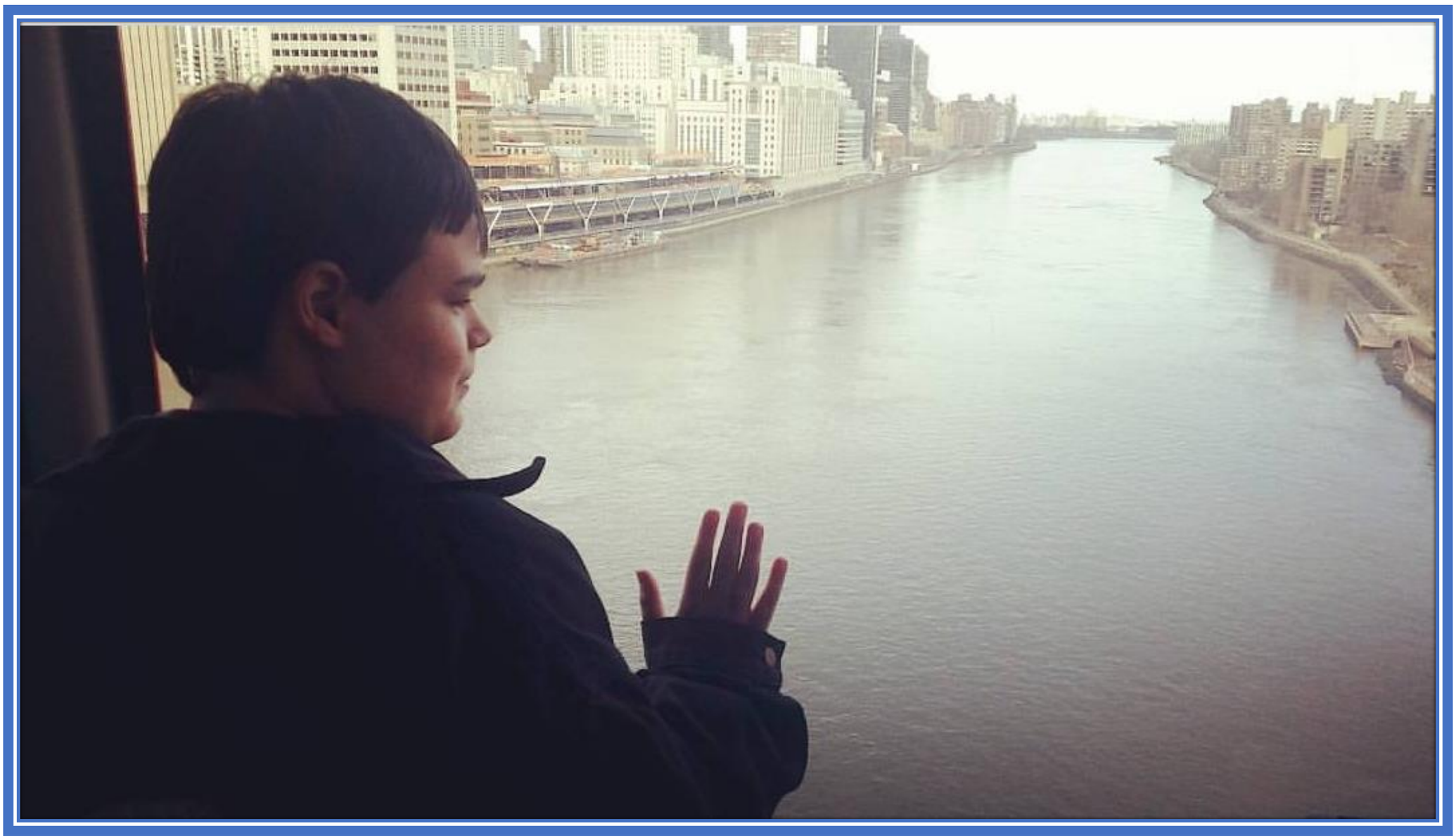
Marcus Rodriguez

What Autism Means to Our Family

It means that you may see Marcus in no pants happily stimming (flapping his hands) around the house!
It means you may hear a specific part of an episode or movie being replayed over and over again.
It means you will see the same limited food, in bulk, in the cabinets and fridge.
It means there can be a beautiful sound of laughter one minute that could easily become a frustrating sound of crying the next minute.
It means routine.
It means understanding.
It means patience.
But most of all, it means love.

Brian Walter

What Autism Means to Our Family



Autism has been part of our family for almost 18 years, when my son James started showing signs of being on the spectrum. Since then, life has been a journey of ups and downs, triumphs and tragedy, but as much laughter, smiles and giggles as tears.

