

## **Beyond the Finish Line: Creating Lasting Change Through Inclusive Sports**

[00:00:00.14] KELLY MAHONEY: Thank you, everyone, for joining us for today's session, Beyond the Finish Line-- Creating Lasting Change through Inclusive Sports. My name is Kelly, and I'll be moderating today's session. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm on the marketing team here at 3Play Media. Just a brief self-description-- I'm a young white woman in a black sweater with my hair pulled back today.

[00:00:21.42] All right. I have a little more blabbing to do, and then we'll get into the meat and potatoes for today. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us for a special webinar today on Giving Tuesday. Giving Tuesday is an internationally recognized day of radical generosity with a mission to shape a world built on shared humanity.

[00:00:40.25] Every year, 3Play likes to highlight an organization dedicated to accessibility and disability inclusion. And this year, we're happy to recognize the Special Olympics. So with that, that brings me to welcome today's speaker, Loretta Claiborne, the chief inspiration officer of the Special Olympics. Thank you very much for being here with us today, Loretta.

[00:01:00.17] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Well, thank you. And also, would you like to hear my story about inclusion and what it means?

[00:01:05.88] KELLY MAHONEY: Absolutely. That's practically the first question I'm going to ask you. So just dive right in.

[00:01:11.06] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Several years ago-- I'll never forget this as long as I live-- they wanted me to be on a board, to serve on the board of directors. So they sent me this paper, and I said, should I go? So I went to a couple meetings. I talked to my then-advocate, who's now passed.

[00:01:26.49] So I went to one meeting. I went to two meetings. I raised my hand. I had a question, and they kind of talked over my question.

[00:01:34.17] So I went back to my person who was working with me, and I said, you know, I don't think I want to do this anymore. And she looked at me, and she discussed with me, well, you should give it a chance. I said, look, I've been to three meetings. I said, and it took all day. And I raised my hand on the second meeting to say something, and they just looked over me. So I wrote a little note of resignation to resign for that particular meeting. I'll never forget it.

[00:02:02.31] And they called me up, and they asked me. And so I said, no, don't talk to me on the phone. I will come and tell you. I said, I didn't feel as though I was included. "Included" means bring me to the table, and give me the same rights to participate in your meetings as well as everyone else. And that's what inclusion means to me.

[00:02:25.07] KELLY MAHONEY: I mean, that's a wonderful story, and I think that we can certainly see how that would shape how you get involved. The question I wanted to ask you originally was a little bit like the origin of your story. That's absolutely a fantastic touchpoint, and we appreciate you sharing that for us. It's important that everyone gets to have their voice.

[00:02:44.88] So I'd love to learn a little bit more about maybe historically, early in your life or maybe through high school or those formative type of years. Would you mind sharing a little bit about your journey? What inspired you to become an advocate for inclusion beyond, of course, the story you just shared with us? And more specifically, what brought you to the Special Olympics?

[00:03:07.58] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Sure. Well, back in high school-- I'll go back as far as high school. I think Special Olympics-- elementary is irrelevant because that was way early, but I still remember.

[00:03:18.60] But back in high school, I wanted-- they wanted to start a girls track team. This was before Title IX, where girls had the right to be a part of sports. Girls were not involved in the sport until 1973, '74. Title IX was then explained. I had graduated from high school.

[00:03:37.47] So in high school, these girls saw me, and they said, hey, we want to start a track team. We always see you running all the time. And I've been running since I was 12 years old, 1966. So do your math.

[00:03:50.69] And so I said, OK, what do I have to do? So all the girls looked around. They said, Loretta, we need you to go around and get things from the principal. Get everything signed. You have to have so many signatures from the teacher.

[00:04:04.71] Nobody else did nothing. So I went out, and I got all the signatures. I went to the principal, and he said, you girls can practice in the hall. And I looked at him. I said, why do we have to practice in the hall?

[00:04:17.51] And so after that, we went down to the athletic field, and we watched the guys. And my cousin, who was a real good runner-- he was a sprinter-- noticed that these boys were making fun of me because I was in special ed. And they poked fun at me. He says, oh, no, we're going to stop this right now.

[00:04:35.19] He said, Loretta, come here. They didn't know that I was his cousin. "I want you to run the mile. You know what the mile is? I said, yeah, four laps. So he put me up against these boys, and I beat them all hands down. They didn't even get through the second lap.

[00:04:53.57] So I was, like, in 10th grade. Then I went to a school-to-work program, so I knew that wasn't going to happen. I was broken. That just ripped me apart.

[00:05:05.31] So I went to a school-to-work program, and from there, the first day of my job, I was real angry. I took a lot of medication for behavior, basically to shut me down, because I

would be angry at everything. So there was a counselor there. After a bad day, he called me in his office. He says, how was lunch today? I said, good. He gave me a free sandwich.

[00:05:28.35] Well, I knew not to take anything free, but I didn't think it would get to my mom. But it did. So I ate this free sandwich, not thinking what I was going to get into.

[00:05:40.40] That evening, he called me and says, how was everything? I said, good. How was your lunch? I said, good. I had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He says, of all the sandwiches, you had peanut butter and jelly? Well, I knew I couldn't eat meat, so-- because of a medical problem.

[00:05:55.30] So he says, I have something for you. And I looked at him. I said, now what? I didn't get in no trouble today. He says, no, no, no. He gave me a paper, and that was my ticket. My ticket. It was basically my dream that became reality, but I didn't know it at the time. And it said "Special Olympics." I could barely read it.

