

SPRING 2006
VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2
\$6.00 US



The **AUTISM** magazine
TAP INTO IT.
perspective

“A Gifted Autistic!”

A Candid Interview with **Johnny Seitz**
How He Helped American Icon **Dick Clark**



Living from
the Heart

FLOORTIME:
What It Is and What It Isn't

Wanted:
Parent for Autistic Child

PLACING OUR
CHILD

Growing Up Aspie



Cheryl and
Zariah
Ocampo

A Different

By Cheryl Ocampo

As a young single mother, raising children on my own has been very challenging. However, raising a child with special needs has even been more challenging.



Zariah Ocampo

Zariah is the youngest of my three children and she is one of the many children in America who lives with autism. At first glance, Zariah seems to be like any three-and-a-half-year-old. She loves Elmo and Dora. She loves to listen to music and attempts to dance. She loves to play the piano, or at least she tries. However, because of her autism, Zariah has limited speech, and she is developmentally delayed.

Before Zariah was born, I was very dedicated to my fast-paced career of telecommunications. The long, treacherous hours of work kept me away most of the time from my other children. However, I would manage to compensate for missed time on the weekends. The wages earned from my occupation reaped many benefits and I was able to explain to them the circumstances that mommy had to work so they could have nice toys like "Yu-Gi-oh" or "Pokeman."

When Zariah was born in 2002, her pediatrician prescribed her to begin early intervention services at 8 months old. I wasn't really too sure about the doctor's orders and the doctor basically explained to me that Zariah was a little behind in reaching her first year's milestones. Towards Zariah's second birthday, I enrolled her into preschool for the first time. I felt the environment of being

with children her own age may motivate her to communicate and interact with other children better. Zariah continued to receive her early intervention services in the preschool and at home. However, I began to notice that she was very isolated among her peers and something "just didn't seem right." One of my biggest concerns was that Zariah still

I began to notice that she was very isolated among her peers and something "just didn't seem right."

did not speak and when she did, it seemed like she was babbling. When I expressed my concerns to family members, many would say that children developed differently and there were many children her age that didn't speak yet. I brushed off my concern, thinking to myself that maybe I was just paranoid. When I expressed it to the therapists, they explained to me that progress took time.

Right before Zariah's third birthday, her pediatrician referred her to see a neurologist and it was then that I heard the words from the doctor's mouth that forever has changed my life: "Your daughter has autism." Like any parent who has heard these words, it was both the darkest and brightest day of

Perspective



Zariah and her brothers

my life. I asked all of the questions that I could possibly come up with at that moment. Of course, one of them was, "Is there a cure?" When I was advised that there wasn't, I couldn't help but feel such despair.

Overwhelmed by so many emotions, I found myself wondering, "What could I have possibly done wrong as a mother for this to

"What could I have possibly done wrong as a mother for this to happen to my child?"

happen to my child?" From that day on, I did my research, joined a support group, bought books that I could get my hands on concerning autism, and took a step forward to get the help my daughter needed.

Then there was the choice I had to make between my career and the needs of my child. As Zariah transitioned from Early Intervention into a Center Based Special Needs Preschool, I made the choice to stay home with my daughter in order to establish her routine with her Early Intervention therapies. It was a difficult choice as I took a huge pay cut, but to be honest, it was the best choice that I could have ever made for my daughter and my other children. Now

that my daughter is enrolled into preschool, I work part-time when she is in school. I also had to move back with family for support. However, when it seemed that I may have taken a step backward, I realized that I was taking a step forward in faith.

At one point, I was out of the home for 10-11 hours of the day, paying a nanny to care for my child when I wasn't available. The time away from her was unbearable. All my time was consumed with work and when I did have time available, I was too tired. I wasn't able to attend the monthly parenting workshops presented by her school on special needs, and I was missing out on special events in school because I couldn't take the time off on a consistent basis. It was then that I realized that as Zariah's mother, I needed to make the best decision for her. With my decision to work part-time and with the benefits that Zariah is entitled to that supplements my income, I am there to put her on the school bus in the morning and there to receive her off the bus in the afternoon. This is her routine everyday.

Zariah teaches me everyday what is most important. When I see her match a puzzle piece to its exact location, I know that she is progressing. When I hear her spontaneously identify something such as "bed" and that is exactly what it is, it is the most

glorious feeling in the world. When I see that Zariah is attempting to put on her own coat or attempting to try and feed herself and even if she cannot do it, she demonstrates a grand enthusiasm of accomplishment, and it brings tears to my eyes.

Zariah has taught me that time is priceless and each day, each moment, each minute

Zariah has taught me that time is priceless and each day, each moment, each minute is priceless.

is priceless. Zariah, to me, is the bravest person I know because she works hard at everything she does everyday that some people may take for granted, and that is just being human. Zariah has truly shown me what it is like to have a different perspective. **TAP**

Cheryl Ocampo lives in Queens, NY with her daughter, Zariah, and Cheryl's parents. She also has two older children who live out of the home. She works part-time in Office Administration and Support, and she also is a freelance writer. Cheryl also attends college online majoring in Business Administration and Management.