in a legal challenge of his 225-vote recount lead to be the next U.S. senator in Minnesota.

Whether you love or hate this pompous comedian and his liberal leanings, there's no denying that Franken was hilarious as the nebbish Stuart Smalley. The image of him in his buttoned-down yellow cardigan, awkwardly standing in front of a full-length mirror during his personal pep talks — I deserve good things. I am entitled to my share of happiness. I am an attractive person. And, of course, the oft-quoted, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me," is forever etched in the minds of SNL viewers.

Having watched these humorous but honest vignettes about self-esteem and the trendy nature of 12-step programs, one can't help but wonder how Stuart's life might have turned out if others — most notably his mom and dad — had offered him positive words of affirmation during his formative years rather than leaving poor Stu to convince his mirrored image as an adult.

Well, I know of one mom in Montgomery Township who isn't taking any chances. Debbie Oser, a former sign-language interpreter who's now a stay-at-home mom, is a strong believer in the power of positive words, and it has formed the foundation of a business concept.

Debbie's boys, Zachary, 7, and Justin, 4, are the beneficiaries of their mom's positive philosophies. From early on, Debbie committed herself to saying positive things to her children every night before they went to bed and every morning when they woke up.

But like all of us moms with good intentions, she wasn't quite sure she was getting through to them. At least until one day when she tried to help Zachary on the monkey bars at the playground. Zach brushed aside his mom's offer of assistance: "No, mom, I don't need you. I can do anything I put my mind to."

This revealing statement from her newly empowered son is what pushed Debbie Oser into entrepreneurial action. She's now the businesswoman behind Keeping it Positive, an online store www.keepingitpositive.net that sells what she calls "positive affirmation" products, such as Pleasant Dreamz pillowcases.

"Keeping it Positive was developed out of a desire to help children and adults feel more positive, inspired, self-assured and confident, and know that they can do anything they put their mind to," her Web site explains.

For example, she says, the Pleasant Dreamz pillowcases are designed to help develop that positive mindset and confidence — they're available in assorted colors and are decorated with an equal assortment of self-validating phrases: Whatever I imagine I can do. I believe in myself. I make good choices and people can trust me. I am a good friend and I share well with others. I accept and love myself for who I am.

And, of course, there's her son Zachary's statement that started it all: I can do anything I put my mind to.

In my opinion, they're pretty good words to be the last thing your child sees before closing his eyes at night and the first thing he sees when he opens them in the morning.

With her business starting to blossom, Debbie plans to expand it to baby blankets, travel pillows and even ceramic mugs adorned with messages geared to adults, for the Stuart Smalley in all of us. I find the business concept an interesting way to remind our kids of their value, so that they don't grow up to wear yellow cardigans and stare at a mirror while trying to convince themselves of their worth.

Psychologists tell us that a child's self-image can be shaped at an early age. That's certainly worth resting your head on.

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