[00:06:16.10] I took the paper, fold it up, put it in my pocket, and went home. And my mom says, how was work today? I didn't get no calls about your behavior. And I just looked at her, and I walked by her. She was playing cards. And I said, oh, Mr. Lee gave me this.

[00:06:30.44] She says, what's this? She opens it up, and she reads it, and her neighbor says-- the person she was playing cards with-- oh, I ain't got no money for that. You know I get welfare, and I got two kids in Drum Corps. And the lady next to her says, Rita, why don't you let Loretta have something that she can say is hers? This will probably be the best thing, better than all that medication she's taking.

[00:06:53.56] That first day-- I'll never forget, it was a Saturday-- she banged on the thing. And she said, you get up, you get out of my house, you take another free sandwich, and you go to that program. I said, I don't want to go to training.

[00:07:07.78] So I get halfway. I'm fuming. I'm saying some choice words that I knew I would have got a licking for. But I get there. I'm mad.

[00:07:17.48] We go, and he says, well, I see you made it. 7 o'clock in the morning? First of all, I was arguing with my mom because I don't get up that early. But she said, mm-hmm, take another free sandwich. Well, it was the best thing that ever happened.

[00:07:31.87] And I came home. She says, well, how was your Special Olympics? I said, it was OK, but I quit. She said, what did you say? I quit.

[00:07:40.10] She said, no. Oh no, no, no. You don't quit nothing in my house. You quit today, you'll always be quitting. So that's how I got into Special Olympics.

[00:07:49.78] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. That's incredible. I think everyone can relate to that idea of having to go do something, not wanting to do something, and then you come out the other side, and you go, oh, that wasn't half bad.

[00:08:00.73] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And she didn't have to pay one brown penny out of her welfare check.

[00:08:06.85] KELLY MAHONEY: That's wonderful.

[00:08:08.12] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: It was free.

[00:08:09.11] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like, especially with this program, but you, more broadly, have always been inclined towards advocacy and fairness. And this experience certainly sounds formative in changing sort of your life trajectory and where you decided to go.

[00:08:26.44] So we know now the Special Olympics is commonly known as-- it's a platform that uses sports to drive inclusion. Would you be able to talk a little bit more specifically about how sports have the abilities to break those barriers and bring people together, whether using your own personal experience or what you've seen through others?

[00:08:47.32] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Sure. And, you know, we look at sport in this country. It used to be a kid goes out and plays some kickball, and that was it. And they'd go out in the park. Well, now sports has gotten organized in schools. But regardless of whether it's organized or not, or whether it's in the gym class and you're playing dodgeball, what happens, do you ever know that's the beginning of learning respect for others? Did you ever realize it means discipline, that you could stick with somebody, or you could stick with something?

[00:09:18.23] Because when I started Special Olympics, everything I did, I was either pushed out, or the thing would come in. They would have something in the housing project. We had African dancing, and I was really good at that. I shined. My one sister says, oh, Loretta, they always compliment Loretta. And well, I was just agile, and I was really good at the African dancing.

[00:09:41.42] Well, boom. That summer. The next summer came. It was gone. And the same thing with sport.

[00:09:48.28] It taught me that if I want to play this game, I have to have respect for myself. And then when I learn respect, I have to have respect for the next person. So if I have respect for my teammates, and they have respect for me, I can do something.

[00:10:11.50] And the discipline. You had to be at practice every Saturday unless you're sick or unless you've got to work. And I look at that, all that that comes out of sport, whether it's a regular ed student, whether it's the top athlete, or even a person with intellectual disability. And especially the person with ID, such as I.

[00:10:32.14] We weren't invited into sport. But what I learned from sport, number one, was the discipline, that if I wanted to play that sport, I had to practice my behavior, let it be better, have respect for the coach and the respect for the other athlete, and then have respect for the team.

[00:10:54.71] And when you're included, the next thing I know, I wasn't just running by myself. I was running with the team. I was playing basketball with the whole team. The team would say, oh, Loretta, we need you down here because you're quick. Everybody was inviting me. And when you're invited to something and when you learn discipline, that takes you on to being an advocate.

[00:11:18.50] I know I have to be disciplined. I know I have to speak up because he was cheating over there, or he was doing something, and I would raise my hand. And everybody would look and says, well, he did this, and he did that, and he ran out of line, and the coach didn't see it.

[00:11:32.76] And the first thing they'll do is, Loretta, you saw it. I said, yeah, but shouldn't we all raise our hand? So it told me to speak out. And sometimes I took that as a risk.

[00:11:44.63] And sometimes when people speak out, if you look at your leaders-- if you look at the Mahatma Gandhis, you look at the Martin Luther Kings-- those were people-- Nelson Mandela-- who took that risk to put their hand up and says, I believe everybody should have the right to live independently or to work or to be in this country and vote. So those are the things that sport teaches, whether it's the child with intellectual disability or the child who is very, very bright. Sport is a platform to inclusion, to independence, and to your voice.

[00:12:28.64] And my mom would say to me, when I wouldn't say anything, Loretta, you can hear. You're not deaf. If you were deaf, that's one thing. Use your voice. A closed mouth never gets heard, and a closed mouth never gets fed.

[00:12:47.24] She had those little sayings that she had, and she would not let me give up. Nope, Debbie, don't say it for Loretta. Loretta got a voice. Let her use it.

