



**Special Olympics**

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August 11, 2009

Dear Special Olympics family,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to let you know that my mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, passed away early this morning.

At the time of her death -- as it was throughout her long and full life -- she was surrounded by her family, her husband, her children, her grandchildren and those who loved her.

Though at the end her body had become weak, her heart was strong and it was abundantly full. It was overflowing with faith in God's will. It was replete with a sense of contentment about the past and a deep hope for the future. It was full of love and gratitude for those to whom she had dedicated her life's work and who had in return given her life the gifts of clarity, aspiration and friendship.

Her heart was full indeed of faith, hope and love. She was very much at peace.

As I write to you, her extended family of the Special Olympics movement that she loved so deeply, it is hard not to recognize that these same traits that sustained her at the time of her death had fulfilled and motivated her throughout her lifetime of advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities -- or as she always said, her "special friends."

Her faith in the athletes of Special Olympics was unflinching, even from the very start. When she was young and Special Olympics was still just an idea, few people particularly cared or knew about people with intellectual disabilities. Fewer still shared or understood her dream to awaken the spirit and denied potential of this forgotten population. And yet, though others could not see, she still believed, conceiving Special Olympics in her heart before she could unveil it on the field of play.

She believed that people with intellectual disabilities could -- individually and collectively -- achieve more than anyone thought possible. This much she knew with unbridled faith and certainty. And this faith in turn gave her hope that their future might be radically different.

Her faith in them allowed her to hope for an army of supporters -- coaches, volunteers, donors, fans -- that would emerge and grow and become the foundation upon which a worldwide

human rights movement would be built. It allowed her to envision a world of formerly skeptical people who would witness the accomplishments of our athletes and say “Yes! I understand!” Hope allowed her to see the invisible, fight for the isolated and achieve the impossible.

But mostly, it was her unconditional love for the athletes of Special Olympics that so fulfilled her life. As Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and social activist reminded us: “the beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image, lest we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”

Her love for the athletes of Special Olympics was always just like that. She never hoped that people with intellectual disabilities should be somehow changed into something they were not. Rather, she fought throughout her life to ensure that they would be allowed to reach their full potential so that we might in turn be changed by them, forced to recognize our own false assumptions and their inherent gifts.

She fought the good fight, she kept the faith, and though she knew the race for equality was not finished, she knew that the army of supporters she had hoped for long ago had become a reality that would carry and someday complete her vision. On her behalf, as we prepare to say our last goodbyes, my family and I thank you for your shared commitment to that dream.

My family and I would be proud and honored if you would take some time to learn more about her life, share your own remembrances about her, and read the remembrances of others at a website that was recently established to honor her legacy, [www.eunicekennedyshriver.org](http://www.eunicekennedyshriver.org). In the spirit of her hope that everyone would share in the power of Special Olympics, I hope you’ll not only read and contribute to the site, but share it with friends.

With great appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy P. Shriver". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "S".

Timothy P. Shriver  
Chairman and CEO  
Special Olympics