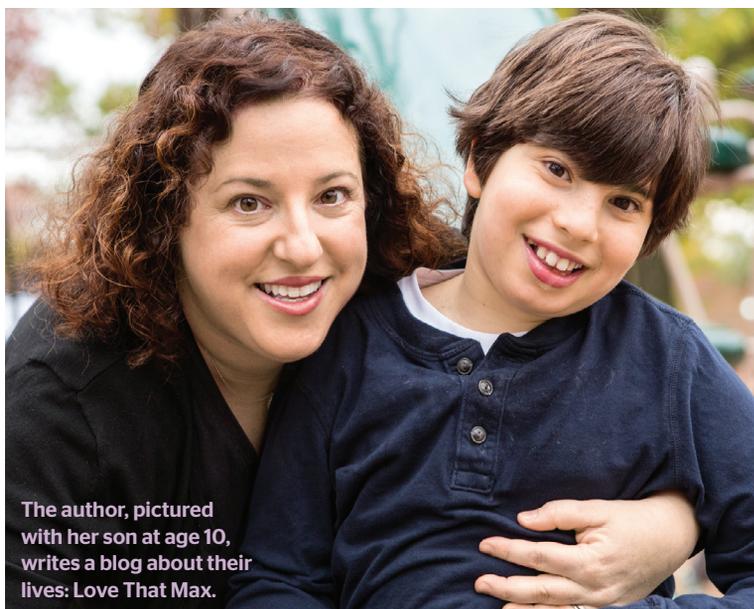


MY MINI LIFE COACH

How do you get through just about anything? Find a hero, who can show you by example. For Ellen Seidman, that's a 12-year-old who never quits in the face of struggle: her son.



The author, pictured with her son at age 10, writes a blog about their lives: *Love That Max*.

MAX IS CLIMBING THE STAIRS to the second floor of our house, moving slowly so he doesn't lose his balance. He carefully places one foot and lifts himself up, clinging to the rail for dear life as I stand behind him. Every step is downright miraculous; this is a kid who wasn't even supposed to walk.

Max had a stroke at birth that resulted in brain damage and cerebral palsy, a condition that messes with your muscles. I can picture him at 2 years old, commando-crawling along the floor like an army soldier to get around when his arms and legs weren't strong enough to hold up his body. At 12, he's still that gutsy kid. His speech is impaired, but he will doggedly repeat himself or use a communication app until he is understood. Reading, spelling, and math don't come easy, yet Max doesn't know how to quit—he just knows to keep trying, willing his body and mind to find a way.

I'm right there with him. My life as Max's mom has been a daily practice of dedication and tenacity;

I've sat in countless doctor and therapist appointments over the years to hear sobering truths about his delays, then pushed myself to deal with whatever was next. I massaged Max's limbs every evening, hoping to alleviate the stiffness. We tried alternate remedies like hyperbaric oxygen treatment (Max would lie in a long glass tube next to me or my husband as 100% pure oxygen poured in, theoretically sparking brain activity). We got Max speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and even music therapy. Our motto: If it couldn't hurt and it might help, we'd do it.

It's not always easy, but Max is my model for saying yes to the things that are hard. My son has made me a better mom, and he's also made me a more successful human being. I've joked to my husband that Max has a future as a life coach because his determination has helped power my own when I've faced challenges over the years, whether with work, finances, or, recently, my health. My doctor let me know, in no uncertain terms, that I needed to lower my cholesterol. If I didn't course-correct now, I'd be at risk for heart disease.

What I've learned from all my efforts with Max is that I have to deal with this challenge head-on, and not wait for when I might *feel* like it. I started making little eating changes that added up, like trading in my breakfast bagel with cream cheese for Greek yogurt, and having a salad

at both lunch and dinner before I dig into the rest of my meal. I began exercising more, speed walking for at least 40 minutes a day. So far, I've taken off 10 pounds (halfway there!), my mojo often fueled by Max. As I'm huffing and puffing on the treadmill at the gym and I'm tempted to stop, I think, *Max never quits*. And I keep on going.

Every time Max hits the stairs, I get another shot of perspective. In the course of the two minutes it takes to walk up 14 steps, with Max unwaveringly going at it, whatever's weighing on my mind inevitably feels lightened. I can deal. When Max reaches the top I say, "Good job!" like I always do. He beams at me and I give him a big smile right back. Once again, this boy has shown me the way.

Every step is miraculous; this is a kid who wasn't supposed to walk.