[00:12:59.17] My sister was defending me because she knew I wasn't going to probably be able to say it, but my mother says, no, no, no. You have a voice. Use it.

[00:13:11.80] KELLY MAHONEY: That's a very powerful saying. Just, I can imagine how that must have motivated you. You got to speak up if you want to get what you want.

[00:13:22.84] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Sometimes it gets me in trouble, but, you know what? If I speak up for the rights of somebody else, in the end, yes, I'm going to probably be the one that's going to be put down. But I could say-- I can turn my back and said, that guy might won't like me, or they might won't like me, but I didn't come here for a crown. I came here to play, and I came here to be fair, and I came here to speak on behalf of my other friends or athletes.

[00:13:49.55] KELLY MAHONEY: Absolutely. And I like how you started to touch on the point of how these lessons have translated into other parts of your life. I'm sure that these-- discipline, respect, leadership-- those are all very transferable into other spheres outside of athletics, like education, in the workplace, or even like you said, just advocacy and community. So given that most people know the Special Olympics for their athletic programs or as an athletic program--

[00:14:19.42] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: More than that. It's more than that.

[00:14:21.52] KELLY MAHONEY: Thank you. That's exactly what I want to ask you.

[00:14:23.89] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I want to tell you, what do you do when most people-- now I just have a bicycle, and I just walk. I can't drive. But what do we use our car for? It's a vehicle. That vehicle is to be driven to take you to the doctor or to take you to where you want to go, right?

[00:14:42.91] So a vehicle. Sports is the vehicle for our Special Olympic athletes and their mentors because, yes, Special Olympics is just not for people with ID, such as I. Special Olympics is now very inclusive, from the very young in schools, such as playgroup.

[00:15:04.81] When I look at the Young Athletes program, that's athletes 2 and 1/2 plus till 7. They learn how to play with regular kids their age. They don't see crutches. They don't see speech. What they see is another kid, their height, their size, who wants to play. And they adapt normally.

[00:15:27.28] They don't need that adult to say, oh, Jason can't talk, or Jason can't walk. That kid notices. All that little kid wants is somebody to play with.

[00:15:36.82] Then you get to elementary school. Then the difference is starting to be seen because at 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, you start to see differences. But with Special Olympics, we're getting into those schools, and we're teaching children how to include others who are different, because down at the end, no, we're not the same. But there's one Earth, and we all gotta live here, and we all should have the opportunity to live, work, and play.

[00:16:07.60] So we get into the elementary schools with playgroups. Middle schools, we have clubs. High school, middle school, then we have teams, and they're inclusive. So when we look at our schools, people used to say, Special Olympics excluded. So in 2000, Tim Shriver, Dr. Tim Shriver and I stomped the grounds down at the Capitol. And I'll never forget how bad my feet hurt because I wore dress shoes instead of comfy shoes. We stomped the ground at those senators to get them to understand that what we're doing is trying to break down the bullying, break down the stereotype in our schools.

[00:16:49.77] Years later, we got money. And we know, we have research now, that this is working, that bullying is really breaking down, that we have schools now that have people with and without disabilities on debate clubs, on sports teams, doing everything in the school. So we have Unified Champion Schools, we have Unified Schools, and then we have Banner Schools all over the world.

[00:17:18.10] I just came back from the Middle East, talking about inclusive education. And when I look, sport is a vehicle to drive to inclusion and acceptance. Not only our Special Olympic athletes. We have athletes going to college.

[00:17:37.12] We have an athlete here that went to college, and he has degrees. We have many athletes that have degrees. I just met, a couple weeks ago, an athlete who's going to get his PGA card, professional golf.

[00:17:53.10] So it goes to show our athletes can do anything. And why? Because we went beyond the sport just for people with intellectual disability. That is sport for all. And that's our ticket to inclusion, to independence.

[00:18:09.55] And I still say today, when I talk to you, my dream is your reality because that wasn't a reality when I came up. And when I look at inclusiveness, I live in my own home. I go to meetings. I go everywhere in the community.

[00:18:28.69] I just spoke up for somebody at the store. A guy came up, and I'm standing there drinking my cup of coffee, and he didn't know that something was on sale. And the lady is, like, looking. I said, Sir, I hate to butt in the conversation. I said, but yes, that product is \$1 because I bought one yesterday, and the sign-- I said, give me one minute, and I looked back. I said, oh, it's still \$1 on here.

[00:18:56.22] So it's just small things that takes you into bigger things, acceptance. And that's a stinger right now in this country today, people wanting to be accepted. What's the biggest thing of suicide with young people? They're not accepted, or somebody said something. When we go into our schools now, and we have our Unified Sports, it changes not only the athlete with intellectual disability. It changes the whole student body.

[00:19:25.50] KELLY MAHONEY: And I like that you highlighted that it's just become more and more inclusive over the years. I think that supports the idea that it's a journey. There's always something that can be improved upon. There's always room for growth and learning. I think a lot of people, especially in 3Play's experience, a lot of people think about disability and inclusion or accessibility as a journey that starts with awareness, which is crucial.

[00:19:48.30] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: More than a ramp.

[00:19:50.27] KELLY MAHONEY: Right.

[00:19:50.70] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: It's more than a ramp.

