

Tide's In

Written by Gayle Nobel

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Jeff Stimpson is a guest blogger on AutismWithAttitude today. Our children with autism challenge us daily. This reminds me that sometimes, well maybe often, you just have to go with the flow and also remember to have a sense of humor.

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At the register, I ask Alex to take stuff from the cart and put it on the belt. "Alex, take out the ham and put it up there for the cashier. The ham, Alex." He then appears to be moving on to the toilet paper and the bag of green peppers; good time for me to manhandle up the carton of Diet Coke. I get the Coke up there and I turn around thinking Alex is still helping take stuff from the cart. Isn't that great! He's learned-"

I spot him vanishing into the LAUNDRY AND HOUSEHOLD aisle. Again.

For months he's darted like a dragonfly into the LAUNDRY AND HOUSEHOLD aisle of supermarkets, drug stores, Target and Wal-mart almost the second after we enter the stores. Invariably he finally stops in front of the rows of fat plastic orange jugs. He pulls one down: sometimes Regular, sometimes Fresh Mountain Scent. Other flavors include Free & Gentle, Touch of Downey, Sport Active Fresh, Actlift (Clean Breeze and Fresh), April Fresh, Bleach Alternative, Fabreze Freshness, Renewing Rain, and Renewing Rain Scent, among others. I'm unsure which Tide Alex favors.

Tide's been ugly. One exhausted night in a grocery store this summer Alex bolted from the register and found the Tide aisle, and when I found him he met my eyes for about a second and then zipped in the opposite direction. I was ... displeased. One part of me felt I had a right to be mad; another felt I should try harder to understand him.

So again autism makes me ask weird questions. "What do you like about Tide, Alex?" He waps the white plastic cap (Color Safe Whitening ... 26 Loads [Lavadas]). "Wanna Tide!" he says, hugging the jug like he would a teddy bear. Is it a toy or a tool for a future job?

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Is this related to Alex bolting into laundromats, which he's been doing for months? Zip and in past the front-loaders and the dryers and the wide-eyed owners. After lassoing Alex in these places, I've tried to make it clear to him that he's too large to run full speed into crowded businesses anymore, that he might plow someone over. That he should walk in. Modify the behavior.

Modify the Tide: Maybe Alex should pick up the Tide when we enter the store, lug it around with him as we shop, and leave the jug by the register when we leave. We try this. "Alex, we're not buying Tide ... "

What do you like about Tide? Do you like it because you know what it is? What's it used for? Alex stares at the ceiling of the store and says, "Tiiiiide..." I point to the label and ask if Alex knows this word. "Bleach!" he says. I take his finger in my hand and letter by letter we spell "Alternative." He moves his finger over the label. "T – I – D – E. Tide! Ha!" Alex's laugh echoes off the gleaming mascara display nearby.

When it's time to return the Tide to the Tide shelf so it can be with all the other Tides, Alex, almost with love, slips the orange jug back. I tell him it's time to leave the store. He grabs the jug again when he thinks I'm not looking.

Jeff Stimpson is a native of Bangor, Maine, and lives in New York with his wife Jill and two sons. He is the author of *Alex: The Fathering of a Preemie* and *Alex the Boy: Episodes From a Family's Life With Autism* (both available on Amazon). He maintains a blog about his family at [jeffslife.tripod.com/alextheboy](http://jeffslife.tripod.com/alextheboy), and is a frequent contributor to various sites and publications on special-needs parenting, such as *Autism-Asperger's Digest*, *Autism Spectrum News*, *Fatherville.com*, and *The Autism Society* news blog. He is on LinkedIn under "Jeff Stimpson" and Twitter under "Jeffslife."