

Success for Sam - A Mother's Story | CPD

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This amazing young man graduates from High School today. There's so many things that just make me in awe of this moment. Yet, they seem so ordinary now. Everyone expects their son or daughter to graduate from High School. Right? No big deal! I mean I've already had one graduate 4 years ago, so this shouldn't be anything new to me. But in some ways, today marks a huge triumph for this young man.....and for us, his family! Fourteen years ago I dragged this cute little four year old from special clinic to specialist in a search for some much needed answers.....afraid to know the truth, but wanting some explanation about how our world had been turned upside down. I looked at this cute little boy with the amazing blue eyes and wispy blond hair and wondered what had happened to the happy go lucky baby I had carried around just a few years earlier. When did he begin to refuse to meet my eyes? Why did he begin throwing violent fits of banging his head on the floor, the wall, anything that would make my heart lurch? When did he begin hiding in

closets,, endlessly stroking his over-stuffed duck. How had he become a stranger to me.....this sweet toddler who seemed content to follow his older brother around?

What had happened to change him from a good natured baby to a silent, anxious, hysterical, escape-artist toddler?

I needed answers.....every day I felt that he drifted a little further away from our family and I panicked,.....wondering if we would lose him all together. Answers came.....Autism.....on the spectrum.....but they came, because I felt I had to push for them. Was I wrong?

Was I sentencing him to a label.....a life different from his peers? Guilt washed over me as I struggled under that label.....knowing I was the one that helped fix it there. What did it mean for Sam? What did it mean for us?

What would it do to our family? Where would Sam end up? For Sam, it meant finally getting some amazing people in our lives that offered help. ADA therapy, nutritional diets, nutritional supplements, modifying his environment, making people aware of his needs, special teachers, special aides, setting him apart from other 'normal' children. It meant explaining what 'echolalia' is to others when they asked why Sam repeated all of his sentences back. It meant aides who although trying to help him in class, actually separated him from his peers. For Sam it meant that his big brother was continually embarrassed by his lack of social barriers and social graces and his outbursts at social events. It meant labels, such as 'developmentally delayed', 'autism spectrum disorder', speech difficulties, 'behavioral disorders'.....labels for everything that didn't seem 'typical.' For us, it meant listening to a psychiatrist diagnose him as functioning on a 6 month old level when he was 4 and telling us to 'get used' to him falling behind his peers, 'Put away' those dreams of his future....he's just going to get worse.

It meant going to endless IEP meetings that lasted for hours, offending educators, being offended myself, trying to find someone who wanted to understand my son and help him. Putting him in special classes, bussing him to Preschool every day, finding aid and applying for endless programs that required an amazing amount of paperwork, taking him out of school and home schooling, holding him back in school, having an IEP, not having an IEP, notes to teachers, principals, administrators. It meant finding money for conferences, workshops, special intervention services, supplements, diets, more information. Endless nights of searching the internet for information, reading other stories of parents that 'cured' their child, looking for that miracle for my family, for my son. For our family, it meant eating weird food, holding Sam down before he got on his Preschool bus to shove fish oil down his throat and hope that he wouldn't throw it back up. It meant always feeling 'different' because we always felt panicked whenever we went anywhere with him. Would we lose him because of his amazing ability to get away

from us? Would he tantrum relentlessly during programs, recitals, meetings, church, etc? It meant disapproving looks from older people in church, who watched me let my 4 year old eat bags of chips all over the bench during church, because he was on a gluten free/casein free diet and potato chips were the only food he would eat or that would keep him in one spot for a few minutes. It meant asking the Bishop if there could be a 'gluten/casein' free sacrament tray (no), asking for special helpers in church, at school, at home. It meant neighbors who would kindly find him over a few blocks from our home and slip him through our front door.....when I didn't even know he had slipped away while I jumped in the shower, assuming he was watching TV. Everything we did with Samuel at the beginning of his diagnoses seemed to scream at us.....he's different, put away your dreams, fix him, cure him,..... give up! Yet every year we saw a little piece of Samuel come back to us. And now.....as I see my handsome son getting ready to walk across the High School graduation stage,.....all I can see is triumph. He is Samuel.....same incredible blue eyes and crooked smile.....a member of the National Honor Society, former member of the school ACADECA team, a State Solo Winner, a Wrestling Champion, a Football lineman, a track runner, a Seminary Council Member, a lifeguard, a home teacher, a multi-scholarship winner, attending dances, going on dates, assistant to the Bishop, planning to attend BYU.....hopes and dreams spread out before him.....a person with Autism. I have no doubts that he will achieve whatever he sets his mind to. I see no limits for him. I see no label. And I watch him with his little brother, a fellow sojourner with Autism and Down Syndrome. Labels that set limits.....that wipe away hopes and dreams. And I see as I watch him with Jacob.....there are no limits,there is majesty and power and limitless potential in every one of us. No one knows what each of us has the potential to become.....regardless of the 'labels' we receive in this life. You have made me a believer, Sam! Spread your wings and fly! Love you to the moon and back! Mom