



Volume 17, No. 1 - Winter 2008

THE COMMUNICATOR

A Publication of the Autism National Committee



Oh, Canada!

By Gail Gillingham Wylie

This year's Autism National Committee Conference, *Autism: Living Life to the Fullest*, was held at the Chateau Nova Hotel in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, on the weekend of October 12 - 13, 2007, with approximately 150 people in attendance. We celebrated the lives of those on the autism spectrum through presentations using video, art, drama and mime, as well as the typical keynotes and panel presentations. A raffle of items celebrating Edmonton, Alberta and Canada plus all the regions where our board members live added funds to the registration fees and donations from supporters. This allowed us to "break even," which had been a concern considering the distance that many of our presenters traveled to be with us. The conference was declared to be one of the best AutCom conferences to date by most of the participants who attended.

Probably the biggest difference in this conference when compared to those of the past was the presence of cameras. The Board of Directors decided that we would film every session and have a DVD made. This allows our members who could not travel to Edmonton the chance to be part of the celebration in a small way. It also makes it possible



AutCom board member Kathy Grant is delighted to meet a real Royal Canadian Mountie

for those who attended to view the breakout sessions they did not get to see. This DVD should be available through our Bookstore by 2008. Watch for an update on our website - www.autcom.org - or in

(Continued on next page)

In This Issue:

Page 1: Oh, Canada

Page 2: The Last Word

Page 5: My First AutCom Conference as President; President's Column

Page 6: Next Conference

Page 7: The Mismeasure of Autism; Conference Contributors

Page 8: New Board Members

Page 10: Does God Make Garbage?

Page 11: Membership Form & Principles of the Autism National Committee

Website: www.autcom.org

(Oh, Canada! continued)

The Communicator. Since the presentations will be available in this format, we will not be summarizing them here in the depth that we have in the past.

These were not the only cameras present. A filmmaker from New York, Todd Dresner, approached us in September for permission to come to the conference to film interviews with those on the spectrum for his film to be called *Loving Lampposts*.



Amanda Baggs

We had no sooner agreed to that than we received notification that another film crew was also planning to be present: this one from Dr. Sanjay Gupta's production team for CNN. This team came because of one of our speakers, Amanda Baggs, who described their presence this way: *I wanted to mention, just so everyone knew, that CNN had wanted to come back and do a one hour special entirely about my life and I said "no" to that. I said they could include me but that they had to include other people because there are so many of us and we are so different. We all have a voice, so people need to hear more than just one person represented as the voices of autistic people because there are so many of us and we don't all agree but we all need to be heard.*

A final set of cameras filmed the Autism Society of Edmonton and Area Drama Group presentation of "The Room," which took place after the desert

reception on Friday night. This will be part of another film being made about that drama group.

Much effort was given to making the conference as sensory-safe as possible. We chose a smaller hotel, which meant we did not have to deal with other gatherings such as weddings, a relief to many. A major highlight was the gluten and casein free food provided for all meals which meant that those who require this type of diet could eat freely. The hotel staff made every effort to accommodate us, even providing a short class about autism to all staff on what to expect before we arrived. We thank them for this consideration.

This conference lasted 1 ½ days, longer than any in the past, based on requests from those who were traveling long distances to take part. This allowed one extra keynote and one extra set of breakout sessions. Breakout sessions were designed to meet the needs of all ages—adults, teens, school aged and preschool—although some topics addressed apply to everyone.

Keynote speakers were Sharisa Kochmeister, Estee Wolfond and Gail Gillingham Wylie. A synopsis of the presentations is included in this issue of The Communicator.

The Last Word

At every AutCom conference we always give the "last word" to those on the spectrum who want to comment on the conference itself and on where we should go in the future. Following are the comments from this year:

Kathy Grant

These are my parting words. I was just thinking that in 1905 W.E.B. Dubois said that color lines was going to be the thing of the century. Well, in the 21st century it is disability that is going to be the civil rights movement. You are going to see in the future that the Nobel peace prize is going to be awarded for things having to do with disability rights. Not environment. Not Darfur. Not peace in the Middle East, but disability rights. This is a 21st century thing. We are a part of a major revolution that is going to be heard throughout the world.

