



Cory's Story



67 children are diagnosed per day, with a new case being diagnosed every 20 minutes.

As autism specialist Paula Kluth writes, “If you know one child with autism, you know one child with autism.” Each child on the autism spectrum is unique and each has his or her own personality, often quirky and very good-humored, despite their many daily challenges. This is the story of one such child with a huge personality.

Cory’s difficult delivery and subsequent lung collapse were preludes to a lifetime of challenges for the boy and his adoptive parents Lucy and Eric. They brought Cory home when he was three days old. He is their only child.

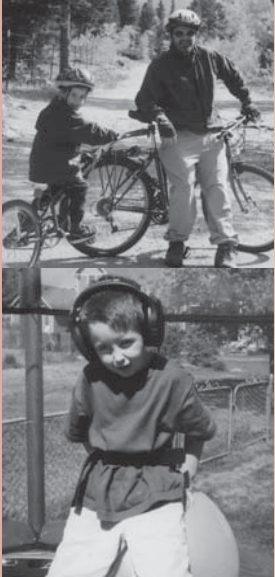
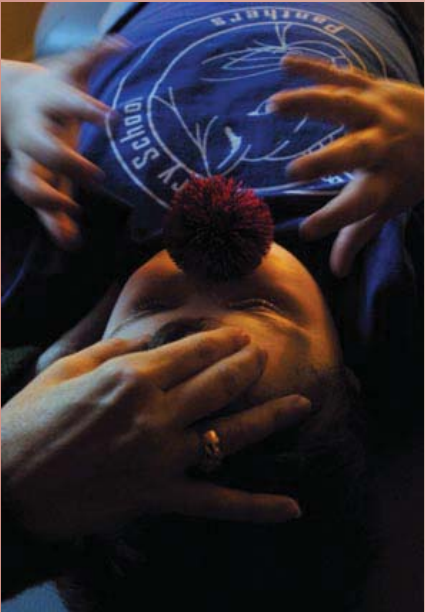
A mellow baby at four-months-old, Cory was cuddly, smiley, slept through the night and made good eye contact. Soon, though, he began to have increasing difficulty falling asleep and became very sensitive to loud noises and other sensory input. Cory hit his developmental milestones on time, but at 13 months was not walking or crawling and his speech was delayed. After an evaluation, Cory qualified for in-home occupational and speech therapy services.

When he was two, Cory’s occupational therapist diagnosed him with Sensory Integration Disorder and described his frequent aggressive outbursts towards his parents as sensory defensiveness. He had low muscle tone and poor balance that his parents struggled to help him to overcome.

1 in 94 boys is on the autism spectrum.



At three Cory was enrolled in a private preschool where he always played alone. He would run away or act aggressively toward other students when he became over-stimulated. Eventually, Lucy and Eric were asked to move Cory to another school.



After a year of mediation, they reconciled and relocated to Colorado. Lucy put off her career and focused full time on Cory. In their new town, they struggled with the loss of their support group, but Cory entered a public special education preschool. He still required considerable help eating, dressing, and bathing, but he seemed to thrive in his new school.

It wasn't until age five that Cory was officially diagnosed with autism. Cory's Individual Education Plan Team implemented evaluation recommendations. His daily activities became more structured and included social interaction with other children. He entered kindergarten with a classroom aide and was provided with a quiet place to calm down when needed.

Lucy and Eric attribute much of Cory's success in elementary school to his exceptional teachers and classmates, with whom he stayed with through fifth grade. When he received an award for the most progress made in elementary school, all of the fifth-grade students stood and cheered for Cory.

Lucy was in denial, wanting to believe that Cory would outgrow his delays. As Cory's challenges escalated, so did the strain on Lucy and Eric's marriage. Eric, overwhelmed by stress and exhaustion, moved out of state and filed for divorce.

Autism costs the nation over \$35 billion per year, a figure expected to significantly increase in the next decade.





Unfortunately for Cory, the environment in middle school was much more difficult to navigate than grade school had been. The challenges of changing classrooms, traversing hallways, and having trouble relating with teachers, caused him to struggle academically. The physical and emotional changes of adolescence added to the stress. His middle school had higher expectations for behavior and seemed less equipped to deal with Cory's individual needs. Some peers offered support, but Cory had become more aware of his own learning disabilities and grew very anxious.

By the middle of seventh grade, Cory's aggression, verbal threats and tendency to run away became so unmanageable the school asked that he be transferred. The next school was likewise unable to handle his behaviors and Cory was again transferred, this time to a private school specializing in educating children with autism.

Cory has begun ninth grade this fall at the specialized school where he finally feels welcome. His tuition is paid by the school district and the staff is able to handle his behaviors and provide academic support. He feels safe and has friends again.



Cory's parents hope that he will remain in the private school until he can develop the skills to transition into public high school. Like all parents, Lucy and Eric want their child to live as independently as possible. They hope he will have friends, graduate from high school, find a good job and fall in love.

Cory has shown remarkable resilience and humor through all his transitions. He has a self-awareness of his low impulse control, and frequently apologizes without prompting after an outburst.

Lucy and Eric have learned epic patience and compassion through their journey with autism. In turn, Cory exemplifies the depth and strength of the human spirit. To all who know him, Cory is "a bright thread in the tapestry of life."

The color photographs in Cory's story were shot in 2002 and 2008 by photographer Barton Glasser. Black and white photographs are from Cory's family albums.





*our goal is to change the future
for all who struggle with autism*



AUTISM SPEAKS™
It's time to listen.

Autism Speaks | 2 Park Avenue | 11th Floor | New York, NY 10016 | Phone: 212 252 8584

© 2008 Autism Speaks Inc. Autism Speaks and Autism Speaks It's Time To Listen & Design are trademarks owned by Autism Speaks Inc. All rights reserved.