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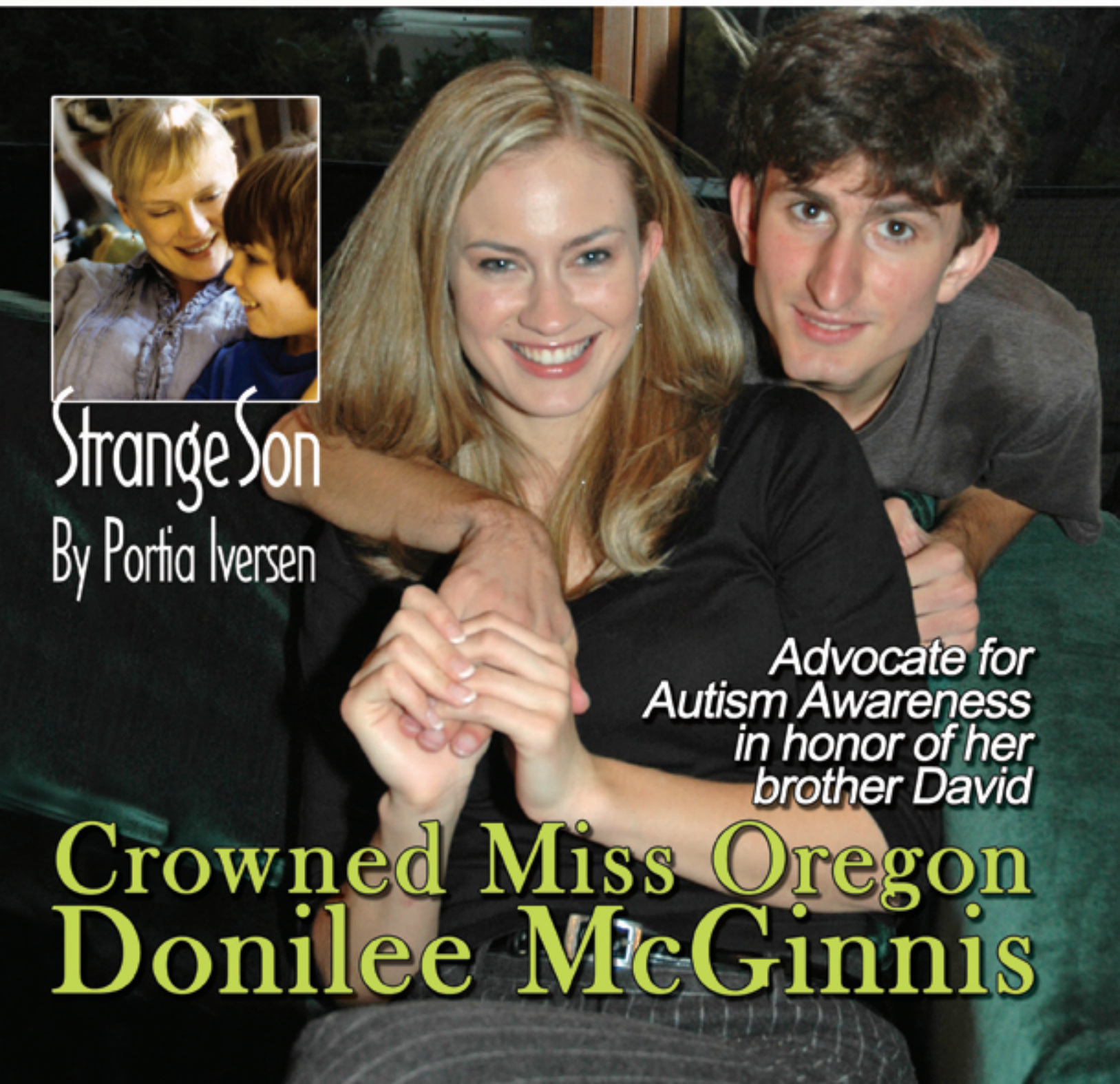
m a g a z i n e
TAP INTO IT.
The
AUTISM
perspective



Strange Son
By Portia Iversen

*Advocate for
Autism Awareness
in honor of her
brother David*

**Crowned Miss Oregon
Donilee McGinnis**



My FRIEND AUTISM

By Cheryl Ocampo

Like any new friendship, you have to allow time to pass in order to get to know one another.

Any good relationship doesn't happen overnight.

Any good relationship takes compromise.

I want you to meet my friend, Autism.

I've known Autism for a little over a year now, but we had been acquainted for quite some time before we actually became best friends. We've become so close that she now lives with me! We are almost like family. At first I wasn't too happy with the idea of her living with me because I was used to how my life was before her. However, after a while I realized that she is probably the best thing that has ever happened to me. Believe me it hasn't been an easy road. I do everything for her: I prepare her food and help her eat it; I help bathe her and help her get dressed afterwards; I wash her up in the morning before

school, and help her brush her teeth; I help her with everything that she is supposed to already be doing for herself at her age, because she is not capable of doing it on her own just yet.

