



# getting into THE SPIRIT

Wow! I recently earned serious cool cred when I told my son, Grey, I was going to meet R.J. Palacio...only the author of his *favorite* book, *Wonder* (now a movie with Julia Roberts — who I also got to meet!). If you don't know the story, it's about a special fifth grader with complicated health issues who fearfully starts school for the first time. His often treacherous journey will make you laugh, cry, cheer and ultimately want to be a kinder person.

I devoured the book on the cross-country flight to interview R.J., Julia and director Stephen Chbosky — and got so emotional that I ran out of tissues. I loved *Wonder* as much as my little guy did, but for different reasons. For me, it was the beautifully written characters that elicited such empathy and made me feel every ounce of their heartache and happiness; for him, it was relating to and learning from the challenges of his fictional peers. Either way, one thing's for sure: *Wonder* is thought-provoking and joyful. And it's why Julia Roberts was so moved to bring the story to the big screen — plus one of the inspirations for dedicating the entire *GH* holiday issue to the spirit of giving. Grey's teacher even put together a list of questions from his class for R.J., who has answered them for us at [goodhousekeeping.com/wonder](http://goodhousekeeping.com/wonder). If you want the inside scoop from the movie team themselves, skip right to page 76. *Happy holidays to you — I hope yours are wonderful!* #kindcycle

Jane  
Jane Francisco,  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

**GH GIVING SPECIAL** When guest editor Natalie Portman and I talked about this issue (see her letter, page 10), I asked her what she thought we could all do to make the world a kinder place. Her immediate response was to put down our phones and look each other in the eyes. Touché! Powering down....

GH WE

EVERYDAY  
HEROES



**WE HERO** *Property Brothers'* Drew Scott  
**HE DID IT!** Went to Kenya to work and draw attention to the problem: "The need for access to clean water is dire. Walk 45 minutes, carry 30 pounds of water...now do that five times a day."

You can help! [hearstforhumanity.com/ghgive](http://hearstforhumanity.com/ghgive)

## AN EASY WAY TO BE A FORCE FOR GOOD!

In a recent national survey, most *GH* readers say they care about giving back, but over 25% say they just don't know where to start. Let us help! We launched the **GH Humanitarian Seal** to evaluate charities and let you know exactly which ones allow your dollars to do the most good.

**WE Charity** is our first honoree. Throughout our pages, look for these special banners to get inspired by ordinary champions of kindness — kids, schools and celebrities (even Prince Harry!) who are helping WE make the world a nicer place. You can have an impact right now! Go to [hearstforhumanity.com/ghgive](http://hearstforhumanity.com/ghgive) to give a small donation to WE Charity's education projects. As little as 10 bucks will make a big difference in the life of a child. Our special guest editor, WE Ambassador **Natalie Portman**, shares her own experiences...

> TURN THE PAGE!

Jane and Julia: Robert Trachtenberg

# THE POWER OF WONDER

Photographed by  
ROBERT TRACHTENBERG



**STARSTRUCK**  
R.J., far left, was “so nervous” the first time she met Julia: “I’m an über fan!” The surprise? “Julia was nervous too!” says the film’s director, Stephen Chbosky, left.

**How do you treat people who are different from you?** That’s the question at the heart of the book *Wonder*, now a film starring Julia Roberts as the mother of a boy with a face that shocks everyone who sees him. Here, Julia, author R.J. Palacio and director Stephen Chbosky share how this little book changed their lives

At first glance, this could be any group of friends chatting over coffee—except that one is a mega-beautiful Oscar-winning actor; another is an acclaimed film director, screenwriter and author (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*); and the third wrote *Wonder*, a middle-grade novel that adults love too and that has been on best-seller lists for over two years. It’s the story of Auggie Pullman, a 10-year-old boy who was born with severe facial differences. Having been tutored until now by his mother (played by Julia), Auggie is entering school in the fifth grade—a change that’s stressful for any child, but especially so for one who has spent his life watching others look away. The story is told through the alternating perspectives of Auggie, his sister and other kids, a technique that gives the reader true insight into how our actions and words really affect others. It’s also built around a teacher’s precepts, sayings related to kindness that echo the challenges everyone in the story grapples with—and that speak to things we can all do to help create a kinder world. With Auggie’s story now hitting the big screen, Julia, R.J. and Stephen highlight the most meaningful lessons they’ve taken to heart in their own families. →

## Let your heart be your compass.

Julia initially found out about *Wonder* by reading a list of the best books for kids. “It was getting tricky in my house to have a nighttime chapter book everyone would like,” she says. “So I bought *Wonder*, and I could not put it down. I read it to the three kids [Hazel and Phinneaus, now 13, and Henry, now 10], and they were all as knocked out as I had been. I remember calling my agent after I read the book and saying, ‘I’ll play the mom!’”

Fun Julia family fact: “I’m the designated reader,” she says, and she puts on different voices to play the different characters. “I’m often asked, ‘Mommy, can you just use your regular voice?’ I do a very dark version of Julian [a bully in *Wonder*].”

## You don’t have to be mean to hurt someone.

The idea for *Wonder* grew in R.J. after she and her younger son, then 3, were at an ice cream shop next to a child who had severe craniofacial differences—and her son cried in fear. Wanting to avoid hurting the little girl’s feelings, R.J. rushed to leave, spilling milkshakes and unintentionally creating a scene as she did so. “As I pushed the stroller away, I heard the mom say in as sweet and calm a voice as you can imagine, ‘OK, guys, I think it’s time to go,’” R.J. says. “And that just got to me...what could I be teaching my children so they could understand how to respond better next time? I was disappointed in myself. I started writing *Wonder* that very night.”

