

KIDS CAN CHRONICLES

www.kidswithautismcan.org

2015-It's All Fun and ...

Giggling at a play, "The Magic Books" put on by PHX Theatre, a tour of The Japanese Friendship Gardens and a chance to "give back" and help make the park more beautiful, rock climbing in tutus at AZ on the Rocks (ok, the tutus were optional). It has already been a great start to 2015 with so much more to come. We are very flexible! Come as you are and for as long as you can; we know that means different things to different families.

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Coming Events! It's All Fun and...

April 13



April 18



May 10



April 2, 2015-Autism Awareness Day

So it is 11am and someone sent me a blog yesterday talking about autism awareness and it got me thinking. What does autism awareness mean to me? I think first you might need to understand my past. I feel sure my dad, although undiagnosed, has autism. He is brilliant, but couldn't graduate from "regular" high school. He has created a social persona but is very uncomfortable around a lot of people, even those he loves. He was the guy sleeping in the Lazy Boy right in the middle of Christmas. Or if it wasn't an important event, he found a reason to hunt or fish instead of being present. My dad did the very best he could, but as a kid, and even an adult, the signals you get when you don't understand the situation are confusing at best. It is easier for our family now; we have a better understanding of him. My mom passed away 10 years ago, she was his buffer but he manages on his own and he is now in his 80's.

When I was little, my mom's cousin would visit us at the cabin, she brought her kids. One didn't talk; he was grown up, the age of my oldest sister. He rocked and played with rubber bands and grunted. He was always right with my aunt. When I was old enough to start understanding developmental disabilities (it was not so nicely worded 40 years ago) we believed he was "mentally retarded". Once again, my mom treated Bobby the same as everyone; she looked at him and spoke with him even though he never said a word or looked back at her. Bobby went for long walks with his mom or grandma every day, hot or freezing cold, they were not optional. He never went into a home; he still lives with my aunt and he is now 62 years old. My auntie Mary did not have Facebook to share what happened in her life. She did not have autism awareness month, but she was strong. She went to the state capitol 40 years ago to talk about what was necessary to support special needs kids. Auntie Mary makes most of us look like wimps!! She is the mom we should all be - she did her job. I am sure she was angry but we never saw, she just fought for what was right and important and she still inspires me; I love everything she stands for. I believe they now call Bobby's diagnosis autism.

The third generation of autism in my family happened when my son was diagnosed. The good news for me is he was my first interaction that actually included the diagnosis autism. I learned of the earlier family members after I learned what autism was. There have also been so many improvements in understanding, treatments and early intervention. Nicholas is now in college, it is not a breeze but it is happening. This week I meet with a man who works solely with kids transitioning to any form of higher education. We are optimistic but there is still much work to be done.

So when I host a fundraiser or ask for donations it is not about buying a burrito or winning an auction basket, it is about affording us more opportunities to educate and support people with ASD and a community that still has so very much to learn. Because trust me, after almost 50 years I understand autism affects every family member, always.

Thanks...

Again, we wish to thank John C. Lincoln Gives for generous grants that will help us provide more events in 2015. They have provided awesome social opportunities for our families.



We would also like to thank Bella Vista College Prep and Boys Team Charity for their on-going support.



“FUN”draising

April is Autism Awareness Month! Here are some ways to participate and we hope you will share this so others will also become more aware! There are several ways to be involved over the next few weeks! Most involve eating and shopping and a little spring cleaning. How hard can that be? Mark your calendars and join in the fun.

Eating:

We have started and will be ending Autism Awareness Month with two restaurant fundraisers. You can help us nibble our way to funding more events. Think of this like that old shampoo commercial; she liked it and she told two friends and she told two friends and so on and so on. Pass along the flyers and ask your friend to pass them along too, because every person that attends helps our earnings increase!



Chick-Fil-A –**Thursday April 30th, 2015 from 5–8pm.** The cow will make an appearance. We just love that cow! This event is at Raintree and the 101, in Scottsdale. As centrally located as we could get since we had to choose one location. 20% of ALL sales, no flyer required.

Shopping:



KENDRA SCOTT

NEXT WEEKEND

Kendra Scott Gives Back Party– **Saturday, April 11th, 2015 from 1–4 pm.** This store is located at Scottsdale Quarter and has beautiful pieces of moderately priced jewelry. Great for Graduation, Mother’s Day, End of Year gifts or a little treat for yourself or someone you love. Please come and enjoy bubbles and bites while you shop!

Spring Cleaning:



NEXT WEEKEND

Fill a Bag and Make a Difference! Savers Donation Drive– 3 Days/3 Stores– **All Day April 10th, 11th and 12th** at the following locations. So spend a little time de-cluttering, fill some bags and boxes and drop them at Savers locations listed here, **tell them it is for Kids with Autism Can** and we will be paid per pound!

Savers Scottsdale

15020 N. Northsight Blvd
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

Savers Chandler

1106 N. Arizona Ave
Chandler, AZ 85225

Savers Peoria

7759 W. Bell Road
Peoria, AZ 85382

We hope you will participate in one or more of these events and pass the details along to friends and family. Put your social medias skills to good use.

