



Amazing Grace, the Trailer that Makes Memories (and Holds Them, Too)



By Tom Bentley

Emotional earthquakes—and their aftershocks—can cause tremendous destruction, damage that can reverberate long past the initial misfortune. For the Kiltz family, discovering that their daughter Gracie was born with Down Syndrome was a blow. That she then developed leukemia at age two, followed by treatment complications causing severe brain damage, brought escalating sorrow.

But Gracie persevered into adulthood, and her mother, Erin Kiltz, says she was an inspiration. “Gracie, although fully dependent and nonverbal, was the most joyous person I have ever met,” says Kiltz. “Every morning when I would wake her up, she would immediately smile from ear to ear! Gracie was an unconditional lover of people, and she had a magnetic smile for all who came in contact with her.”

Gracie’s death in the fall of 2018 was devastating for the Kiltzes, but long before that they had turned their challenges and their grief into positive action. Before Gracie passed on, they established a nonprofit productive community for adults with special needs called BiG (Brookwood in Georgetown), where participants make and sell handmade crafts. “Looking back, I only regret being so consumed with trying to create a community for Gracie’s future that it stole actual time with her—time I can’t get back,” says Kiltz.

The Kiltzes also established the nonprofit His Grace Foundation in Houston, Texas, for families of patients of the bone-marrow transplant unit in Texas Children’s Hospital.

Gracie’s parents, John and Erin Kiltz, give her a kiss on her 24th birthday.



TOP: Gracie's family members congratulate her on being selected Homecoming Queen at her high school. **BOTTOM AND OPPOSITE PAGE:** The "bright, airy, and spacious" interior of the Airstream is the result of light color values, less overhead storage, and extensive use of exposed interior aluminum.

And they named their Airstream "Amazing Grace."

Erin and her husband John had long dreamed of owning an Airstream, and on a hiking trip in Crested Butte, Colorado, after the loss of Gracie, they decided to act on that dream in her honor. They bought a 2014 28-foot Flying Cloud, but its interior didn't meet their vision. "We immediately contacted Timeless Travel Trailers and began working with their outstanding design team. They were so accommodating and tender regarding our recent loss of Gracie."

"Our customers come to us with a vision, and we must translate it and turn it into reality," says Darcy McDonough, a project designer at Timeless. The fulfillment of that vision took seven months from design to completion and included new cabinets, lighting, flooring, countertops, appliances, custom mattresses, and smaller design touches.

Making it happen did present some challenges, says Lena Meyer Goss, another Timeless project designer. "One unexpected challenge we were able to resolve was to guarantee the structural integrity of the bunk beds above the panoramic windows without disrupting the unique lines of the Airstream's end cap," she says. "How bright, airy, and spacious it all feels now, compared to the original interior."

"If vintage or new, Airstreams are timeless classics," says Goss. "With each project you have to find new creative design and engineering approaches not only to satisfy the client's needs and expectations in usability, space, finishes, and materials but also to honor the integrity of such a timeless, classic vehicle."

McDonough echoes that perspective: "Airstreams are iconic and have carried through the generations, and that history and archetype inspire such passion in their owners regardless of whether it is a vintage or new unit," she says. "To work with people that truly care and to be trusted with creating what are essentially family heirlooms is a true privilege."

The Kiltzes are still mapping out their travel plans in the finished trailer. Their big-picture view is to share travel time to the






Gracie enjoying Central Park on a special trip to New York.

Crested Butte, Colorado, area in the summers and within Texas in the winters.

And Erin Kiltz has a message for travelers of all sorts.

“My message to all that journey through life is to cherish every moment of every day and to love, love, love your children and spouses ‘overtime,’ never knowing when that time together will end.”

Sorrow is a painful motivation, but good can come of it. Rich, deep memories of Gracie—whether through the trailer named after her, the work with the foundations she inspired, or cherished memories of her short but joyful life—will be with the Kiltzes forever.

For more information on BiG, see brookwoodingeorgetown.org. For more information on the His Grace Foundation, see www.hisgracefoundation.org. 

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