[00:19:51.81] KELLY MAHONEY: We have to turn awareness into acceptance, like you said, and actionable change. So could you maybe elaborate for us on how the Special Olympics helps to ensure various programs can lead to this real, lasting change? You mentioned Unified Schools and the distinctions there. So are there any other programs to highlight?

[00:20:13.45] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: There's so many things we could look at-- health, leadership. We have athletes who are now going out and taking leadership roles. And when they take these trainings, and within their own local community, then they can advance, and they can go to the state. We have athletes who now work for Special Olympics. They get a pay, just like any other employee.

[00:20:37.38] And when I say "leadership," if I would happen to pass, that's one thing, the first thing I would give to, because that's a program that teaches people how to lead. Starts out small

in your local group. You go to a meeting, and an athlete will say, my goal is to be a speaker. Then he or she will work towards that.

[00:21:00.01] But we have athletes that say, my goal is to be a coach, because now I'm getting older, and I don't get to-- I can't play like the younger ones. I have this experience. I want to show the younger ones that they, too, could be a coach as they get older or they get better, or this is something for-- it teaches them to lead.

[00:21:22.32] Like I said, that first board meeting, I just sat there. And I put my hand up. I was a token. And today, I will not be a token, and our athletes who come on our boards and serve, they are there to speak on behalf of the other athletes, but on behalf of all people really. Not only the athlete, not only the person with ID or disability, but to bring all people together.

[00:21:51.01] Like I said at that conference, I said, you know, we have one world that has over 8 billion people, and space is getting tight. And being inclusive means not just sitting at the table, but sitting at the table and communicating with the rest of the people at the table, eating the meal with the rest of the people at the table, and not being there just to sit and be heard, but take part in all aspects.

[00:22:19.71] And when you talk about leadership, yes, some people are leaders. They're born leaders. I used to babysit this little girl, and I used to say, you're going to be boss of the world. But we can all be our own leader in our own right, and we all have to learn to take part.

[00:22:39.84] Pay taxes. A lot of our athletes used to be, oh, you put them on the system, and that's where they should be. In the shelter workshop, you put them in that system. You give their parents a little bit of money. Now our athletes are working.

[00:22:53.14] I have a friend who works at the local hospital, full benefits. He's working two jobs. He just bought a home last year at the age of 26.

[00:23:03.09] The power that came from sport. I, myself, I own my own home. I just got done paying my house tax-- my property taxes. I just got done paying my school taxes this summer. This last month, I just got something in the mail-- your homeowner's insurance. I just sent that in.

[00:23:24.54] I'm totally independent. And if it wasn't for that coach saying to me, Loretta-- if it wasn't for that mom saying to me, use your mouth. You got a voice. Use it. Closed mouth never gets heard, and the closed mouth never gets fed. I want you to be independent.

[00:23:43.98] And I'll never forget the counselor coming to her and saying, Miss Claiborne, this is the plan for Loretta. She'll graduate. She'll go to the shelter workshop, and you probably would want to make the decision for her to be in a group home. She turned around and said, let me tell you something. I raised my own, and Loretta takes care of me, and Loretta is going to be fine.

[00:24:07.71] KELLY MAHONEY: It's amazing. I mean, that is a perfect illustration of how the Special Olympics are more than just an athletic program, giving--



[00:24:15.28] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Just think. If it wasn't for Special Olympics, you know where I would be? I always say I would be two places, and this is sad to say-- behind somebody's prison walls or six feet under.

[00:24:29.46] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. So it really gave you sort of structure and a vision and, as you said, even a voice. So that's a perfect anecdote, and it's an incredible example-- thank you for sharing-- of how--

[00:24:41.01] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Look at the health care issue, the health care for people with ID. I mean, I used to take a lot of medication for my behavior. I don't take no pills for behavior now. Now I know when I'm getting upset, or I'll pick up a pair of knitting needles because it's getting dark real quick, or I'll go out and take a run.

[00:25:00.30] And now I go to the YMCA, and I'm the only person with ID in my classes. And here's all these ladies and men, and they're seniors, and I'm a part of the class. I'm doing the dances. I'm doing everything. And one time, the teacher didn't show up, and everybody in class says, hey, Loretta, why don't you just take over the class? And I did.

[00:25:18.19] KELLY MAHONEY: [LAUGHS] That's amazing.

[00:25:20.79] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And I did.

[00:25:22.20] KELLY MAHONEY: That's awesome. So would you give that advice to other people looking to find their voice?

[00:25:26.64] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I would give that advice--

[00:25:27.74] KELLY MAHONEY: Just get in there.

[00:25:28.08] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: --to anyone. To anyone, and especially the people with different abilities.

[00:25:37.55] KELLY MAHONEY: Absolutely. That's incredible. Thank you so much.

[00:25:40.40] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And it was that coach.

[00:25:42.59] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah.

[00:25:42.94] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: It goes back to that coach. Like I said, if it wasn't for Special Olympics, I wouldn't be sitting here. I know I wouldn't be sitting here.

[00:25:50.90] KELLY MAHONEY: And thinking about yourself, as a woman of color with an ID, as you said, your story intersects with many different forms of advocacy. Would you say that these identities have shaped your approach, or how have they shaped your approach to leadership and inclusion?

[00:26:08.81] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: You know, I'll never forget driving up the road from Baltimore with my advocate, Ms. Janet McFarland, who's now deceased. She worked for The Arc, so she knew about people with ID.

