


Autism Is Not My Enemy

By Kathy Grant





I am a 41-year-old woman who was officially diagnosed with autism in 2001, although I have known about my autism for 20 years, since I was a junior in college. I grew up in a conservative upper middle class Roman Catholic family at a time when there was little known or understood about autism.

Before the 21st century, I used to view autism as an enemy to be combated. I had no self-confidence and was angry at the world, especially my family. I felt I was being “cheated” because I was different and if I made a mistake it was always because of me having autism. Now I realize autism isn’t an enemy to be fought against. I have made peace with autism and because of that, have learned I am just as human as everyone else.

By making peace with autism I have learned that:

- if I make a mistake it may be due to just being human, not having autism.
- being different doesn’t mean less than. Many of us on the spectrum are lead to believe that we are not fully human because of our differences.
- I can ask for and receive help and still remain independent. It’s not an “either-or” equation. I used to be so fearful of losing my independence.

My family believed if I did something “wrong” it meant I couldn’t take care of myself. Therefore, I used to believe that too. Now I realize that is not true.

- I am capable of making good decisions, despite my autism.
- everyone has trials and tribulations whether or not a label is attached to them. We all have personal strengths and weaknesses that affect us.

In my opinion as a person with autism, our American culture fosters the notion that if you are not like everyone else, something is wrong with you, rather than attributing this just to the vast diversity of the human condition. As you grow up, the view you form of yourself comes from other people’s perspectives, especially those of your family. Oftentimes, people with autism are brought up within an environment characterized by relentless efforts to “change” them. This can create the message of “less than” unless parents and teachers are careful to balance it with equal attention to the strengths of each child. Unfortunately, that is often not the case and individuals carry this attitude toward themselves throughout their lives - that they aren’t acceptable to others.

My autism does not rule my life. Although it is with me always I won’t allow it to be a stone yoke around my neck. Like a pilot in a jet plane, I am in control of the plane called autism. This is the only life I have and if it comes with autism, it is part of the ride I’m on.

People with higher-functioning autism and Aspergers have a choice in their attitudes toward their autism. You can be bitter about it or embrace it. You can find ways to make it work or let your life crash and burn because

of it. I choose to embrace it and steer my life towards brighter horizons.

I found that by embracing autism, I discovered I have gifts I can share with others – and that some of the gifts are because of my autism. Most people don’t remember situations or events in vivid details like I do. I have a deep passion for things I like and as a result, lots of interesting information to share. I have over 200 flags I can recognize and have knowledge about. Another of my passions is Battlestar Galactica. I know every episode from both the new and old versions. I can recognize by sight over ten different foreign languages, even those that don’t use a roman alphabet.

As I get older I am more comfortable with myself, autism and all. And I am glad that I am more comfortable with myself. I have the energy to truly live life to the fullest. I now do things I enjoy with more gusto and can help people and feel good about it. I can stop and smell the roses and even exalt my uniqueness, rather than hide it. I realize I am the person God made me to be.

I am the only me I got...and now I like that me so much! 🇺🇸

Kathy Grant lives and works in Denver as a respite provider with a young adult with autism. She writes and speaks on autism topics, is on the Board of the Autism Society of Colorado and is on the State Rehabilitation Advisory Council, a Governor appointed position of three years. Send comments to Kathy at kgrant5709@aol.com.



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