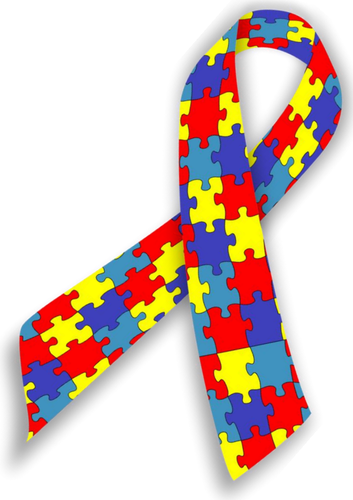
Any family on the autism spectrum will tell you this because autism is different, not less. When you allow yourself to enter James' world, you'll see the wonder and joy in the simple things in life.

I know my son will never be able to lead a life on his own, have his own family, or run for president, but he gets to see Santa at Macy's every year, and to him, that's just about the most important thing.

Even at 18, we're taking him to see the newest Disney movie because, as James puts it, "we really want to see that." And yes, maybe he's physically too old for that but maybe it's what is keeping our family young at heart.

Chai Cedeno

What Autism Means to Our Family



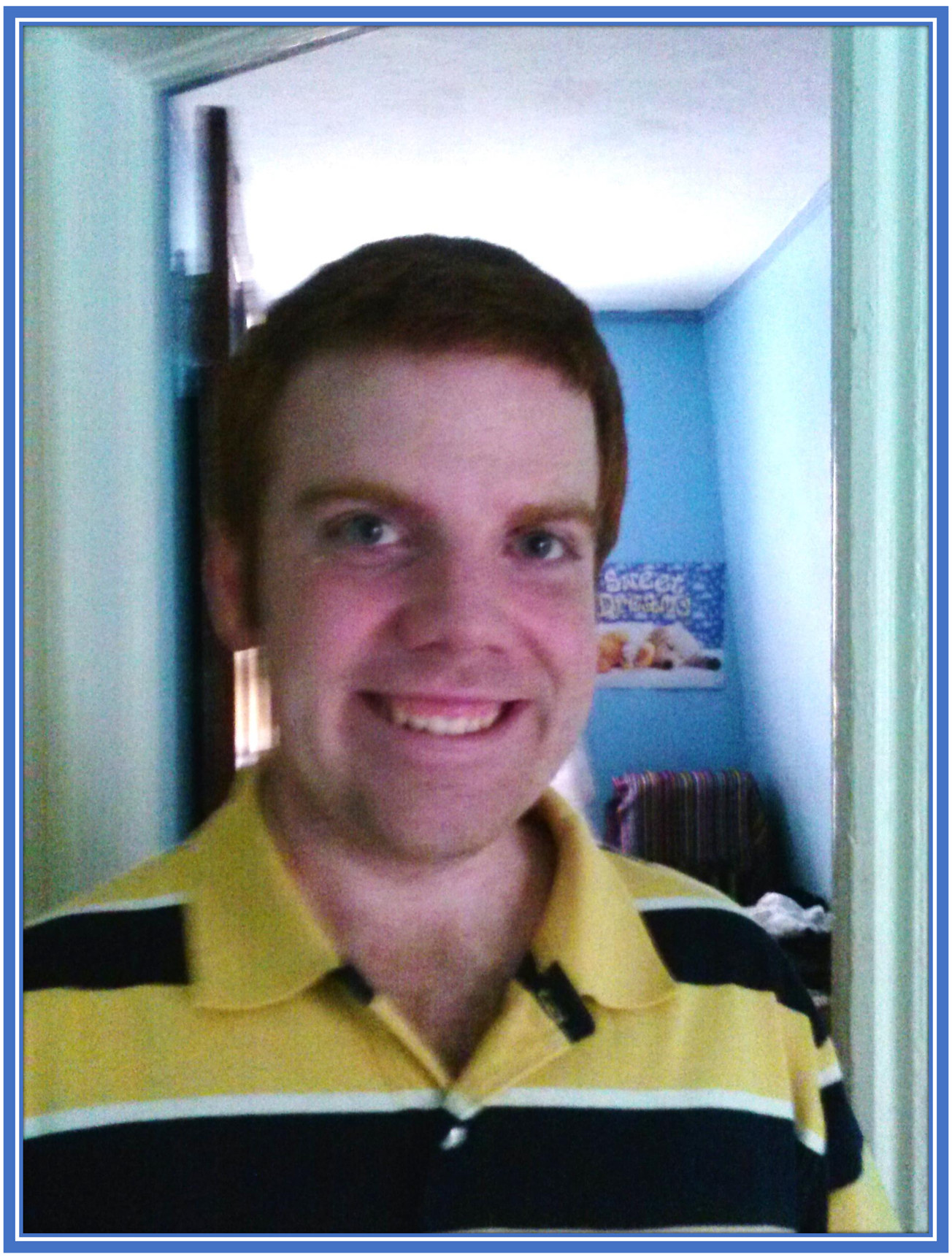
This is my amazing son, Chai Cedeno.