Johnny Seitz

I don't have anything to say. I just want to be up here with "my people."

Anne Carpenter

What I have to say is that this was an awesome conference. It really presented a very positive view or vision of autism, a new, new, new vision of autism. I was hoping to do that with the interview I had with CNN crew today. I saw it rippling through the air as I went to the presentations and the panels with the married couples and to hear about movement and regulation differences. Let's hear it for synchronicity, everybody. And for the earlier panel about jobs, the interesting thing Gail did about the Scio and the wonderful presentation by Estee Wolfond. This is the positive view of autism. This is what we need to do in the 21st century. Long live Autism. Long live the 21st century and let's enjoy.

Barbara Moran

The media could do a lot to simply put autistic people on television and hear about what life is like from our point of view. They would realize that they have more in common with us than there are differences. We may look different on the outside but we are people like everybody else. It would be good if we could get the kind of treatment we need to help us feel better and do everything we wish we could do. In other words, the treatment would be geared for our benefit, not to "clean us up." Basically, autistic people are often treated as if they are very bad boys and girls and we want to punish it out of them. Autistic people do have some things that cause them a lot of discomfort where they need relief, and they need help to be all they can be, and they are the only ones who know what that is. They need treatments that are aimed at helping the person get the life they want. Other people tried to decide what was best for me and they totally screwed up. When I finally got to decide what was best for me...I mean, I was wishing for help and longing for help and looking for it all my life. When I found what I wanted and I was able to get the kind of help that really helped, I became a better person. Trying to coerce me into acting like I couldn't act would be like trying to tell a dog he had to be a cat. I am simply going to say that if my brain is wired differently, you gotta fix

the inside to have it work on the outside. Make my body do what I want it to do, rather than what it wants to do. Anyway, autism has to do with sensory processing, and motor planning and anxiety and there are all kinds of things that autistic people want. They want to function better. They want to get a life. They want to be able to cope with life and have friends just like everybody else. But autism treatment is pretty much aimed at behavior and ignores everything else. If they put the other things first, the behavior would take care of itself. I want to be a star.

Arak Thaylann

Communication and theory of mind, I believe, are a two-way street. If you want to communicate with me or if you want me to communicate with you, you have to learn how I think, you have to learn how I feel and you have to accept that, respect it, understand it. I believe that conferences like this give us the chance to have our voice. A lot of people say that autistics don't talk, they're not telling us what we need. Conferences like this give us the chance to say what we have to say. We're here. We're talking. Listen to us.

Michael Hover

I think I need to tell the people who presented that they had good ideas. I liked the presentation on movement the best. I liked the way you talked about neurological basis of motor activities and how they help people make transitions and cope with life. I thank the people who came. I had fun meeting new people and learning about their lives. I think the AutCom conference is the best around. The thing I need to do when I get home is keep telling people about fc. I need to help more people have a voice. The importance of communication is totally including people in life. The thing I need to do in my own life is to be the person I have the potential to be. I had a heart attack and had to be on the heart pump and respirator for a few days. I have another chance at life. I need to get to my family and friends to thank you for helping me get through the scary times. I used fc as soon as I woke up to tell doctors what I needed. I need to tell Gail she did a great job. That's all for now.

(Continued on next page)

("Last Word" continued)

Amanda Baggs

I liked most of the presentations I went to. I think I liked the movement one the best as other people have said. I did not so much like strange science. I really enjoyed the movement one because that's exactly what I've been dealing with my whole life, but especially later on and a lot of that was very much what I experienced—the variability and the freezing and everything like that. It was misdiagnosed for many years while seen as evidence of other things that it was not. It is really important that people get the word out about that. I also liked Estee's talk where she talked about making things more positive. I did not as much like watching my movie as it made me want to jump under the table.