[00:26:19.70] And my mother just wanted me to be raised with her other six siblings at the time. And then we adopted one, so seven. She wanted me to be independent because she knew it was going to be a tough road, number one, for being a Black child.

[00:26:34.56] When she took me to the institution, a lady that she knew, who had gotten kicked by a cow, said, Miss Claiborne, don't send Loretta here. They'll just pull her teeth and cut off her long hair. And that struck my mother.

[00:26:49.37] So she came back. And when the official that summer says, hey, you've been to some of the best institutions that Loretta could go to, and those are the finest in the state, my mom says, you got a school. You got a classroom, which Loretta attends. And darn it, so far as I'm concerned, my child is going to go to that classroom. And I might won't live to see it, but so far as I'm concerned, I might be living a pipe dream, but I want to see my child get a diploma, the same as her sisters and brothers.

[00:27:19.40] And that was my dream. And it might won't seem like reality to you, but it's going to be to me. And she actually-- I did not want to walk across that stage that night. I did not want to put on that gown because I thought I wasn't included.

[00:27:33.38] That ripped-- that I got ripped at that medal field, saying that I can't be on the team. We don't want retards. That ripped me. But she brought it all back together, and she was so proud. When I walked-- my sister walked across the stage first, then I walked across the stage as they said the C's and put that tassel on the side. That was my mom's dream, and that became her reality.

[00:28:01.10] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. I mean, your personal stories that you've shared really demonstrate just how resilient you are. Again, that idea of not necessarily wanting to do something, but pushing through and being better for it. For anyone listening who's maybe inspired by what you've shared, what advice would you give to them to help them start getting involved in either advocating for themselves or in their own communities? What's that first step?

[00:28:25.94] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I'd tell them-- I just told somebody the other day. We were all sitting in the group, and I don't know how the conversation started, but it was like, oh, I ain't going to say anything. And I said, we're all sitting here. I said, somebody's got to say something. It can't always be me.

[00:28:44.18] I said, how many of us are sitting here? And we looked around the room, and the one guy said-- I said, you know what my mama always said? You know what? You need to take a turn.

[00:28:55.79] And everybody has spoken. Everybody had a right. You have to have something to say. If you don't want to, that's fine.

[00:29:04.71] But just remember, I'm going to tell you the whole thing like my mom says. Closed mouth never gets heard, and a closed mouth never gets fed. I said, and you know what? If you see something, you say something. If anything that upsets me, when you see something, and you know something, and you don't say something, and you rely on somebody else, you're not hurting that person. That person is taking the risk. You're hurting yourself.

[00:29:29.42] And I just told-- like I said to the guy in the store, hey, man, you got to speak up, man. And I told him-- he said, how much did you pay for that? I said, oh, they were two for \$10. I got two of them for \$10. "Oh, I paid \$10 apiece."

[00:29:42.63] I said, well, you go in the store, you take your receipt, and you go back and show the man. "Oh, well, no." I said, well, that's on you. I said, if I can save me \$5, \$5 is \$5.

[00:29:53.72] And this was a typical regular man, because he saw me up at the counter saying no to Halloween candy because it was Halloween, and they put everything on sale because they had the Christmas candy out. And they said two for the price of one. So when I got up, I got the two big bags because I was going over to my friend's house. And I went through, and I said, no, sir, I think it's two for one. I said, honest, I saw the sign.

[00:30:20.46] So he rings the thing, and the guy comes up and says, yes, the lady's correct. It's two for one. If I wouldn't have spoke up, I would have paid \$10.

[00:30:32.39] My crony gets outside. He said, what did you pay for that? I saw you arguing with the lady. I said, sir, I wasn't arguing. I was just making a statement that it's two for one. That's why I bought them.

[00:30:42.80] I said, what did you pay for yours? "Oh, I paid \$10." I only paid \$5 for mine. I said, sir, you can go in. "Oh, no." \$5 is \$5.

[00:30:51.83] KELLY MAHONEY: I couldn't agree more. That \$5 could be used for something else just as easily. I appreciate-- it's inspiring to me, honestly, because I am a little bit the person who probably would have just paid \$10 and been like, oh, well, and gone home. So I appreciate how much you're sharing about speaking up for yourself.

[00:31:09.05] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: The doctor's office. And I speak up in the doctor's office. I mean--

[00:31:12.28] KELLY MAHONEY: Right.

[00:31:12.57] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: --I'll never forget it. I got sick one time, and I was complaining. I went to the doctor's office, and I said to the doctor, something's not right. And she said, well, what's wrong? And I told her what my symptoms was. She says, well, the office is busy today. And I said, I really need to have this looked at, because the last appointment you said you were going to look at it, and she didn't.

[00:31:32.87] She said, well, it's going to be 2 and 1/2 hours. I said, well, I could wait here. Of all times, I didn't take no knitting. So I'm sitting here in this doctor's office with this paper gown on. I took the gown off when she walked out the door, put a shirt on, and went outside. Got me some books, brought them back in, sat there, and read those books. I took a power nap.

[00:31:50.48] All of a sudden, I put the paper gown back on because I knew it was almost two hours. And I'm sitting up on the thing, and I'm still with my books, and I'm sitting there. Doctor walks in. She has a nurse come in.

[00:32:00.45] She says, you got patience of steel. I said, I can get angry. I said, but I used to use these, but now I use this, and I use this.