## Always be kinder than necessary.

While the three are together, Stephen, who directed *Wonder* and cowrote its screenplay, asks Julia how we can all work to be better humans in general. “I think we need to stop criticizing,” she says. “Honestly, it’s become a sport—at lunch, online, wherever. ‘I can’t believe the way she’s wearing her hair,’ or ‘He looks so...’ It’s all so petty, and we’re grown-up people. There have to be more interesting things to note about one another...and I’m talking to myself here too, because I find the sarcasm and the criticism and stuff like that very humorous, but there’s a time when you go, ‘Well, why don’t I say all the true and kind things?’”

## Never, ever give up.

When R.J. started writing *Wonder*, her older son had just finished fifth grade, so she set her story at that age level. “It wasn’t the easiest year for him,” says R.J. “It’s an age when they’re toggling between being little kids and being teenagers. It’s a fragile moment in their lives. He had a couple of friend betrayals... When you’re living it through your kids, it becomes that much more touching. I was going to great pains to raise a son with the idea that kindness is paramount...but I kept thinking, *If every other parent isn’t doing the same thing, I’m kind of spitting in the wind.* I remember one incident where my son got his feelings hurt and he was sad, and another mother’s answer to that was ‘Well, maybe you need to toughen him up.’ That’s not really the answer. Rather than take my son down, why not try to raise the bar for what we expect from our kids?”

## Believe you can.

Ironically, working on the feel-good movie triggered parental guilt for Julia and Stephen, who both spent long periods on set. Taking a movie role is “a complete mathematical equation now,” says Julia of juggling the demands of parenting with the realities of moving onto a movie set for weeks at a time. “The minutiae are incredibly irritating,” says Julia. “[But] I knew I was getting a pass on this one because the kids were like, ‘Mom, you *have* to make this work.’”

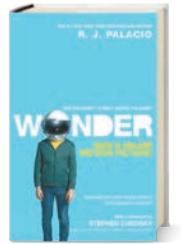
## Kind words do not cost much.

Making the film kept Stephen from his daughter’s birthday, an ache soothed by a sweet note from Julia that read in part, “Your daughter will not remember her 4th birthday, but she’ll always remember that her daddy made *Wonder*.” Says

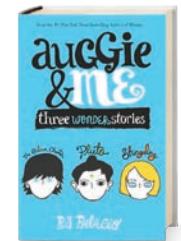


**SMILES & STRESS**

Auggie (Jacob Tremblay) gets his first look at his new school with his mom, played by Julia Roberts.



**TWEEN TRIUMPH**  
*Wonder* originally came out in 2012. The newest cover shows Auggie in his trademark helmet, which allows him to hide in plain sight.



**TAKE TWO**  
A second book, *Auggie & Me*, includes a chapter from the point of view of the boy who bullies Auggie.

Stephen, “I will never forget that kindness, because I was really messed up that day. Trust me, fathers feel their own guilt.” Later, during filming, Stephen was able to fly his daughter in to play Auggie’s sister, Via, in a scene in which she just happened to be celebrating her 4th birthday. “So I got to have the birthday I missed!” he says.

## Whatever you are, be a good one.

“I for sure need to break up with my phone,” says Julia. “Because once the kids get home from school and it’s the time of day when I’m getting a lot of messages, I’ll be making dinner and checking my phone and talking to the kids, but that’s not the conversation they want to have. I kind of try to do too many things at once, which I am not very good at, so I go through periods when I make a conscious effort once they’re home from school to put the phone down and try not to give it too much attention until they go to bed. But then you’re in the weeds.”

## Very little is needed to make a happy life.

Despite her admitted dependence on her smartphone, Julia draws a harder line with her kids when it comes to gadgets. “I have a fifth grader who doesn’t have a device,” she says. “I think it overcomplicates the challenging times of fifth grade...[a phone] is not a simple thing of direct communication, getting a busy signal and calling back later. [Now] there are so many indirect ways of showing someone appreciation—or not. There are these little side doors now into

people’s feelings... Not to be down on social media, but it makes people impatient for answers and information. There is no waiting for your pictures to get developed at the drugstore, the patience of it.”

## Nothing is stronger than gentleness.

“My mom gave me unconditional love,” says R.J. “I think that’s the one thing we can really do for our kids. Not to say that we have to be blind to their little quirks and faults, but it helps you in life.”

Julia agrees, but adds, “I think some people confuse unconditional love with spoiling. None of my kids would think I have a problem with that distinction. I do love them unconditionally, and I try, when they do something wrong, to say, ‘This doesn’t change the amount of love in this house for you, but you’ve got to do your homework.’ Because I think that also makes a child feel safe.” The lesson is clear: Put kindness first, and the rest will follow.

# WONDER-FUL STUFF

Give (or get!) a little magic in your day



**WRITE IT**  
This Choose Kind journal features daily be-kind ideas. One fave: “Surprise your parents today. Wash your family car before anyone gets up.” \$17



**WEAR IT**  
A sweet necklace with a mini book charm lets your child show the world she cares. (It makes a great stocking stuffer!) \$12



**CARRY IT**  
Stash your stuff in this 15" x 17" cotton canvas tote; an inside pocket keeps keys and other essentials within easy reach. \$18

\*Precepts adapted from 365 Days of Wonder © 2014 by R.J. Palacio, published by Random House Children’s Books. Fashion stylist: Elizabeth Stewart. Hair: Serge Normant for sergenormant.com (Julia Roberts), Andre Gunn using Oribe at Honey Artists (R.J. Palacio and Stephen Chbosky). Makeup: Genevieve for Lancôme (Julia Roberts), Adam Breuchaud using Chanel at TMG-LA (R.J. Palacio and Stephen Chbosky). Manicure: Lisa Jachno at Aim Artists (Julia Roberts), Stephanie Stone at Forward Artists using Chanel Le Vernis (R.J. Palacio and Stephen Chbosky).