Autism to my family means that my son is different, not less.

All he needs is to be accepted, for us to be patient with him and give him unconditional love.

Brendan Berry

What Autism Means to Our Family



Hi! My name is Brendan Berry and I have autism.

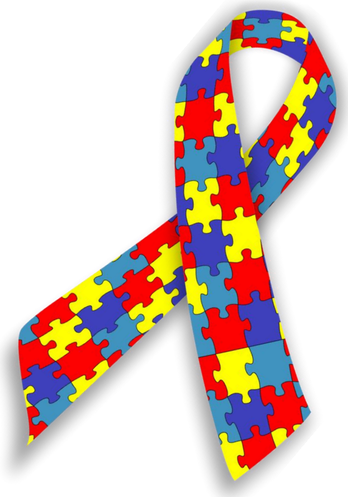
I am an important member of my community.

I work at Bimmy's Catering in Long Island City.

I volunteer at the Woodside Library and help make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the homeless at St. Sebastian's.

Kami-Leigh Agard

What Autism Means to Our Family



World Autism Day was this past Tuesday, April 2, but the entire month of April is celebrated as Autism Awareness Month. It's posted all over social media and broadcasted in the news with countless small and large organizations worldwide promoting autism awareness. However, I would like to take it a step further. Don't get me wrong, building awareness is important, but what about driving acceptance?

Online, I recently read a Jewish Boston article, "Etymology of the Word 'Autism,'" that really struck a chord. The article's author, Nessa Levine, a teen living on the autism spectrum, stated: "The word, 'autism,' is composed of two parts, 'aut' and 'ism.' The prefix of the word is 'aut,' which comes from the Greek word, 'autós,' meaning 'self.' The suffix, 'ism,' also from Greek, implies a state of being or condition. When I looked at the prefix and suffix of the word combined, I found that the word, 'autism,' in its purest form, means 'a state of being oneself.'"

Levine continued, "At that moment, everything clicked for me. It solidified my firm belief that autism is not a disease, but rather a state of being. Most people realize at a very young age that they must hide parts of who they are in order to be *accepted* in the world. Without it being explicitly taught to them, they know how to change their personalities and actions to 'fit in' with everyone else. However, people with autism are born without the innate realization that they need to change who they are to belong. We embrace every part of ourselves, regardless of whether or not it is socially acceptable. We see the act of changing ourselves for someone else's approval as pointless, and we need to be explicitly taught how to alter ourselves to function in society."

Mind-blowing! How many parents out there secretly hope their child's autism can be cured, meaning the countless challenges, and ostracism from the so-called normals of society could magically disappear. What drives us to try medication, special diets, every nouveau therapy—while longingly looking at other children, who on the surface seem normal, but are struggling with their own challenges, especially in this viral society, suffering from the pressures of being accepted by their peers.

I looked up the etymology of the word, "acceptance." From the late 14th century old French root, "accepter," or directly from Latin "*acceptare,"* it means to "take or receive willingly," or "receive, get without effort."

Folks, as parents, caregivers, family and friends of someone on the autism spectrum, that's exactly what we wholeheartedly need to do—receive autism willingly and accept it without effort. I know that's a tall bill, but with each day observing, engaging, and above all, loving my daughter, I sometimes am baffled. How did God bless me with this beautiful being? Her smile, giggles, bewitching beauty, cunning personality and athleticism melts my heart. Autism is challenging, but I feel like the luckiest parent in the world. My daughter cannot lie. She's comfortable in her own skin, and cannot be bullied into trying to be something she's not.

Autism awareness is important, but building acceptance is even more vital. Our loved ones should not be left out of activities just because they have differing social skills and intellectual abilities. We should promote inclusion of all children within the community, especially the educational and vocational environment.

Let's drive the momentum for acceptance of our loved ones with autism. You never know what their beautiful hearts, minds and souls can contribute. Keep building awareness, but note that acceptance is the key to a brave new world.