[00:32:13.19] And so she gave me the physical, and she looked at me, and she says, oh my god. Now her husband is a minister, and she's in the church. For me to hear her say that, "oh my god." She looked at me. She says, I'm so sorry. And she was in tears. Tears were going down her face.

[00:32:31.19] She says, Loretta, get your clothes on. How did you get out here? I rode my bicycle. Well, I don't advocate for you. I said, how else am I going to get home? So I got back on my bike.

[00:32:45.09] She says, tomorrow, you talk to your advocate, and see if she can take you to the hospital. So she called Miss Janet. Miss Janet talked to her. Miss Janet, I said, no, you're not taking off your job. I'm going to ride my bike. She says, no, no, no, Loretta. This is more serious.

[00:32:58.26] She took me to the hospital. Hadn't I would've spoke up, I probably wouldn't be sitting here today. I had a mass growing inside of me.

[00:33:07.16] KELLY MAHONEY: Wow.

[00:33:08.27] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And it was because I stuck to my guns. And I said, I'll sit here. Just think if I would've walked home. That didn't happen.

[00:33:20.84] And Special Olympics now has a program called Healthy Athletes. One of the biggest hurdles for people with ID is get the correct health issues, small things-- checking your feet, looking at your teeth. They found a cancer in one of the athlete's mouth. That athlete now is healthy, he's doing well, and he works for Special Olympics on the Eastern-- Western part of the country. I know him very well. And if it wasn't for them taking that little exam, checking his teeth, and that guy probably wouldn't be here.

[00:34:00.63] KELLY MAHONEY: And so this Healthy Athletes program, I think you said it was called, how does that enable athletes, specifically in those circumstances? Like you said, a medical office is much more stressful than, I would assume, going to school or something like that, because it's a different scenario completely.

[00:34:17.52] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: We have athletes--

[00:34:18.40] KELLY MAHONEY: How do programs like that help people reconcile with the challenges they face?

[00:34:22.21] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: OK, I'll tell you a story when I was a kid. My mom took us all to the dentist, and she checked it. They checked all the kids' teeth, and I think it was me and two other sisters because she had the girls. And they got to me, and they said, oh, no, no, no, we don't check these kids' teeth. You got to take her to the clinic.

[00:34:41.27] My mom's a big, broad woman, and she says, don't tell me what you-- And he says, I'm sorry, ma'am. We don't check. So she got the paper. We went out to the clinic, sat for hours. I take a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, sit there and eat it, and take--

[00:34:56.18] Finally, my mom got upset because I wasn't getting the care that her other kids was. But at that time, there wasn't nothing she could do. There's not the programs. Well, we know now that things can be done, and people should have access to primary health care.

[00:35:15.03] And I'll never forget going to New York speaking. And I said, if your feet hurt, you can't run your best. If you can't see well, you can't do your best. If you can't hear well, you can't do your best. And how important it is to have health care, and when you have health care at a young age, just basic health care, how much it can improve your life and everyone to have the right to basic health care.

[00:35:51.86] And now what Special Olympics does-- and they're getting better at it-- they used to do it at mass competitions. They have found athletes who had eye problems that was never discovered. We're not talking about athletes just here in the United States. This is a global thing.

[00:36:09.08] Just last year, in 2023, I went to the Healthy Eyes, and they found I had a cataract starting. And I had just been to the doctor's before that, to the eye doctor. Oh, no, your glasses don't need changed, da da da. I paid my bill like everybody else. The lady's looking over and says, oh, you probably get everything free. Don't you have a medical card?

[00:36:32.57] And I looked at her. Excuse me. First of all, you ain't got no business looking at what I'm doing. Second of all, you see this? This is called a check, written out to this doctor. Pardon me? Excuse me? Yeah.

[00:36:50.35] KELLY MAHONEY: Right. And you've spoken about how your mom was an advocate for you.

[00:36:54.83] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: No, she advocated.

[00:36:55.97] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah, and it sounds like you've worked with an advocate as you've gotten older. So I want to talk a little bit more about that role and advocacy generally. Advocates can often face burnout or even just discouragement when faced with systems that are slow to change, or it doesn't really seem like it's going the way that you'd like it to.

[00:37:15.86] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I almost thought I was going to burn out this morning, and I thought I was going to burn out getting on this call because I'm not computer literate.

[00:37:23.44] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah.

[00:37:23.93] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And I was like, no, this can't happen. This can't happen. My call like this this morning didn't work. This one's not going to work. So I was here 20 minutes ahead trying to get on, and then finally, I hit-- this thing came up, and it says Zoom, and I hit it, and I got on the call.

[00:37:39.14] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. So how do you push yourself? How do you maintain your faith?

[00:37:41.86] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I don't know where I get it from. I don't know where it comes from. But this morning, I was burned out, and I needed-- I said to myself, Loretta, you need to take a deep breath and think about this and move on. And that's what it takes. But some people do burn out.

[00:37:59.96] I try not to burn out, but this morning, I said to the lady on the other end of the phone-- I said, do you know what? I'm about burned out with this computer. I'm not burned out with my job, but I'm burned out with this computer because they keep changing this thing from one platform to another.

[00:38:17.03] I said, you know what? Give me something that works. Zoom works fine for me.

[00:38:22.75] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. It sounds like even just that momentary reset of, let me take a deep breath, that's a big, big first step in not letting it overwhelm you for sure.

