

“The Year I Opened the Meijer Ad and Saw Myself In it”

When Elli Simcoe was looking for models for our Easter 2020 toy ad, the Meijer photo shoot manager knew she wanted the kids to reflect the people in the communities we serve.

“It can be tricky shooting for ads because we only get certain sample sizes in clothing,” Ellie said. “With a toy shoot, we can expand our talent pool and look for people of all sizes and abilities.”

That’s when 9-year-old Alicia Marewski came to mind. Ellie’s daughter attends school with Alicia and had recently mentioned the school installed an accessible swing. Ellie’s daughter was excited that Alicia, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, had a swing to use. Ellie knew she would make an excellent model for the toy book because she is always smiling, so she grabbed the school directory and called Alicia’s mother, Jill.

“Of course we were interested,” Jill said. “We were super excited.”

Easter was fast approaching, so it wasn’t long before Alicia and Jill were at the Meijer photo studio for the shoot. Alicia got to have her makeup done and played with Barbies for the shoot, which are some of her favorite toys. Jill said Alicia isn’t fully verbal, but it was clear to everyone on set that day how excited she was.

“The makeup artist approached me after the shoot and said, ‘I want you to know your daughter made my day,’” Jill said. “She said, ‘Even though she doesn’t communicate like a typical person does, her eyes are so expressive. She just has a glow about her.’”

Jill said, “I left there with goosebumps.”

The photo shoot was a success, but shortly after, the pandemic reached the United States and the Easter toy book was canceled.

Months later, Ellie remembered the photos of Alicia when it was time to put together the Holiday Toy Guide. Alicia’s photo was featured with one of the season’s top toys, the Squeakee Dog Interactive Balloon. The family was so excited to finally see Alicia in the catalog and when her birthday came around in January, Alicia had a specific request: the Squeakee Dog Interactive Balloon.

“Of course, I ran to Meijer and got it using Pickup,” Jill said.

Jill says the family has loved seeing Alicia become “famous.” She said Alicia shared the news with her friends at school and sent a copy of the ad to a pen pal.

“It was just a very positive experience for the family to share together,” Jill said. “We’re calling this ‘the year I opened the Meijer ad and saw myself in it.’”

Alicia has now been pictured in another Meijer ad, with other potential features in the future.

Ellie says Meijer is committed to finding models that are fully representative of our communities when preparing for our ads, which is something the Marewski family appreciates.

“It makes me feel very proud that we live in a community and an area where that is valued and they’re being treated the same as everybody else,” Jill said.

Additional assets available online: [Photos](#) ⁽²⁾

<https://meijercommunity.com/2021-02-12-The-Year-I-Opened-the-Meijer-Ad-and-Saw-Myself-In-it>