Kassianne Sibley

I really liked Estee's talk. I didn't get to go to the movement one that I really wanted to go to, because I'm not the stereotypical "thinking in pictures" autistic but I'm stereotypical "things with movement" autistic that no one knows about, but I was talking at the same time which was also fun. And it was nice to only hear a little science, not a lot which you get at most conferences. It was weird watching Amanda's video so huge as I have a laptop. It is really great to hear what autistic people can do instead of what we can't do and not a word about functioning level or any of that garbage. So this is probably the most positive conference I have been to even if I did fall on my head and dive under a table.

Flo Mitchell

I came to this conference because I have been on the SCIO with Gail. I have had sensory issues all my life, but other people have not understood them. A few months ago a neighbor dropped off Gail's book, *Autism Handle with Care*, and as I was reading the page about visual—well, exactly the way I am fits into a book, and I am no longer in a box with no name on it because there is someone who understands how I am. I just cried when I heard the poetry and another time when I heard DJ tell her story. I just feel so good to be among people who have issues a bit like I do. We are each unique, but it just feels good to be part of this conference and it has changed my life. Thank you, Gail.

Phil Schwarz

I want to thank everybody for coming. I think it is very powerful when we get together like this, those of us on the spectrum and our allies. I heard somebody say something about "here are my people." When I spoke to Todd earlier, one of the questions he asked was, "What do people all across this wide spectrum have in common?" I answered that most of us, if not all of us, have some kind of sensory issues one way or another. But I think far more important is the end points or the most distant points in the cloud. Amanda corrects me that it is a multidimensional cloud, not just a line segment, that represents autism. Those most distant points have other points between them. Look at the line of people sitting here in chairs at the front of the room as an example. I think that the line is, as we say in Massachusetts, a busy, busy street—thickly settled. I think that it is not continuous. There is not an infinity of autistic people, but it is well populated. Each point is next to the next point and that's the common link. I think it is really important for us to maintain those common links and community across the entire cloud and across the allies of folks of all parts of that cloud. I think that's what we are doing. That's part of what AutCom is all about. So thanks everybody for coming.

And finally, from our new president,

Sharisa Joy Kochmeister

Next year we party hearty in Ann Arbor. I declare 2008 the year of fun. Get ready and get real and get your butts and behinds in gear. Learn acceptance of yourself and others if you expect to be accepted and empowered.