[00:38:31.34] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Exactly. Exactly. Right now, I'm going some issues. We have a person in my family-- my sister's husband's not doing well. And I said, let me get out here and get a run and just digest it.

[00:38:44.54] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. I'm sorry to hear about that, but it sounds like you have-- I'm sure that people listening will take inspiration from what you're talking about.

[00:38:53.27] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Worry can-- worry is not a good thing.

[00:38:57.32] KELLY MAHONEY: No, no.

[00:38:58.46] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I always tell people, try not to worry--

[00:39:00.94] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah.

[00:39:01.28] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: --if you can. And it's a hard thing not to do. But I try to keep it minimal because it can raise the blood pressure. You can have a stroke. It can lead to other things.

[00:39:12.50] So I tell people all the time. I say, look, I'm not going to fight over this. There was one time I'd knock you out and forget about it. I can't do that no more. I'm better than this.

[00:39:21.64] KELLY MAHONEY: The knitting sounds like a good backup alternative to calm yourself down.

[00:39:25.88] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Yes, and I do. I'll sit here because now it's getting dark. I don't want to be out after dark. But you just got to find different methods, and that's what Special Olympics and that's what sports have taught me.

[00:39:38.65] KELLY MAHONEY: What's been one of the most rewarding parts of this journey for you, or as a leader? What do you look back on and feel almost the most proud of?

[00:39:49.03] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: I'm mostly proud of-- I don't like to speak religion, but what God has given me, my family, and the good people who I've met on this journey. Right now, it's becoming the holiday time. And we think about gifts wrapped up, but the gifts-- the best gifts I think you can have don't come in a package. It's the gift of that person who comes to you when you're down and says, Loretta, put your head up. I'm here to help you.

[00:40:20.38] And now I'm turning around to some of my friends. My one friend, she has a lot of illnesses, and we help each other. Going and sitting at Panera and having a cup of coffee and just talking for a half an hour.

[00:40:32.71] It's those people who I met along the way. And if it wasn't for Special Olympics, I wouldn't be able to have that journey to meet people that I met along the way. And it's too many to meet, but they know who they are.

[00:40:50.62] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. I think this is the perfect time of year to be expressing that gratitude. And I love to hear that, because even in the difficult moments, it's important to step back and find something that you can appreciate about the experience.

[00:41:03.49] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Just like yesterday. I was in the class, and the lady looked at me. I said, well, I'm going to skip yoga. And she says-- lady walks up. And I said, well, I have a doctor's appointment.

[00:41:12.32] And she looked at me, says, how did you get here at the Y? I said, I rode my bike. The one lady comes over to me and stands behind me doing exercise. She says, Loretta, I'll take you out to get your blood work done. She did.

[00:41:23.33] I said, no, no. She's 74, I think, 75. She says, Loretta, I don't want you riding your bike. Leave your bike parked there, and I'll take you.

[00:41:33.17] She took me all the way out to get my blood work and brought me back. And I said, can I give you something? She says, no, no. I just feel good that I do it.

[00:41:43.64] So tomorrow, when I go to class, I will have homemade washcloths because I know she likes them. But it was just that whole thing. She thought about how cold it was. And I've done it many times.

[00:41:58.39] KELLY MAHONEY: That's incredible.

[00:41:59.08] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: She seen that I got my blood work done, and she wanted to take me for a cup of coffee. And I said, no, I'd better get back to the Y. That way, I can get my gym workout in.

[00:42:07.54] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah.

[00:42:08.06] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: But it's still those people.

[00:42:08.77] KELLY MAHONEY: I still have work to do.

[00:42:10.62] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Those are the gifts.

[00:42:13.36] KELLY MAHONEY: Absolutely.

[00:42:13.54] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: People who you meet along the way.

[00:42:13.90] KELLY MAHONEY: And I love that you gave her a gift in return. [LAUGHS]

[00:42:18.19] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Well, she doesn't know it.

[00:42:19.58] KELLY MAHONEY: Oh, then we'll keep it quiet.

[00:42:21.10] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: She doesn't know it.

[00:42:21.56] KELLY MAHONEY: We'll keep your secret.

[00:42:22.90] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Well, I'll see her in class tomorrow, and I'll have some because I know she loves those homemade washcloths. And--

[00:42:30.25] KELLY MAHONEY: That's wonderful.

[00:42:30.76] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: --so I'll give her some.

[00:42:32.26] KELLY MAHONEY: Well, as you said, it's getting into the holiday time. We're gearing up for the new year as well. So when you think about your hopes for the future of inclusion, how would you see the Special Olympics leading the way in achieving them? Are there any 2025 plans you might be able to share with us?

[00:42:53.08] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Yes, Special Olympics in the Middle East. We just had a conference about a week or so ago, and I flew all the way over to the Middle East. And the



whole conference was about inclusion in the Middle East. So the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, that whole region, wants to have all their schools be inclusive schools. And that's a big step for that whole region, that girls and boys with and without disability, the number one, play sport together, which is normally not done in that region before Special Olympics has stepped in.

[00:43:32.27] They had the most inclusive games. They had 60% women in the games. You have 100%. Now imagine 50% to 60% women in that region playing sport. And what they have learned, that this inclusive education is working.

[00:43:50.51] And what I'd like to see for 2025 and beyond, that not just 10,000 schools in the United States or so many thousands of schools around the world, but in the future, to see all schools have some form of inclusive education for all students from the beginning to the end through college. Because we live in one world with 8 billion people, and at this time of the year, it's the most giving time of the year. So not only should you just give your money, but you should give through your heart.

