

### What If?

Gayle

I am truly relieved Kyle is nineteen and past his childhood. I had so much angst and worry about the future when he was a little boy. Life was colored by my desperation to do the right thing. I could never do enough. Sick days or rest days were not allowed for either of us. The window of opportunity often seemed on the verge of closing, so I had to cram it all in before it slammed shut.

In reflection, what if my attitude was the only thing on this journey that mattered? What if I had known it was never too late? What if I had really believed that with all my heart? Would I have worried less? Felt less desperate to get the hours in, rushing from one thing to the next, cramming in as much stimulation as possible?

What if I had realized early on that everything I did with Kyle was really therapy anyway? What if, in the end, many of the things I was frantic and anxious about didn't really matter?

What if I could have previewed some of the lessons still to come in a crash course called acceptance? If I had believed there was plenty of time, would I have slowed down and really seen the unique soul of my child? Could I have looked past the labels to discover his extraordinary spirit? Could I simply love my boy for a while, without needing him to perform?

What if I had known he wasn't going to talk, would he be okay anyway? Could I then have been satisfied, even happy?

What if the number of hours, or even the type of therapy, didn't matter in the long run? Would I have allowed him to rest when he was sick? Could he have ditched a session once in awhile? Could I have spent a day holding him and seen that as productive?

What if Kyle's relationships with people mattered more than any other thing he achieved in his life? Would I have done it differently? Let him hug me to get out of working? Spend a session tickling and chasing, rather than matching and imitating?

We are now living the future I worried about for so long. There are no more age deadlines to meet. The developmental windows, if they ever really existed, have faded into the background. The doors of possibility are wide open, and we have plenty of time to explore them.

What if my attitude really is the only thing on this journey that matters?

Happiness

Kathy

Last night, Frank saw the movie, "The Terminal." He loved the movie and said it was a great reminder for him that life is a process, not a destination. He said, "As in the example of Mark's seizures, instead of saying we'll be happy when they're gone, we'll be happy now." Happiness already lives within us. It is only our judgments and beliefs that tell us otherwise.

On a day-to-day basis, it's amazing how often I get to use this information. I look back at my own life and see how many times I have used happiness as my motivator. I'll be happy when I lose those extra five pounds, or when I get married and have children, or when we build our dream home. The list goes on and on. There was always something I could dangle in front of myself to motivate me to get what I wanted, with the prize of being happy.

Nothing is a better example of this than Mark. With his autism and seizures, I have been constantly motivated to help him. Behind that motivation was my desire for us to feel good and be happy. But what happens if you don't get what you want? Does that mean we must spend our whole lives being unhappy? Or must we be at the mercy of getting what we want so we can feel good?

I realized I didn't want to live my life this way anymore, dependent on things outside of me to be a certain way for me to feel good, whether that involved people or circumstances. I know now that happiness is the way, not the destination.

This has been an extraordinary gift. I love my life and the people in it. With its opportunities and challenges, each day is like a brand new canvas on which I get to paint. Some days I love what I create, and other days, not so much. As I practice my skills in the art of living, I am getting much better at it. And just like painting, my "pictures" might not be perfect, but I'm having fun, living and "painting" my life.