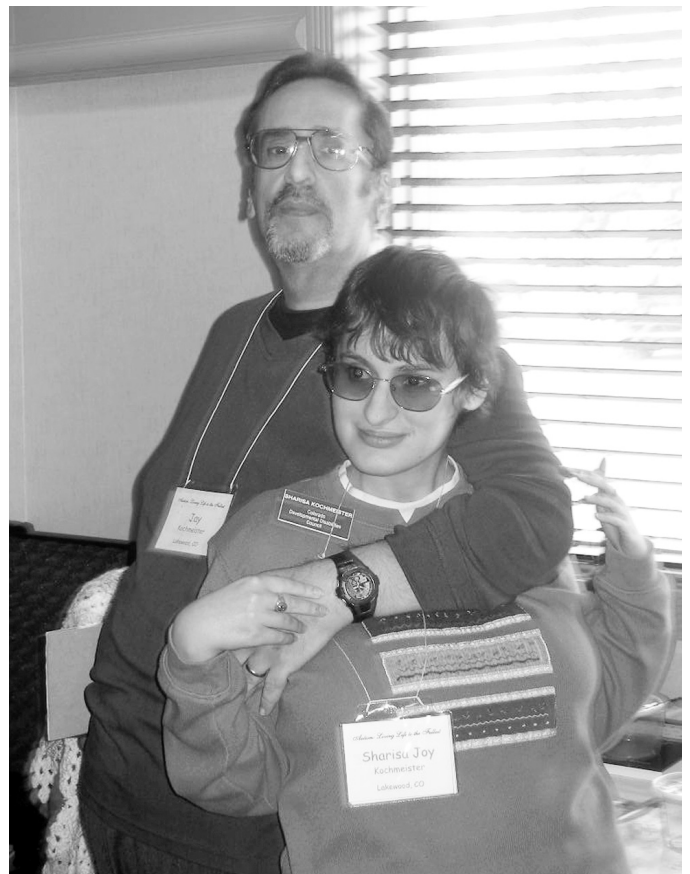
MY FIRST AUTCOM CONFERENCE AS PRESIDENT

by Sharisa Joy Kochmeister

Strangely enough, especially for those of you who already know me and my legendary confidence, I must admit some trepidation at being elected President of Autcom just before I was scheduled to do my keynote presentation, *My Surreal Life and the Feelings within My Autism*.

I have never been nervous about a presentation or a conference, but this was my first PowerPoint presentation ever, there were two crews videotaping, a great deal of trust had just been placed in my shaky cerebral-palsied hands, and I not only wanted to impress the new friends I was about to make and the video people, but I wanted to impress the board members who had just placed their faith in my leadership ability. Although it's a bit of a blur now, my father did an exceptional job of presenting my words and thoughts, the reaction was at once overwhelming and validating, and the reaction since has made me more confident of my competence.

This was a good and productive conference despite some issues that arose. Next year's conference should include more opportunities for socializing, fun and a quiet place to escape/relax if needed. I am serious in declaring 2008 "The Year of Fun." Thank you all for electing me to this wonderful position and thanks to Gail for her efforts towards making this year's conference as successful as it was. I want to sincerely thank Gail and the Conference



Sharisa Joy Kochmeister with her father, Jay Committee for doing such a great job, the staff at the hotel for being so kind and understanding, and the AutCom board, membership, conference attendees and videographers for making us all feel important and not judged.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: THE YEAR AHEAD

by Sharisa Joy Kochmeister

After being President of Autcom for a month-and-a-half, having run one phone meeting, and having said my two cents worth to "Paging Dr. Gupta" (see below), I have many thoughts, ideas, emotions and challenges for myself and Autcom to meet. I want to help grow this organization and have it do its thing in a POSITIVE, PROACTIVE fashion. I want to encourage open and lively dialogue that doesn't foster negativity and/or discrimination. I want to try to find a unified definition of autism so that those who have said to me that they feel excluded

will feel INcluded. I would like to see us as an organization and as individuals increase our visibility, increase our approachability, develop a Writers and Speakers Bureau, make ourselves open to the media and to other organizations that share our desire for acceptance. As I said in my keynote, one has to accept oneself if one truly desires the acceptance of others. There is far more strength in numbers and a cohesively unified approach than there will

(Continued on next page)

(President's Column continued)

ever be in isolationism. Let's open this dialogue NOW and make this organization and next year's conference even more accessible, more inclusive of ALL people on the spectrum and ALL OTHERS with interest/involvement with ASD, as well as everyone who wants to learn/know more about it. We are, after all, the BEST teachers! I definitely want to see LESS focus on deficits and needs and MORE focus on gifts and giving back! I want to deliver both a keynote and a workshop next year and invite anyone interested to join me! All comments, ideas, discussion, and suggestions are both necessary and welcome!

Here is my response to the November 19th CNN report on Anderson Cooper's program as posted in its entirety on the webpage, "Paging Dr. Gupta":

"I found your report rather interesting & can't wait to see more about my "world" & the people who "inhabit" it. Since I began to communicate via FC at age 13 and advanced to independent typing at age 16, I have broken through & destroyed many walls & barriers. As a consultant to several autism organizations, a speaker and presenter at various conferences, a genius formerly known as retarded, an honors and award-winning college graduate, a so-called role model and newly elected president of Autcom - at the conference you showed on tonight's program, I have overcome labels, stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination and maltreatment for myself and others with disabilities in MANY walks of life. My journey has been long and strenuous, but I am not now nor have I ever been a quitter. I passed double-blind tests years ago for the right to be heard in court and for a full education... and I bristle at anyone still having the incredibly narrow-minded temerity to call FC a hoax, a fad, or even controversial - the controversy is a product of unwillingness to assume competence rather than incompetence and an equally paralyzing unwillingness for some folks to unlearn what they think they know and open their minds to change. I am here to make people think, and I refuse to stop doing so - challenge FC if you wish - even though much of that challenge is foolish at best - but do NOT challenge me, my reality, my accomplishments or those of

countless others whose "Prisons of Silence" were flung open by typing to communicate what we need to communicate, even though it may upset others and rock your worlds!