[00:44:30.40] And my best way of doing something, I always say, everybody has something to give. It doesn't have to come in a package. Sometimes it's just sitting there listening to somebody. Could be an elder. It could be somebody that's depressed. Sometimes it's just you giving them advice to help them up, a hand up. And yes, it takes resources, in a sense, of our charities that we give, that we can help others as we have been helped.

[00:45:05.42] One of the things I do? Since 2014, I've knit thousands upon thousands of premie hats for so many hospitals. And I knit the knockers, the inside insert, that when a lady loses her breasts, she can put this in her garment. If she's going to a wedding, say she lost her right breast, she can put this thing in her garment, and it makes her look even so that she can go to her son's or daughter's wedding. Absolutely free.

[00:45:38.44] KELLY MAHONEY: That's amazing.

[00:45:38.87] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Give back. And like Bob Marley's always said, "live for yourself, you'll live in vain. But if you live for others, you will live again. In the Kingdom of God, you shall reign. So pass it on."

[00:45:49.79] And people say to me, why do you do what you do? I say, because you know what? Somebody has done for me along that long road. And I think it's time that I could do for somebody else in my own little way, whether it's helping teach a young athlete or talk to somebody who's depressed or just to sit there and listen.

[00:46:14.34] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. And you're setting up really wonderful transitions for me here, because I did also want to ask-- I love hearing about how you support and give back to your community outside of the ways in which that you're involved with Special Olympics, of course. It is the season of giving back, and today is Giving Tuesday. So, of course, I wanted to just interject here and give you the opportunity to share how individuals or organizations can help support the mission of the Special Olympics. Is there any sort of drive you'd like to shout out or any particular way they can get involved?

[00:46:50.39] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: COVID has taken from everyone. I don't care what kind of movement you have, what kind of organization you have, and it could be just you. COVID has taken from everyone. In Special Olympics, we have lost a lot of our athletes, not only here in the United States, but there are still programs that need to function beyond the United States. And we knew how these people's lives were impacted.

[00:47:16.59] So number one, I'd like to see more athletes come back and have those same blessings or opportunity. But I'd like to see more coaches, volunteers, because we're a volunteer-driven movement. 95% of the people do not get paid.

[00:47:38.85] So in order to do that, we need more volunteers. We need more athletes to come back. But yes, we also need resources, because we're just not here in the United States. We're global. We're a part of that world-- 200 million people with different abilities. And hopefully, a vast portion of those 200 million people would have the opportunity that I've had.

[00:48:08.40] And the only way we could do it is, number one, bring back the athletes, bring back volunteering, whether it's a coach, whether you're just a local person, even if you're the person that just go sit in the gym and make sure that all the athletes of different abilities have returned. You might be asked to get up and help an athlete in our MATP program, Motor Activities Training Program, to throw a ball or to make them laugh. Maybe that's the only time he laughed that week, by throwing that ball to him. Or pushing his chair just so he can push his hand to push the ball down the ramp, and he possibly gets a slow strike. The differences you can make. And yes, resources, because nothing works without resources.

[00:49:00.60] KELLY MAHONEY: That's wonderful. Thank you for calling all of that out. It's a nice reminder.

[00:49:04.27] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: And like I said, it doesn't cost an athlete nothing.

[00:49:08.25] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah.

[00:49:09.15] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Absolutely free.

[00:49:11.46] KELLY MAHONEY: It's wonderful that there are other ways to get involved as well, even if you're not going to be an athlete yourself. I like that you mentioned coaching and volunteer-based ways to get involved. So thank you very much for giving us a comprehensive overview of all the ways in which it's possible to get involved.

[00:49:28.05] I do want to say, we're running up towards the end of our time together here, but I have one last question for you. Might be hard to do because you've given us a lot of wisdom today. But if there's one message--

[00:49:39.30] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: A wise one will ask this question, while a fool will argue with the fact.

[00:49:43.83] KELLY MAHONEY: Is there one message that you'd like attendees to take away from this discussion today? What would that be? How would you sum it up?

[00:49:52.38] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: My message would be for the attendees who are taking part, is go back to your local program, to your local Special Olympics program, and advocate. Go back to that program and volunteer. Go back to that program and get another athlete to come back. And go back to that program and support it with your resources. And their world, our world, and your world will be a better place if we all just take a little bit of ourself and give back. That's all. It would be much better.

[00:50:30.18] KELLY MAHONEY: Yeah. That's absolutely true. I couldn't agree more.

[00:50:33.28] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: It doesn't take a lot. Just give whatever you got.

[00:50:35.83] KELLY MAHONEY: No, even if it's just time.

[00:50:37.41] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Everything is not in a package or money.

[00:50:40.70] KELLY MAHONEY: Right. Well, thank you very much, Loretta, for those wonderful parting words and everything that you've said today. Thank you for sharing your experiences and, of course, your wisdom with us. I'd like to thank our audience for joining us today.

[00:50:53.60] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Yes, thank you.

[00:50:54.45] KELLY MAHONEY: Sadly, we're out of time. I'll give one final round of thank yous to everyone who's here. Thank you, Loretta. Thank you to our interpreters, our captioner, our attendees. That's all from us today. I hope everyone has a wonderful rest of your day.

[00:51:09.54] LORETTA CLAIBORNE: Thank you.