

One Step at a Time brings heart and humour to Gibson Centre

It's a story most parents can relate to: a last-minute run to the local drug store to find that one outstanding item missing to care for their child.

For some parents, that item might be diapers. For others, a tensor bandage to hold a hurt wrist in place until morning.

Andrew Prashad has walked that road many times, but this is a road with a few different forks.

A father of three, Prashad, an award-winning performer, has a son living with spina bifida and hydrocephalus. In addition to the typical diapers and bandages that are an inescapable part of parenting, his son requires a catheter which, in turn, requires the use of lubrication.

'I've had to run into Shopper's and go to the baby aisle looking for lube and I stop and think, 'Where's all the lube? How can they be out?' Then, I realize it is in a different aisle,' Prashad tells *The Times* with a chuckle.

It's a story, he says, that parents with differently-abled children can relate to, one which brings both laughter and representation to the stage – and he's set to do just that next Thursday and Friday as he brings his one-man show, 'One Step at a Time' to Alliston's Gibson Centre for the Performing Arts.

Billed as a 'theatrical testimony to the power of faith, love and teamwork, in which a stay at home father learns how to balance a successful career in the performing arts while raising two daughters and anticipating the arrival of a son diagnosed with spina bifida and hydrocephalus,' the show brings together monologues, original songs and tap dance to tell a very personal and very poignant story.

A multidiscipline artist by training, Prashad says he was long-encouraged to develop a show to showcase his skills but, for quite some time, he didn't feel he had anything to say in the form of a one-man show.

But once he began sharing his family's story on social media, a story which laid bare their challenges and milestones, he found their personal journey was having an impact on families following similar paths.

'I thought maybe there was something here,' he says.

But, for a while, he wasn't sure what that something was – until one day he found himself struggling to catheterize his son.

'I will sing at catheter time to relax him so it goes in easier,' he says. 'I was singing everything for about 45 minutes' and it was

getting a little frustrating and I ran out of songs to sing. So, I just sang an improvisational song I made up on the spot and he thought it was really funny. He relaxed a bit, the catheter went in, it worked, and I finished the song that same night. I shared that song and a lot of people encouraged me to create a show around that song and that is how I ended up with five original songs, then the dancing, and the model which encompasses that story.

The show is essentially about me as a performer and a father and my wife trying to raise our three kids and all the needs that brings, while I am also trying to balance a career in the performing arts, which is incredibly demanding.

The show begins when he and his pregnant wife find out there could be something wrong with their expected baby. It follows his birth, how their two daughters adapted to their new brother, the struggles they shared as a couple, and several surgeries, during which they thought they might not see their son again.

Then, it comes out the other side to where we are now, just him being amazing, overcoming everything and teaching us so much and us just trying to adapt our lives and me having to adapt my career, says Prashad.

While he says the show is encouraging with its fair share of laughter, Prashad admits it is sometimes difficult to relive some of the more traumatic moments of this journey every time he steps onto the stage. Yet, he's buoyed by the idea that it is, in the end, about encouraging people who might find themselves in difficult situations to forge ahead, especially the special needs community, from parents who might find themselves in their situation or children who have since grown up who are curious as to what their parents went through.

My favourite audience is when the differently-abled and the special needs community come out, he says. From the kids who are now older and can understand what their parents went through, to the parents and grandparents who have been there and done that, they get it and they love seeing a part of their lives and stories reflected on the stage. That is one of the biggest things that pushed me to write this. There is not enough representation on Canadian stages, they are generally pretty white as it is, and I have been fighting for cultural representation on the stage, so to be able to help that as well as the communities I am part of because of my son, to share a glimpse of their stories and represent us on stage, that is very important to me.

My most favourite feedback to get is the thank you from those communities. They come up and they're crying, but they're happy. They ride the roller coaster with me because they have been there before and there is that extra layer of joy on top of their experience because they are living something like this. To see it on a platform that reaches more people than just the people in the know encourages me to keep doing this.

Andrew Prasad's *One Step at a Time* takes centre-stage at the Gibson Centre for two performances next week ? Thursday, February 27 at 7.30 p.m., and Friday, February 28 at 11 a.m. Tickets are on sale now for \$25. For more information, visit gibsoncentre.com/events.

By Brock Weir