Proudly Free, Sharisa Joy Kochmeister

I hope to continue to represent myself, this organization and people with and without autism and other so-called "dis-abilities" as effectively and completely as one person possibly can and hope you all will join me in this continuing journey into a future without labels that disable rather than enable.

Contact Sharisa if you wish at
sharisajoyshares@comcast.net

Plan Now for our Next Conference

October 17 & 18, 2008

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Four Points Sheraton

Phone: 800 325-3535

Website: fourpointsannarbor.com

Reserve your room early. It will help us get more rooms placed on reserve.

This conference will last two full days, as requested by AutCom members, with a dinner in the evening of the first day. We hope the first day's presentation by Anne Donnellan, Paula Kluth, Martha Leary and David Hill will draw many local teachers, community mental health staff and parents in addition to conference attendees from around the U.S. and Canada. Plans for the second day are under development.

The Mismeasure of Autism

by Estee Klar-Wolfond

Imagine what the world would look like if Autism was valued, not greeted with "arms-length" fascination or perceived as weird genius; if Autism was viewed as natural; if Autism was okay; if Autism was understood in terms of a different way of being, knowing, learning and behaving; if Autistic behaviors were viewed as a different way of communicating rather than disruptive and problematic.

What if we could develop support for anxiety and physical issues that took into account external issues and seeking to modify the environment rather than the behavior; putting non-autistics in sensitivity training where autistic people could do the teaching; working on socialization issues through understanding versus becoming a normal socializer; providing training in augmentive communication with AAC/IT; seeing inclusion as a win-win situation for both non-disabled and disabled citizens?

What if we defined the "mosaic of support and education" for autistic people with the premise that everyone progresses from their own starting point? Perhaps a mission for the way we educate could derive from this. Teaching autistic children rather than wasting their time may be the difference between

teaching them to be normal as the sole goal versus teaching them about the world and enabling them, with the appropriate tools, to communicate their feelings about it. We must value their responses while building bridges to communicate and navigate their work.

What if we changed the marketing model so that instead of eliciting pity we focused on gathering respect? To construct a new marketing model for autism charities, what if we let autistic people speak and ensure that there are more autistic people running our autism society boards and that there are at least an equal number of autistic people at all our conferences as there are non-autistic ones?

What if we regarded their lives with honor and respect by listening to their experiences in order to learn and become sensitive to their needs? What if we approached them carefully and learned from them how to educate and support them instead of imposing what we think they need and how we think they should be taught?

What if we lived as if we truly believed that autistic people are different AND equal?

Conference Contributions of Cash and/or Raffle Items

Autism Society of Edmonton and Area
The Institute of Disability,
University of New Hampshire
Paula Kluth
Deb St. Jean
The Mahaffey Family
The Greenwood Family
Jackie Zacharias
Lisa McDonald and Elvin Collins
Judy C. Bailey
Anne Bakeman
Char Brandl
Sandi and Doug McClennen
Mary Nazzaro
Margo Williams
Fleur Wiorkowski
Diane McNaughton
Janna Hoskin

Gail Gillingham Wylie
Clayton Wylie
Lisa Lieberman
Phil Schwarz
Barbara Cutler
Pascal Chevedi-Cheng
Donna Downing
Michael Hoover
Lyn Parker
David Hill
Mildred's Antiques
Mr. Frame
Yvette Prefontaine

Thanks also to the volunteers from Edmonton who donated their time and effort to the conference in a variety of ways:

Greg Morrison
Faye Morrison
Paddy Carson
Clayton Wylie
Scott Biggs
Ebony Wylie
Heidi Diamond
Lynne Gillingham
Joshua Gillingham
Tracy Mahaffey
Rose Prefontaine
Dick Sobsey
Lyn Parker

Welcome New Board Members!



