

Raising Ryan:

A Mother and Son's Journey

My son Ryan was diagnosed with autism when he was three years old. He had lost language, stopped making eye contact and was slowly disappearing into himself. These changes occurred quickly and I was scrambling to find out why this was happening. A year later his father died from complications due to cancer. As a widowed, single parent, I spent most of my free time as an autism warrior, getting Ry the therapies and treatments necessary to maximize his best potential, and creating support systems for him within our community. I was determined that he would lead the life he wanted and I steadfastly developed a plan so that one day he would attend college, live independently, and be gainfully employed.

As Ry drew closer to his eighteenth birthday, it was becoming painfully obvious to me that his life trajectory was going to differ from what I/we had been working towards. I was watching my peers take their teenage children on college tours while my son was still working out the vagaries of crossing the street safely, getting his daily dose of Sesame Street and struggling with reciprocal conversation. As my sadness was increasing, I realized that I was grieving the loss of a future I wanted for him. Not knowing how to process my sorrow, I began to write a story to myself, Ryan's story.

What began as journal entries to help me assuage my grief, slowly blossomed into a blog. As I was writing each entry, I would read them aloud to my son. I wanted to be transparent, get his permission to post, recruit his input and engage him in conversation. It gave us an opportunity to share in a manner that neither one of us had experienced with each other before. I gained invaluable insight in regards to Ryan's memories and how he processed the world around him and viewed himself (sometimes referring



to himself in third person). On Ry's part, he finally figured out that I was someone that was more than his Mom and that parenting by myself was really hard work. We developed a richer understanding of each other and that was more than I bargained for. Part way through the process, I asked Ryan if he wanted to participate and contribute his thoughts to each entry. He enthusiastically agreed and Raising Ryan: Living with Autism began to take shape.

"Who is your audience?" I get that question a lot! Raising Ryan is meant to provide resources and hope to families with a new diagnosis, allow educators a deeper understanding of the 24/7 responsibilities of parents with special needs children and adults, and to educate anyone that wants to know more about autism. From our perspective, each book that is purchased represents one more person that understands autism a little bit better and isn't that a grand idea?

We would like to thank Kimberly Reeves for sharing her Parent Perspective with us. To learn more about Kimberly Reeves & Ryan Cunningham, visit Village Books (Fairhaven) to hear a free reading of Raising Ryan: Living With Autism, on Sunday October 28th at 4pm. Meet the author and get your book signed!

Upcoming Parent Support Meetings:

Monday, 10/8, 7 - 8:30pm **Topic: *Creating Supports for your Child & Family***
The Arc, 2602 McLeod Rd., Bellingham

Thursday, 10/18, 1 - 2:30pm **Topic: *Feeding Tube Family Support***
WCEL, 2001 H. Street, Bellingham

Monday, 11/5, 7 - 8:30pm **Topic: *Resource Sharing for your Special Needs Child***
Fisher Elementary School, 501 14th St, Lynden

Supervised care is provided to those who contact us by the Friday prior to the meeting. For special accommodations and interpreting services, please contact us 3 weeks in advance at (360) 715-0170 ext 302 or p2p@arcwhatcom.org