In the beginning, I truly just wanted to kick Autism out of my home and kick her to the curb! I wanted my life back to the way it was because she would do some things that were so unknown to me. For example, sometimes we would be having a good day and then, out of nowhere, she would get frustrated and throw a tantrum! I couldn't understand it. I thought everyone enjoyed going to the indoor amusement parks and arcades.

Zariah and Cheryl

Instead, my friend Autism fussed and fought with me even before we entered the establishment. I was so hurt. It also really, really scared me. I thought maybe she had gotten hurt in some way that I wasn't aware of. But after checking her and not seeing anything visible to the eye, I thought she just didn't like the place. In the beginning, I felt that she was doing it on purpose to upset me. Now I realize that I just didn't understand. You see Autism is different. She doesn't really speak, so most of the time there is a communication barrier. Our solution is to use a picture exchange system (PECS). Overall, Autism loves pictures, so we use them for almost any and everything to help us communicate with each other. I've discovered that there are different kinds of people in life, including my friend Autism. That is just how the world is. Everyone has their own individuality.

On most days, we get along pretty well. We do things that all friends do: We play games, play with toys, go to the park, sing songs, listen to music, play on the computer, and read books. However, there are certain things we can't really do like everyone else, such as having to wait in long lines (Autism cannot tolerate the long wait), and being in loud and chaotic environments (Autism gets scared very easily). Going to the movies is sometimes a difficult task because I'm not sure how Autism is going to react. She might like it and watch the whole movie, or she may get scared senseless from the Dolby stereo surround-sound and squeal and tense up. There really is no way to tell beforehand, so sometimes I just take my chances. If my friend Autism doesn't feel up to the movie on that particular day, then we skip

it. Sometimes, we usually just wait for the movie to come out on DVD.

I thought everyone enjoyed going to the indoor amusement parks and arcades. Instead, my friend Autism fussed and fought with me even before we entered the establishment. I was so hurt.



I felt sad for Autism. I could tell that she didn't like it when the other people moved away from her. However, no emotion appeared on her face.

She is really a great person once you get to know her. She gets sad sometimes when people don't understand her. When she gets

excited or happy, she displays it by flapping her arms, squealing, and jumping up and down. She did that once at the playground around other people her age and they all ran away. I felt sad for Autism. I could tell that she didn't like it when the other people moved away from her. However, no emotion appeared on her face. (Autism sometimes has a difficult time understanding emotions.) I let her know that flapping her arms when she's happy is like people yelling and clapping their hands at a ball game when their team is winning. Different people express their emotions in different ways. She didn't respond of course, but I was hoping that she could understand me.

On the other hand, my friend Autism appreciates the tranquility of a nice bath or a soft, warm blanket. She gleefully reaches and screeches in delight for a light-up-stick toy, as opposed to the most expensive baby doll that does almost everything a human baby does. (I think the dolls actually scare her more than delight her!) She yearns for an afternoon walk on a nice, cool sunny day and sticks her tongue out to taste the wind. She loves playing in her kiddie pool in the summertime as opposed to going to the water park. She can listen to music all day long, even if it's the same tune over and over again. She dances around with her head held up high and her arms swaying in the air, like she doesn't have a trouble in the world. Her frowns never stay and her smiles last ten times longer. When she falls and scrapes her knee or bumps her head, she cries for a little bit, then she keeps going like nothing ever happened. I've realized Autism doesn't know any material value. I've realized that my friend Autism is resilient. I've



Zariah at her 4th birthday party in the classroom

realized that she enjoys the simpler things that most of us have taken for granted, such as a warm, sunny day or even a rainy day for that matter.

Autism is my best friend. She is family. I have learned to embrace her instead of resist her. She has taught me things that I never would have known would be so valu-

able in this lifetime. My friend Autism shows me that life is how you perceive it. Everything in life is not always black and white. Sometimes you have to look for the shades of gray. And, if you look hard enough, you will also see color.

You never realize the power of your voice until you meet someone with limited

speech. Autism has taught me that she has a whole lot to say if you would just take the time to listen with your soul and not just your ears. Autism has also taught me that seeing is not always through the eyes. If we look hard enough, many of the gifts that we search our whole lifetime for in pursuit of happiness stand in front of us each day of our lives. My friend Autism has taught me how to see a little bit more clearly. **TAP**

Cheryl Ocampo is a freelance writer who lives in Queens, NY with her family. She attends the University of Phoenix Online, majoring in Business Administration and Management, in hopes to one day open up her own early childhood and learning center. She is working towards publishing her first novel. She has three children: Joshua (13), Isaiah (9), and Zariah (4). Zariah lives with PDD NOS: Autism. You may visit Cheryl's webpage: www.myspace.com/pen_2_paper, or email her: co-campo76@aol.com for comments.



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