Need a Home Inspection?



Checklist Inspections of Gilbert is generously donating \$10 for every home inspection they perform in the month of April in recognition of Autism Awareness Month. We thank them for their generous support. Kids with Autism Can families will also receive a 15% discount this month.

On A Personal Note

Autism –Happy 19th Birthday Nicholas!

Every few years I write a little story about Nicholas' life usually around his birthday. So here I go!

This week will be Nicholas' 19th birthday. When he was younger I would never have imagined this would be his life at 19. Remember, Nicholas was the kid with sensory issue like I have never seen. Waking up, eating, going anywhere and changing clothes were all painful. Please pay attention to the word painful, I don't mean he was uncomfortable: I mean I am not sure he encountered much of anything that didn't hurt until he was maybe 5 or 6 years old. I get that now! I wish I would have understood it better at the time. He also had almost no language until he was about 5 and was diagnosed with moderate to severe autism.

When you see us at events, I think many parents must think, "Look how well he is doing, they can't possibly understand what we go through!" Here is what we understand. We understand being exhausted to the point that you cannot move from your chair, and your family and friend can barely look at you because they feel sorry for you, but really can't understand what you are going through. We understand that you can drive an hour to an event that you will only stay at for five minutes because there will be a melt down and you will need to leave and then your other two kids will join in the meltdown because they want to stay.

We understand the guilt involved when you can't possibly make everyone happy and I don't mean like a typical family, I mean never being able to finish anything the way most families would. We understand the uncertainty of life with autism on a big scale (Will he be ok? Will he live on his own?) and autism day to day (Can I take him to the store for milk, without him screaming ow! if I touch his hand?) We now also understand the possibilities for kids with autism.

Nicholas leads an awesome life, but still does so with much anxiety. Life is far from perfect. I think the biggest trick is trying to let go of our fears! The funny thing is when Nicholas moved to Tempe, I was desperately afraid he would fail a class or be struck by a car or someone would be cruel or a thousand other things that ran through my head...None of these have happened. Some of them probably will and that is part of life. With or without autism. My mom used to say "Katie, 90% of the things you worry about never happen and the 10% that do you can't do anything about!" Boy was she right on that one. It seems once we take the next step in letting go it starts to become the new norm. So now I don't worry every minute about what his life holds and what he is doing but I also know it has taken me 19 years to get there. We are clearly blessed that he has Paige, his older sister living with him. I think having a group working to support your child and you family make autism a little more peaceful.

Nicholas is starting to manage more parts of his own life. It is exciting, he texts to maintain his own speech and OT appointment, as well as tutors and other students. He cleans his condo, cooks simple meals and does his laundry, all still with help but he is getting there. He has his license to drive although that is still something he most often does with another person in the car. It is always good to have extra eyes

on the road, but he is actually a good driver. Nicholas has also learned to “give back”; yesterday, we spent the morning at the Japanese Friendship Gardens. He raked and trimmed and helped make the park a more beautiful place. He is still making improvements constantly. Including giving me a hug this morning that did not feel like I was hugging a wet noodle, but also didn’t make me feel like I was being given the Heimlich maneuver!

So we continue to travel the road with more confidence and less fear. More humor and less tears. More energy to help others and less exhaustion because we have stopped allowing autism and negative members of society to control our family’s lives. We know what Nicholas can do and we see no limits in his future. That doesn’t mean we won’t have challenges but we can all continue to grow and learn and love.

Happy 19th Birthday lovely, charming, opinionated, intense, precious Nicholas!

A Step Back In Time – Sharing an Old Letter

Happy 9th Birthday Nicholas!

Today is April 5, 2005. It’s Nicholas’ 9th birthday. Nicholas has Autism. I have things I want to say to him. It is part of the gift I would like to give to him. Nothing compared to what he gives all of us. I read a short book of quotes on the meaning of life and came to the realization that Nicholas and my other children Paige and Drew “get it” much better than we do as adults who try to fit the molds society creates for us.

At the risk of losing what I think is a great book title; I want to tell you a story. About four years ago, a woman I have known since just after Nicholas was born called me, she said “My son has been diagnosed with Autism, what do I do? What will happen to him when he grows up?” I tried to help, I said, “Don’t think so far ahead, deal with now.” The next thing I said I realized later was very telling of how we live our lives. I said, “Typical isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.” We finished our conversation and hung up.

The next day she called me back and thanked me for my “words of wisdom”. I didn’t quite understand, then she repeated the phrase back to me “typical isn’t all it’s cracked up to be”. She said “that has really made me see things differently!” I think it made her feel like she could cope a little better with an overwhelming situation.

Nicholas helps us learn limits! Whether we want to or not!! My husband and I are both high energy over-achievers. We have been forced to slow down. I realize my family’s happiness is more valuable than a clean house or a 65 hour a week job. I have also learned you can play 18 holes of mini-golf in under 15 minutes or go to a bowling alley for 20 minutes and have a great time or stay for two hours and leave with everyone crying (that has nothing to do with Autism). The same holds true for the zoo. I see so many people dragging their kids around when they are exhausted and overwhelmed. They do not understand that all kids feel this to some degree. Don’t take them to dinner at 8 p.m. instead take them home to snuggle in their bed and go to sleep. These typical families don’t seem happier than mine.