Arak Thaylann



Estee Klar-Wolfond



Linda Rammler

The Fall of 2007 saw one of the biggest changes in the AutCom board with the loss of five members: Lisa Lieberman, Marna Arnes, Jeff Strully, Wade Hitzing, and Anne Bakeman. We thank them for all of the energy and dedication they have shared with us throughout the years. AutCom wouldn't be where it is today without their efforts.

We elected a new slate of officers: President Sharisa Joy Kochmeister, Vice President Sandi McClennen, Secretary Pascal Cheng, and Past President Anne Carpenter. Wade Hitzing has agreed to continue to fill the role of treasurer until a new one is named and transfer of funds is arranged. The officers' willingness to accept new responsibilities is greatly appreciated.

Five new individuals have stepped up to accept positions on the Board of Directors.

William Stillman, a writer from Pennsylvania with Asperger syndrome, is the author of the ground breaking book, *Autism and the God Connection*, as well as other books and articles, and he consults with several government and community organizations nationwide. Bill is interested in serving on the AutCom Board in order to join our collective endeavors to educate others about autism while concurrently shattering demeaning myths and stereotypes. His areas of special interest are cultivating self-advocacy skills, mental health issues, alternatives to speech, and sensory sensitivities. If there is a true autism "epidemic," it is the myriad teens and adults on the spectrum who are depressed and suicidal.

Bill wishes to focus on educating parents

and caregivers about self-advocacy rather than dependency and self-deprecation. It is urgent that AutCom establish a greater presence in the autism community as the antidote to the parents, professionals and caregivers who presume to speak on behalf of self-advocates. There is too much talk in recent times of cures, segregation and restrictive procedures. In particular, it is vital that the voices of those living with autism influence a media that insists on pathologizing autism as a tragic disorder rather than promoting acceptance and celebration of unique gifts and talents.

Arak Thaylann was born in Calgary, Alberta, Canada in 1975. At the age of two she was diagnosed with "high functioning" autism and underwent ABA therapy in an institutional setting for six months (which she believes did some damage). She was then raised at home as a normal child, graduated high school with honors, worked from the age of 13 and moved out on her own when she was 19. She is now attending university and working towards a degree in psychology in Calgary. **Arak** was motivated to join AutCom because she is on a personal mission to advocate for better understanding of autism from autistics' point of view as well as respect for the autistic person as a human being. It is difficult for many autistics to be able to speak their minds in a world where autism is portrayed as a tragedy and an epidemic.

Arak notices that too many "treatments" completely miss the mark because researchers are working based only on what they see (behaviors), not

on what the core issues really are (sensory issues, etc.). She wants autistic people to have a future in which therapies are actually beneficial and positive.

AutCom shares her vision of creating awareness that autistic people have a voice and these voices should be heard and respected. AutCom is one of the few societies that serves as a true advocate for autistic rights and benefit.

Attitudes need to change. For that to happen, people need to hear the real voices of autism. Without societies like AutCom working for our benefit, how will our voice be heard?

Estee Klar-Wolfond is the founder/Executive Director of The Autism Acceptance Project (TAAP) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and the mother of a young autistic son, Adam. Through TAAP Estee promotes acceptance of autism rather than prevention. She believes we must view autism as a way of being and focus on ability in order to support, educate and accommodate autistic people in society. As a parent, she wants to empower others by presenting new views and debates from all sides in order that we all make informed choices regarding how we regard and educate autistic people. She sees AutCom as allied to TAAP in these goals and complementary to TAAP in the sectors of the autism community it reaches. She aims to build an aggregate of supporters so that we can show how many people support autistic people as they are, and so that we can identify and provide the kinds of help autistics need in order to contribute to society as "autistic people." She sees AutCom as a vital part of that aggregate.

