

an uncommon grace

Jennifer Renasia is one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. Her voice is a mixture of whole milk and honey. She tends to smile frequently. She speaks softly. And I never would have imagined what her life was like before I sat down with her last week in our humble office in Kaimuki.

Her son, Logan, got involved in Common Grace about a year ago. I understood why Jennifer signed him up after she told me he got kicked out of two preschools by the age of two (it's just the bloodline, she tells me laughingly). She was raising Logan on her own because she just divorced her husband of two years. It was an unhealthy relationship. After her divorce, she moved back in with her mom to get help with Logan.

For five years, Jennifer's mom ended up raising Logan by herself. "I got a few slaps on the face from my mom, literally—my priorities weren't straight. I was trying to get my degree. I stayed out all night on a school night. I was like, 'Here, watch my kid. I'm going to party,'" she says sheepishly. Jennifer did alcohol and drugs and immersed herself in the nightlife in search of someone or something to complete her. "But every time I went out I would just end up alone," she tells me somberly.

Jennifer then recalls when she reconnected with an old ex-boyfriend, Joseph. The connection they felt was strong. They depended on each other for comfort and empathy while both of their fathers were fighting cancer. Throughout their relationship, she would make sure to take care of him and his needs but in the process, completely forgot about taking care of her own family.

Logan was jealous of their relationship. He accused Jennifer of loving Joseph more than she loved him. She was lost. She was looking. She was longing. She just couldn't seem to figure it out. Jennifer realized the true state of things when Joseph broke up with her 2 years later. "Everyone around me told me—his family, my family—I needed to take care and focus on myself. I said, 'But I am!' But I was focusing on him and making sure he was okay. I forgot about Logan and myself. When he broke up with me I had nobody—not even my family because I moved out and I caused so much tension before that. They were just like, 'Don't come back, stay over there.' I couldn't even turn to them."

And at the right place and time, Common Grace came into Jennifer's life.

Jennifer invited herself to the high school graduation of her son's mentor (Uncle Jay said, "You actually *want* to come? *A parent?*") and was clearly eager for something new, something different. Curious and open, Jennifer inquired about the church Uncle Jay and Aunty Aries both belonged to.

A year later she is immersed and smiling in the Pacific Ocean, alongside a happy Logan in the picture above—ready and willing to rebuild her family and her life. Today, the lovely Jennifer I know is a Common Grace mentor. Each week, she meets with a little girl in the 3rd grade. "She drew me a picture—on my shirt there was a big heart and on her shirt the word "love" was spelled out. It was showing me sharing my love with her. My son ended up drawing the same thing."

What is God's grace? It is completely undeserved forgiveness. It is available to all those who wish to receive it. And it is incredibly uncommon in our world. The smile upon Jennifer's face as she clutches her hands to her heart after being baptized is happiness only possible through grace given and received. Here at Common Grace, we can't change water into wine and we don't have the capability to service hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. But what we definitely can do is show love, kindness, compassion and most importantly—grace.



Common Grace
Kindness 4 Kids

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Aloha Common Grace family,



Here's your Spring 2017 BIG NEWS from Common Grace. Please enjoy the photos of kids + mentors @ the Honolulu Zoo. We went there instead of the water park this year and it was great. There's also an important story about Logan and his mom, Jennifer. They both have been touched and transformed by God's grace and ours. That moment in the surf—baptizing a mother and son—was a dramatic and fulfilling first for us. What? Has Common Grace gone "religious" all of a sudden? Please allow me to reply in a clear and honest way. Most of our mentors over the last 15 years have love in their hearts for their kids because they have been loved in their hearts by Jesus. His kindness to us and His favor for children, especially the lonely children, was the impetus and energy for Common Grace in 2002. The public schools understand our motivation. Yes, we have separation of church and state in America. We respect the distinction. We promised not to blur it—not to secretly bring the Sunday school to the Public school. When we mentor the kids on their campus we never pray, read Bible stories or overtly reference our faith. At school, simple kindness is everything. Jennifer and Logan are following Jesus now because of the redemptive relationships they found apart from the public school-based service of C.G. Let's celebrate! And, as Grandpa/Flounder (I mean Founder) of C.G. I want to shout my celebrations of the many mentors who do not identify with personal faith. You, in your beautiful compassion for lonely kids have shown deep and lasting kindness. See your photos with your children at the zoo! I love you all.

Uncle Jay

ADVENTURES AT THE HONOLULU ZOO



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