I want to share a bit of our atypical lifestyle and the many gifts we get. Let me tell you about our friends, sometimes we get up and leave someone's house in the middle of dinner. When Nicholas is done, he's done. You have to take us for who we are as a family. We have been blessed with people in our lives that will do whatever we need to make our friendship work because they are kind, loving and supportive people. I wonder how many of these people we wouldn't know if I wouldn't have talked to them about his special need and gotten such amazing responses.

We have been blessed with a supportive family. They don't understand it but everyone does what they can and more importantly there is no lack of love from anyone in his life. I have found a part of my husband that I never knew. He is amazing! Often the stress of children with special needs can divide parents. It provides us strength and pride. We are good parents. We bring different things to our children's lives and respect that in each other.

Everyone in Nicholas' life seems to work toward his success. Twenty three (23) little third grades and several amazing teachers cheer him on each day in school. He is now in a typical classroom most of the day. They provide him with kindness and support. He also helps them learn about tolerance and compassion and on some level we help them to learn that each child has needs that are just theirs.

Don't let me mislead you; it is sometimes exhausting and challenging. IT IS NOT FUN to watch him roll around screaming on the ground at the airport with everyone staring and wondering why you can't control your child. My life is better now because I see most of that as their problem, not mine. I also know they do not understand that he is totally overwhelmed and can barely stand to be in his own skin. The noise and lights and waiting are all so difficult for him but even in these situations you come across kind strangers and it helps you remember the good in people.

Five years ago, my husband and I stood outside of Nicholas' bedroom door after putting him to bed. We looked at each other and said "Do you think he'll ever be able to say I LOVE YOU? And if he can say it, will he know what it means?" He at the time had really limited comprehension and speech about that of a 2 year old. What a difference each year makes. Nicholas now understands almost everything we say. He still has anxiety and some sensory issues but they are improving. He says, "I love you" and knows exactly what it means. He hugs and kisses us each day and we occasionally get a glimpse of his big beautiful dark eyes. Eye contact is still hard. He reads books and roller blades and is excited to see his friends. He will also tell our friends "it is time for you to go home now" when he has had enough. They take it with a smile and now know that's Nicholas.

I want Nicholas to know how special he is but I would also like other people to know. When he was diagnosed and I kept reading books about how very hopeless it was I would cry for hours. The books said he would probably never talk or show emotion and for the first 3 years they were right, he did almost nothing but cry and vomit (this was his response to sensory overload). Now, I believe they were wrong. He is smart, kind, and is developing a great sense of humor, although he is still very literal. He will never be typical, but who is?

Spring has Sprung!

We are sharing a special springtime treat. These birds' nests are great to make and decorate with kids of any age. Please remember the ingredients will be hot, work closely and safely with your children.

Birds Nest Cookies

1-12 oz. package of butterscotch chips (or semi-sweet chocolate chips)

1/3 cup peanut butter

1-6 oz. bag of crunchy Chinese noodles

Melt chips and peanut butter together in a double boiler. When completely melted, gently mix in crunchy noodles. Spoon mixture onto wax paper, forming a nest. When the cookies are hardened, decorate with Easter candies. We used Peeps, jellybeans, and foil eggs.



"Nothing you become will disappoint me; I have no preconception that I'd like to see you be or do. I have no desire to foresee you, only to discover you. You can't disappoint me"

— Mary Haskell

What's Next? – Welcome 2015

We have some great events coming up! **Ice Skating** at the Ice Den in mid-April and once again the amazing **Diamondbacks** have donated party suites for Mother's Day. The tickets are now available. This has been such a great event for our families. One mom said, "Your organization is wonderful, and that baseball game was life changing for our son! I am so excited to hear about the Dbacks, he still talks about it almost daily!" **CrackerJax** is full, we needed to reschedule due to rain so it is a makeup.

We are also looking into the Phoenix Mercury and some other ideas for the summer and of course in Fall, we will try again for Polar Express tickets and we have been in touch with the elves at the North Pole Experience. So lots more fun to come! We will also reschedule Yoga, we didn't have much many sign-up but I think that was due to Spring Break. I hope it wasn't because people were afraid to try something new. Remember it is us, we "get it". We adapt the event for you and your kids. Again, I will encourage you to try new things; Yoga is so great for everyone!

As always go to <http://kidswithautismcan.org/be-informed/events/> to sign up and join us.

Kids with Autism Can regularly updates their website. Please check back frequently for events and new information. Take time to dive into the stories and perhaps share some of yours.

Kids with Autism Can
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SUPER HERO & PRINCESS WALK

FOR AUTISM AWARENESS

THIS IS A FREE EVENT!

Dress in your favorite Super Hero or Princess Attire!

Aprox 1 mile Family Friendly Event!

WHEN? APRIL 19TH 2015 9AM

WHERE? RIPARIAN PRESERVE

2751 E GUADALUPE RD, GILBERT

If you wish to make a donation please donate to:

Kids with Autism Can

<http://kidswithautismcan.org>

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