

NOT YOUR TYPICAL Babysitting job

Since age 11, Jackson Reynolds, a sophomore at Chapman University, has cared for George, a nine-year old, severely autistic boy.

I actually started as a “mother’s helper” for George’s older brother, Isaac, when I was 11, a few months before George was even born. George was born the following summer, and I first started caring for him the next year. He would accompany Isaac to my house from time to time, so his parents could get work done, and I could get experience with children.

Shortly after this, George was declared to be autistic. He is severely afflicted with this disorder, and although he is nine years old today, many components of his brain only function equivalent to a three year old.

I eventually started to babysit them on my own, and this continued through all of my high school years. During this period, I became very close with both children, and I would often accompany them to other events from birthdays to Bar Mitzvahs, so their parents, or just Isaac, could interact more fully during events and George could still get personal attention.

I did not start caring for George exclusively until the summer of 2007, when I babysat him every day for a three-week period. His father had to work, and his mother had taken Isaac on a vacation just for the two of them, so I took care of George during the weekdays.

I needed to make sure he was constantly interacting with me and processing information. I would do different reading comprehension exercises with him, but the best way to ensure this was to get him out into the open among other people. As a result, I spent those weeks taking him to the local pool where he would be faced with mobs of people. Overall, he did very well, and he always loves the opportunity to swim and play in the water. We both greatly enjoyed ourselves.

This past summer, I returned to Massachusetts to accompany George as his aide to the Drumlin Farm Day Camp, which is owned and operated by the Audubon Society. This would be George’s second year going to the camp. My time with him proved to be the most fulfilling experience I have ever had.

At this camp, the kids were put into groups organized by age. George was put into a group of third graders, and I was amazed at how well he eventually came to interact with them.

When working one-on-one with George, it is important to constantly ask him questions and to ensure he comprehends what is going on around him. I always wanted to make sure he understood, at least to some degree, each lesson and activity the camp provided the children. This meant I would have to ask him a lot of follow-up questions and make sure not to ask ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ questions that he could simply guess the answer. I was so proud of him by the end of camp, and I have seen such an improvement in his behavior and social skills since I first started working with him.

His parents were worried that George had hit a plateau of sorts earlier that year, and he simply would not develop any more comprehension skills. This year though, we were all thrilled to see that he seems to have reached a new level of development, and he has been interacting with both people and his surroundings far more naturally and eagerly than we could have hoped.

George is an amazing boy who has an enormous capacity to love, laugh and even learn. He, however, has taught me far more than I could ever teach him, and I am so happy my life and his have been able to intertwine in such a way that has made me a stronger and more responsible person. ▲

STORY IN THE WORDS OF JACKSON REYNOLDS



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