



Trading supermodels for kids with disabilities



NYC-based photographer Rick Guidotti was in Cincinnati photographing local families of kids living with genetic, physical, and behavioral differences. His non-profit, Positive Exposure, aims to show the "beauty in human diversity." The Enquirer/Camie Cochran



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(Photo: The Enquirer/Camie Cochran)

Austin Bitter, 11, shook his head back and forth and squealed. He wandered through a Madeira yard, and into the next-door neighbor's, followed by cameras and his family.

It was Friday morning. The weather was gorgeous. The light was just right.

Austin's parents pulled him out of school for the occasion.

"You are a-MAZE-ing!"

New York City-based photographer Rick Guidotti, was working him. Guidotti, who was in town for a few days speaking at schools, and opening his FotoFocus exhibit, said that what he had been most excited for on his Cincinnati trip was this day.

Austin has Fragile X Syndrome, one of the known genetic conditions to cause autism. And today, he was a super star.

Guidotti is a former fashion photographer. Published in *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Harper's Bazaar*, to name a few, he traveled the globe, photographing models like Claudia Schiffer and Cindy Crawford.

He had reached the pinnacle of his career, but something was missing.

"As an artist, I don't see beauty on covers of magazines only. I see beauty everywhere. And it was just so frustrating to be told constantly who I was allowed to acknowledge as beautiful," he said.

Guidotti created Positive Exposure in 1998, a non-profit. Eight years ago he quit all commercial work. His subjects are now exclusively people living with genetic, physical, and behavioral differences.

Work from his all-day back-to-back shoots of the twelve families he photographed Friday in Madeira will be part of an exhibit shown during Cincinnati ReelAbilities Film Festival, organized by LADD, Inc., in late Feb. and early March. ReelAbilities funded this trip to Cincinnati. A short film, "On Beauty," which stars Guidotti, will also be screened during the festival.

"Austin, you are AWE-some!"

Guidotti laid his finger down on the trigger, taking a rapid succession of photos. His head popped up from behind the camera and he giggled. Then Austin giggled, too. Austin jumped up and down. Guidotti joined him.

"A lot of times people don't see or know the joys, the many, many positives that people with disabilities experience," said Austin's mom, Sara Bitter.

"Photography and art are the perfect vehicles to really shine a light on that."



Former fashion photographer Rick Guidotti shoots the Ayers Family of Mason: Kara and Adam Ayers have a genetic condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta, which results in short stature. (Photo: *The Enquirer*/Carrie Cochran)

Things are challenging, sure, but it means that she is that much more proud of every milestone, she says. He's good at math, is on a swim team, and was in the school play. He's also at grade level with kids his age.

Austin makes movements and sounds that are different from his peers. She often senses a discomfort in others when she's in public with Austin.

"I think sometimes that stops you in a way from going out, into the world, and experiencing it with your child."

But Guidotti flips that upside-down, she said.

"He shows the world for you, and for all of us, the things that we already know as parents: the joys and gorgeousness of our children, so that when we go out again with them in public, and they may look differently or act differently, the world is ready for it."



Rick Guidotti photographed Bayley Hogan and his mom, Terri Hogan of Amberley Village earlier this year. His photo, as well as a photo of Grace Cail of Indian Hill, are part of Guidotti's current exhibit at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. (Photo: Provided/Rick Guidotti)

If you go

"Positive Exposure, The Spirit of Difference"

Through Oct. 24

Art Academy of Cincinnati

presented by ReelAbilities Cincinnati, part of FotoFocus

"On Beauty"

A 30-min. short film by Joanna Rudnick and Kartemquin Films starring Rick Guidotti

Feb. 27 - March 7, 2015

Cincinnati ReelAbilities Film Festival, organized by LADD, Inc.