Jim Butler is an acupuncturist who lives in Virginia, married with one child, Ben, an 8-year-old who is nonspeaking and has autism and epilepsy. As a child, Jim had some signs of autism and as an adult has been diagnosed with a related "soft" condition (mild ADHD). Ben communicates by using facilitated communication (FC), for which Jim advocates whenever he can.

Jim is especially interested in helping to build bridges between people with autism and the scientific community, particularly with regard to FC. He plans to write a review for this newsletter on the current state of the science relating to autism and FC, including autistic intelligence and motor planning.

Jim also wants to encourage collaboration between nonspeaking autistic people and researchers. One factor (not the only one, but an important one) in reaching the "tipping point" for FC acceptance is a stronger evidence base in the scientific literature. This will provide better access to FC for those who so desperately need it.

AutCom is fundamentally about self-advocacy and self-determination. Society is in the midst of a paradigm shift of understanding the abilities of people with autism across the spectrum, much as happened with deaf people and people with cerebral palsy in the past few decades. AutCom has a critical role to play in this shift by helping make our voices heard.

Linda Rammler of Connecticut has been an "AutCom member" since she first learned about us because we share her values and commitment to facilitated communication, full inclusion and equal rights/respect for people with labels reflecting autism spectrum differences. She was the lead consultant in a private practice for over 20 years and recently launched the private non-profit organization, Autism Spectrum Differences Institute of New England (ASDI/NE). She develops accommodations and supports for people who experience Movement, Anxiety, Communication and Sensory (MACS) challenges.

Adults with ASD differences labels need national legislation to assure they get adequate support to live their lives, especially because they don't - and shouldn't have to - qualify as people with intellectual disabilities. Schools need to see "behaviors" as MACS differences, not justification for alternative educational placements. No one should be restrained, but many need deep pressure - and there is a difference!

Linda is willing to join any committee and/or project commitment for which she or ASDI/NE have the time and resources to co-sponsor, collaborate or assist. She promises to continue encouraging family members and youth/adults she knows with ASD differences labels to join AutCom, speak out and be proud! AutCom has the potential to fill a huge need to unite "progressive thinkers" about autism

(Continued on next page)

(New Board Members continued)

from self-advocacy, neuroscience, adult support, education, policy-making and other perspectives through public awareness, promulgation of position papers, conferences, information and referral, and other activities. AutCom's survival is essential as a

valuable resource and as a safe place to collaborate, to commiserate, and to gather new ideas and renewed energy to continue what is probably going to be the most significant revolution in "human services" ever.

Does God Make Garbage?

by Johnny Seitz

Why do you study me from a distance and through a glass? Why do you speak about me behind my back? And why do you whisper when you talk about me?

Other parents talk on and on, loudly and proudly, about each new little thing that their child does. Why do you whisper and glance around furtively? Do you fear that someone might think that you created me, not God? That the me that you created will reflect inadequacies in you? That society might reject you because of me?

I once heard that God does not make garbage. Then who made me? Am I a disease that you might catch? Are my idiosyncrasies little germs that might infect you and make those parts that are different in you begin to grow?

Believe it or not, I am a human being too, just like you. My need for love and understanding is just wrapped up in different colored paper.

If looking into your eyes makes me forget all the things I need to say, this doesn't mean I am stupid or in another world or not present. It is just that your eyes are so deep and filled with so many things that they, your eyes, can confuse me. I can too easily get lost among all the fascinating things I see.

If I don't respond, it is not because I'm too stupid to understand English. It's that words are so slippery at times and the same words can mean so many different things. And other times, I simply can't easily grab onto and use the words that you

might understand to say "thank you" or "I love you." But it doesn't mean I have no feelings. I have too many.

I have heard that people only really fear the things that attract them. The tall building draws and repels the man afraid of heights. Could you be drawn to my uniqueness cause it resonates with some unexplored part of you?

