

LOOKING back at SPECIAL KIDS DAY

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They may seem different. They aren't. They smile like we do. They feel like we do. When you poke them-like Shylock said – they will bleed.

That is why last Thursday at the Western Michigan Fair, amid all the chaos and mayhem of covering 1,000-plus stories for the LDN, I failed to enjoy Special Kids Day.

You see, these children were just like you – like me.

They didn't want to be treated differently, talked to in a condescending tone, pampered. No.

Rather, they want to just play on rides.

Billy Freeman, who works for T.J. Schmidt and Company, said it best: "I have the best job in the world," Freeman said from a bumper car last week. "It's fun. You get to meet new people. You get to see different parts of the state. I grew a rider. Everyone is the same. Everyone wants to have fun. I think I do my job pretty good. The (special kids) need to have fun too, you know. I just let them beat up on me. They don't always get a chance to do something like this."

Everyone wants to have fun.

It was Latimer who restored my faith in this ugly, wrinkled, cargo-shorts-wearing world. As 12:30 p.m. arrived Thursday, Latimer couldn't wait to be on the bumper cars. As if nothing not to disturb a sleeping baby, Latimer gave a thumbs up to his caretaker when he was ready to ride.

She shook her head "Yes."

"He's so excited." Said Ariel Cameron, Latimer's nanny, last week. "He's been talking about it all week. It's really cool to see him this happy. He's excited to see his friends again (because) he doesn't get to see them during the summer."

According to the West Shore Educational Service District, there were about 100 children invited to the event, as badges were handed out to students with special needs.

Latimer was one of those children.

Later that evening, he grabbed my hand, pointed toward the bumper cars, inaudibly asking me if I wanted to go on the ride then. On the ride there.

But then and there, I was too busy. Waiting for an interviewee, I politely declined Latimer.

Too busy? Are you kidding me?

Not a day goes by since that moment at the fair where I haven't felt a 5,000-watt of shock for rejecting Mr. Latimer's request.

He looked like the little boy from “Jerry Maguire.” Blonde hair lying flat on his head, a smile that would kill grumpy people.

Ugh.

Irresistible swagger for a 10-year old boy, really. Yet, unfortunately, I played the fool in the king’s entertainment, and I failed to be a child again.

Looking back, Ryan Latimer, I would have loved to have gone on the bumper cars with you.

Then the moment came, I froze.

For this, I feel pain.

For this, I learn.

For this, I apologize.