

Christmas, Autism and Why I Believe In Miracles

Written by Gayle Nobel

Saturday, 26 December 2009 11:07 - Last Updated Saturday, 26 December 2009 11:20

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas (or whatever holiday you choose to celebrate). We made our own dates for Hanukkah this year since it wasn't until December 25 that our entire family was able to be together.

Yesterday was wonderful. I had the opportunity to hike Lookout Mountain and contemplate life from the top. Then I sat with Kyle out on our front wall. We both quietly basked in the Arizona sunshine for a very long time. (So THIS is why we put up with 115 degrees in the summer!) I visited my brother Philip and watched his face light up as he took the jar of pickles out of his gift bag. Our immediate family was together in the evening with the addition of Rachel's boyfriend, JB. This was his first Christmas away from his family in France. I was pleasantly surprised when Kyle came back to the dinner table not to eat, but just to sit with us. He was also peaceful and even stayed in the room the entire time while we all opened gifts. Reminds me once again, there are "moments" lurking everywhere when we are awake to them.

I wanted to share this inspiring piece I found by Jean Shaw.

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Normally I hate this time of year. The Christmas mail generally brings with it cards from old friends and acquaintances. Whilst I love to hear from them I often feel envious and cheated for they make me think of what might have been if only my son hadn't developed autism.

I know it's wrong but I'm only human.

However, this year I seem to have got things into perspective. Instead of yearning for what I may have missed, I appreciate what I have.

The Season of Good Will didn't start too well. I took my son on a train journey. He loved it.

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The train was full of Christmas shoppers and commuters so we were unable to sit together. However, I managed to get a seat directly behind him and watched as he sat staring out of the window, a finger in one ear, reciting story lines memorised from his vast array of videos.

The lady next to him, engrossed in her paperback novel appeared not to notice, but a young child, three years old apparently, did. With the innocence of youth she asked her mother and grandmother:

"Why was he was talking to himself?"

"Why did he have his finger in his ear?"

"Why did he look out of the window all the time?"

In the quietness of the crowded carriage her persistent little voice carried and her carers were visibly embarrassed. They tried, as best they could to divert her questions but were fighting a losing battle. I noticed soon many people were glancing at my son and contemplating his somewhat unusual behaviour.

Tears welled up in my eyes as I looked at the little girl for it brought back memories of happier times. I remembered how my son used to be such a chatterbox; friendly, sociable and inquisitive. Then came autism and his world and that of all around him changed forever.

Life's unfair.

One of the things I find really hard is my son's inability to share his thoughts and feeling with me. I never really know what he has done when he's not with me, who or what he likes and dislikes and what he really wants. Usually I have to guess and birthdays and Christmas times are very difficult.

On the positive side it means he doesn't continually pester me with demands for "I want"; this and "I want"; that but it would be nice to know I occasionally got

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things right for him.

This year, I think I have and it's all because of a typing error.

My son loves videos and he has literally hundreds. Now I know the specialists will say that's a bad thing because it fuels his desire to be repetitive in as much as he can watch the same films over and over again. He doesn't though. It's true he does watch them more than once but rotates them, and as he has so many that's no different from watching tv every night. The thing is he learns from them and they are not violent.

However, in the sleeve of every video there are usually pictures of other videos in the same series, or by the same producers, and the reason my son has so many is that he feels he has to have them all. To him they are collector's items.

The problem is most of them are very old, many going back to the seventies so finding them is difficult. I use car boot sales, charity shops, word of mouth and on-line market stores, and for the past six months have been searching for two specific titles.

I knew my son wanted them because he has shown me the pictures in the video boxes, has written the titles out on a piece of paper which he thrusts in front of my eyes every time I go on the internet, and drags me to his tv every time a trailer comes on to mention them. He also tells me what they are, and says, "presents Christmas Day" as he points to 25th December on the calendar. As if that isn't evidence enough he has left two gaps in his display where the videos will go once he gets them.

It's been a worry because I haven't been able to locate them and was concerned how I would explain to my autistic son that even when he tries really, really hard to tell me what he wants I can't deliver.

Now, however, because of a typing error I have both of them.

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A local newspaper ran an article about my son and I because of a book I'd just written. They got my name wrong. I started off as Jean Shaw but somehow ended up as Mrs Smith.

Now I had no problems with that but saw it as a last minute desperate attempt to locate the videos my son so badly wanted. I contacted the reporter and asked if he would print some sort of apology simply so that I could appeal to the readers to look out their old stock. He said "no problem" and a few minutes later rang me back.

He told me he's checked on one of the online market places and both videos were there for sale. I was amazed, having checked regularly for the past six months. I thanked him, put down the phone and promptly ordered and paid for them. Today they arrived.

It's Christmas Eve and my son will wake up tomorrow morning a very happy boy indeed.

Who says miracles don't happen?

Also this week son's school were performing their Christingle Service in the local cathedral. It is a beautiful, serene building over 1000 years old. The architecture and decorations are quite magnificent. Set in a flat landscape the huge cathedral can be viewed from miles and is known as The Ship Of The Fens. It gives people hope. Just thinking about its construction makes you realise no task is too great and when you go inside there is an amazing atmosphere of peace and tranquility.

My son attends a school for children with special needs. Each child is different and provides a varying degree of worry and anxiety for his or her parents. Some children have both physical and medical disabilities, others mental or behavioural problems. Some are confined to a wheelchair, whilst others just wander, unable to stay still. However, every single child is cherished and valued for who they are, and their achievements, no matter how small, are acknowledged.

As I sat in front of the huge Christmas Tree gazing up at the amazing stained glass windows, and carved and painted ceiling, I listened to the carols and recitations by the children. I

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watched my son perform Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer dressed in his antlers, scarf and red mittens. He was so confident and happy, it made me realise how lucky I really am.

Life, I know is about being grateful for what you have and those letters no longer bother me.

Yes, I believe in miracles.

Jean Shaw writes articles and is the author of I'm Not Naughty - I'm Autistic.

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