



## Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

### The child who makes me brave

Do you have a child who's the opposite of you, and when they're little you don't know what to do with that, but then they grow up and you realize what an extraordinary gift you've been given?

That's how I feel about my Sophie Bear, who turns 10 this month.

While I'm a scaredy cat, Sophie is fearless.

While I'm sensitive, she is tough.

While I'm an introvert who loves to stay home and nest, she's an extrovert, always up for an adventure and any excuse to get out.

Sophie's courage and passion for people and life inspire me every day. When I grow up, I want to be like her.

I must admit, however, that what makes Sophie great now made her a hard baby and toddler. Back then I couldn't keep up. I couldn't stop her for 10 seconds because from morning to night she had sparks coming off her. Sophie was desperate to keep up with her big sister, and when she got left behind...oh, it was tragic.

At Mother's Day Out, Sophie's teachers often caught her crawling out of the baby room. The second she heard big kids passing in the hall, she'd try to escape. In her mind she was three years old. Whatever those kids did, she could do, too.

Sophie was born with a lot of extras — extra energy, extra spunk, extra smiles and extra love. Early on, many of our adult friends would see a kindred spirit in Sophie. With a twinkle in their eye and a knowing smile, they'd tell me and my husband, "I really like that Sophie. She reminds me of myself as a child."

Their remarks gave me hope when Sophie's spirit wore me out. Those who related to Sophie were always fun-loving, big-hearted and well adjusted adults, and through them I learned to see what her enthusiasm could eventually translate into. I learned to recognize Sophie's zest as something to embrace and channel, rather than stifle and suppress, for people like her are made to move mountains.

Today, Sophie has a great personality and high emotional intelligence. Fiercely loyal to friends and loved ones, she isn't scared of hard things. If a tough situation comes up, she's there. If a conversation needs to happen, she'll address it. Sophie would walk through fire to help someone. She is a protector.

She is also perceptive. She notices everything and asks 100 questions to find out what she doesn't know. If ever you need a detective, this is your girl. Her curiosity leaves no stone unturned.

There's much to love about my Sophie Bear, but her best asset is her heart. Her deep love for people begins with her deep love for God. Sometimes when she's upset, she'll go to her room to pray or write to Him in her journal. Her faith at age 10 amazes me. It's as genuine as it gets.

So if you're raising your own Sophie, a tenacious toddler who keeps you on your toes and your knees as you pray for help, remember there is hope. Remember that what leaves you



Kari Kampakis with her daughter Sophie.

exhausted today may be exactly what leaves you in awe tomorrow.

As for my Sophie, let me end with this: You entered this world on your terms. Unlike your three sisters, all induced, you arrived two days early. Your middle-of-the-night delivery was fast and unexpected, a perfect beginning for you.

From the start I was smitten. I was proud to call you mine. A happy baby, you attracted friends everywhere we went. People thought it was just them making you light up and bounce, and of course I never had the heart to say, "Oh, she smiles like that at everyone. She's very social."

The challenge began at 10 months when you began walking. You went looking for action and wanted off my hip for good. That independence and longing for adventure was hard to accept because I wanted to keep you close. Only in time would I understand that God wired you a certain way as part of His plan for you.

I love you, Sophie Bear, and I thank you for making me a better person and mom. You stretch me beyond my comfort zone and make me brave. When I'm with you, I feel strong and fearless, too, because you rub off on me.

Keep shining your light, spreading your joy and sharing your laughter. This world needs you, and so do I. You might only be 10, but I look up to you. I thank God for the life we've built together and the memories still ahead.

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