



## Unwrapped

The Best Gifts Come in Small, Squirring Packages

By ANGELA LEHMAN-RIOS

**T**wenty-two years ago, Martha Slay became a mom. And about 21 years ago, she became a Fighter Mom.

Although those weren't the words she used at the time, that's when her son Andrew was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA, the number one genetic killer of babies in the U.S. Martha felt compelled to do something.

That something was Andrew's Buddies, an organization she and her husband Joe founded in 1991 to raise money for SMA research and spread awareness of the disease. Over the past 17 years, the organization has evolved into FightSMA, with chapters across the county that have raised more than \$5 million for research.

FightSMA also supports parents whose children have been diagnosed with SMA, helping them become advocates—fighters—for their children.

About three years ago, recognizing that mothers of children with other diseases or difficulties were contacting FightSMA for advice and encouragement, the organization

created the "Fighter Mom" program.

"We were blown away with what moms were sharing" about becoming activists, said Martha. That collective wisdom is gathered into the Fighter Mom manual.

Meant to help parents harness their passion to protect their children, the book is full of nuts-and-bolts advice about raising funds, working with researchers and talking to congresspeople. More information and a link to order the free manual is at [www.fightermom.org](http://www.fightermom.org).

### Martha Slay's Mother's Day Gifts

**The Big One** To help other moms find their inner Fighter Mom. "It's in there, it's not deep down in there. You rise up when your children's lives are threatened. You say, 'I can be about the business of laying groundwork for change in the future so other moms and dads don't have to face what I do.'"

**This Year** "About a month of sleep!" Martha says her husband is

Mother: Martha Slay  
 Spouse: Joe  
 Children: Andrew, 22;  
 Patrick, 19; Megan, 15



Photo: Frost

"big into themes." One year, he got her all the pieces for a backyard fish pond. Patrick and a friend dug out

the space, and she and Megan choose the fish and the plants. "Themes are nice."