The ancients used to metaphorically pile their sins onto the back of a goat, then drive the poor animal out into the desert to die of starvation. Am I the scapegoat that must be driven away in order to expiate parts of normal people that must never be explored? Do you fear that your membership in society might be revoked if you ever admitted that you

might be just a little like me? Maybe my peculiarities are really just reflections of the things in you that you are afraid to look too closely at.

And why are you so embarrassed by my honesty, so ashamed of my uniqueness? Will too much fascination with one thing diminish you? Might it not open doors of discovery for all mankind (your kind and my kind).

Forget my little tics and my strange little rituals for just a second and weigh my honesty and my loyalty against artificial facades and hidden meanings.

If God does not make garbage, then who made me? Maybe I am a gift that you just forgot to open.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Because I endorse the principles of the Autism National Committee, I would like to (circle one):

JOIN NOW

RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

I AM A (circle): Family member Person with autism Friend Professional (field _____)

Annual membership: \$30.00. Persons with autism: \$10.00. Supporting membership: \$75.00

I am enclosing an extra \$_____ to speed up the good work.

Make checks payable to Autism National Committee and mail to:

Autism National Committee
Wade Hitzing, Treasurer
1045 Wittman Drive
Fort Myers, FL, 33919

The Autism National Committee is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. Your contributions are tax deductible and will be promptly acknowledged for your records

PRINCIPLES OF THE AUTISM NATIONAL COMMITTEE

As a member of the Autism National Committee I endorse for all people with autism, pervasive developmental disorders, and related disabilities the development of appropriate community services, including education, residences, jobs/job training programs, and of individually appropriate and adequate support services in all locations for both individuals and their family members; of state-of-the-art communication options for all individuals with unique communicative and social needs; of adequate supports to every family to assist them in maintaining their disabled family member in their home at least throughout the childhood and adolescent years; and the dissemination of available knowledge of those aspects of the disability requiring special support and understanding; the promotion of research to provide parents and professionals with greater insight into the unique needs of individuals with autism and related disabilities; and the use, development, and promotion of positive, respectful approaches for teaching every aspect of life.

Moreover, I oppose the use of institutions to separate people from their communities, and deprive them of dignity, freedom and the level of independence they can achieve in supportive community living; the use of procedures involving pain, humiliation, deprivation, and dangerous drugs as a means to alter and control individual's behavior; the increasing use of bizarre technology to control self-injurious and aggressive behavior; the widespread ignorance of the basic social and communicative needs of people with autism; and the widespread disregard for the individual's unique, basic and human needs. I object to programs which disregard the skills, preferences and basic human needs of the people they serve, and I believe that there is no longer need or any justification for using painful and abusive procedures.

Autism National Committee

Information and Referral
Carolyn Nuyens
P.O. Box 429
Forest Knowles, CA 94933
www.autcom.org



Time to Renew or Join Today!

Annual membership begins in January

(Membership form on page 11)



THE COMMUNICATOR is a publication of the Autism National Committee, Inc., a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization founded in 1990 to protect and advance the civil rights of people with Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder and related disorders of communication and behavior. Contributions of articles, information and letters are welcomed. The Communicator does not carry advertising or fund raising announcements, and we reserve the right to edit all submissions. Your comments are actively sought. Send them to Gail Gillingham at PO Box 11245, Main Post Office, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3K5, Canada, or e-mail her at: exgr@telus.net

THE COMMUNICATOR may be copied in its entirety or individual articles reprinted without permission except when otherwise noted. Please credit them to the Autism National Committee.

Officers and Chairpersons

Sharisa Joy Kochmeister, BA., *President*
Sandra McClennen, Ph.D., *Vice-President*
Pascal Cheng, M.A., *Secretary*
Wade Hitzing, Ph.D., *Treasurer*
Anne Donnellan, Ph.D.,
International Representative
Anne Carpenter, M.S., *Past-President*
Carolyn Nuyens,
Information and Referral

The COMMUNICATOR Committee

Gail Gillingham, M.S.
Barbara Cutler, Ph.D.
Rob Cutler
Doug McClennen, Ph.D.
Sandra McClennen, Ph.D.