

## LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED by Michael Ted Ferris

Standing up there with more than 50 people looking up at me, a few pieces of scribbled on paper and a fuzzy black microphone in my face is quite a daunting position for someone like me. Stage fright doesn't even begin to spell it out for you, especially with the pressure of having to deliver an "inspirational speech".

But there I was, and there those bright shining happy faces were, and it came time to fulfill my obligation to the kind folks at the American Kidney Fund who had asked me to come to Washington DC and deliver a speech to the kids who won their annual "Calendar Kids" contest.

But the key here, and the one that drove me to conquer my stage fright, were those bright shining faces. These were kids who had been dealt a tough hand in life – a hand I was all too familiar with. I knew what it was like to be a kid with kidney disease – the missing school and having to work really hard to catch up, the teasing from other kids who think you're 'different', the misunderstanding and miscommunication that can happen between doctors, teachers, and parents. Not to mention that no matter how much love and support you get from friends and family, it's hard not to feel like you're on the outside looking in – that you don't lead a normal, regular life.

So when I accepted the invitation to speak, I knew that this was what I would talk about – that you can lead a normal life. That kidney disease is not the end-all be-all. But when I got there and saw all of their artwork, I found that they already knew that. Their pictures were full of bright suns and colorful rainbows and messages of hope. There were funny pictures and earnest depictions of how life on dialysis isn't bad at all. And there I was, looking around at all these happy faces, and I thought 'oh crap...now what am I going to talk about?'. In the end, I talked about how great a job these amazing families were doing in both supporting their kids and each other. I talked about how fantastic each of them were, and how it was not I that needed to inspire them, but they that inspired me.

I'm 25 years old now, a far cry from the always hospitalized kid who played pranks on nurses to pass the time – but meeting these kids reminded me of where I came from, how far I had come, and how grateful I was to have every single family and friend who help me through every day – making me feel like I'm just a normal, regular, average guy.

And there's nothing more important to me, or to any of those inspiring kids who showed me just what we all have.