

My Story

A DAD'S VIEW ON SHORTS VS. PANTS

by DINO M. SCANIO



Most of us will do whatever we can to fit in and look “normal.” As a parent of a special needs child, I often find myself contemplating what to dress my son in. Some people feel we should not draw unwanted attention to him if we can help it. Our loved ones worry he will be bullied, that people will stare at him or ask endless questions because he is “different.” You see, my son has mitochondrial disease. As a result, he wears leg braces. So I have to decide whether to dress him in pants that will hide the braces or to let him wear shorts.

I admit that before this, I never really thought about whether jeans or shorts look better. After all, I regularly wear knee-high superhero tube socks with shorts. So maybe my opinions about fashion don't carry a lot of weight. But I truly believe my son has nothing to hide. Let the world see his leg braces. Yes, the braces cause him to run differently than his classmates, and they create some difficulty getting up from the floor. He might struggle to keep up with others because of them, too. But those braces keep him walking. And from a distance, they look like knee-high tube socks with shorts—so when we stand together, we look alike! I often tell my wife, if I can help my son assimilate in today's world the way God has made him, then I guess I'm doing my job as a father.

The braces that cling to my son's legs like skin are part of his daily routine. For a six-year-old who has been admitted to the hospital more times than the average adult, there is no “unwanted attention” that can do more harm than what he has already faced in his young life. Covering his braces will not do anyone any good because we can all learn from each other, no matter our limitations. Those leg braces are part of my son's daily routine, part of our family, and they have given him the freedom to walk.

My son was born into this life, and it feels “normal” to him. He will teach so many individuals how blessed they truly are and how thankful they should be for a healthy life. Not to mention, there is no reason a person cannot accomplish greatness because he or she uses leg braces or gets around in a wheelchair. My son's success will not be based on his feeding tube, leg braces or medical port but on the morals, values and knowledge we instill in him. All the extra medical items my son uses as part of his “normal” life—including his leg braces—are simply extra superhero weapons to help fight this battle.

My son, who faces daily physical and medical obstacles, has taught me so many humbling lessons. If I could trade places with him and be the victim of this progressive disease, I would, but I can't. But I will ALWAYS choose to wear knee-high superhero tube socks with shorts because it gives me a chance to stand next to my son and look up at my superhero.



Dino Scanio is a third generation Tampa native with a passion for service. He founded the Florida Orthotic & Prosthetic Outreach Team (FOOT Foundation) in 2007, a 501(c)3 public charity, assisting children and adults in impoverished countries. Dino has been providing humanitarian care for children abroad for over 10 years. His Foundation also helps small charities in the local Tampa community and is committed to raising awareness about Mitochondrial Disease.

Tickets are now available for the FOOT Foundation's annual fundraiser. This year they are celebrating their Ten Year Anniversary on Saturday, August 19th at the Centro Asturiano Ballroom in Tampa.

Tickets are \$35 for dinner, wine, and dessert.

More info is at footfoundation.org

