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An excerpt from the article...

Parenting Solo

Lessons from an Experienced Mom

By Karra Barber

Life Before

Before Thomas was diagnosed with an ASD as a toddler, my husband and I were living the fairytale life. Blissfully happy and blessed with a beautiful and healthy son, we couldn't imagine how our lives could be better as a family. After Thomas' diagnosis, it seemed our lives had been permanently shattered into a million pieces. Feeling paralyzed by the uncertainty of our child's future, we were absolutely overwhelmed with anxiety and worry. Compounding matters, we both dealt with this devastating loss (as we saw it) differently.

How did I cope? After allowing myself to sit briefly in a puddle of fear and sadness, I realized I had no other choice than to pick myself up, collect my thoughts and move into Plan B mode. Plan B mode for me was to dive in head first. It was sink or swim time and I was a swimmer. I needed information to begin the process of "un-shattering" our lives, so I spent hours upon hours combing through autism research studies and learning about various therapies that were successfully being used for children on the spectrum. Every ounce of my being was wrapped up in improving every aspect of Thomas' development, attending to his special needs, while at the time caring for his basic needs.

My days were long, focused entirely on Thomas, to the exclusion of my own needs, my husband's, and that of our relationship. Thomas' days were also long and rigorous. He spent numerous hours each week participating in intensive therapy programs I felt would help him progress. Would he ever speak? Would he learn to read or write? Would he attend a regular pre-school? I wasn't sure. But, I was certain that I would not rest until I'd exhausted every opportunity available.

Although both my husband and I were extremely devoted and loving parents to Thomas, we had vastly contrasting views on how best to "handle" Thomas' diagnosis and our new circumstances. For sure, life as we knew it had forever changed, along with our marriage, it seemed. We divorced when Thomas was five.

Life After: Newly Parenting Single

Divorce is painful, even when it's amicable. It was depressing to learn that I had become one of the 80% of parents who would raise a special needs child as a single parent. Could I do it? How would I manage? Raising a child on the spectrum as a single parent is not

only an emotional adjustment; it's a life-altering event. We single moms and dads have raw emotions to deal with, and feelings of blame, fear, worry, and depression are par for the course. Many of us are working parents, creating an entirely different set of additional challenges in juggling not just the regular responsibilities of work and home, but also the unexpected but critical responsibilities of a special needs child. Although Thomas had much improved and was making great strides in his ongoing programs by the time my husband and I divorced, I still labored under the heavy weight that I could somehow still be doing more for him.

My life had clearly taken a different direction, whether or not I "liked" it or wished it wasn't so. As with so many people who find themselves at this crossroads, at times I felt tired, weepy, and completely overwhelmed with my new and seemingly solo role. But I also knew that what I did, how I chose to view my situation, would profoundly impact my future and Thomas'. I refused to feel defeated. I kept reminding myself that I was a "swimmer" – a strong swimmer and that I could make it to the "other side." As difficult as it was at times, and as often as I found myself in unfamiliar and choppy waters at first, I chose to view my circumstances as unrealized opportunities for myself, Thomas and our future. That belief and determination in myself, and our futures, was literally the lifesaver we needed at that time. It saved us both from drowning.



The complete article is available in the July-August 2009 issue of the Autism Asperger's Digest. Purchase a single copy, or subscribe to the award-winning magazine today at www.autismdigest.com.

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