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THEY TAUGHT HER WHAT SHE NEEDED

*Written by and solely the viewpoints of:
 Marilyn Flanagan
 Executive Director/President*

As most of you know, this has been a really hard time lately. The State does not pay on time. We have had to live with less staff. It is your donations that have kept us alive. And, I have had to wear two or three hats at once just to keep this organization going - and above minimal standards. And, we have not yet been able to pursue our dream of residential. Through all of this many things have been in the back of my mind.

As many years as I have spent supporting those with developmental disabilities and training staff in how to support them, I have still been learning even more myself. There have been peers who taught me about their own autism, about music, and about nature. Peers who taught me about saying good-bye, about grieving and even about paint colors and what it means when they use them. All along I have had a personal quest to talk about autism and write about various aspects of it. To date I have not had the time or the energy to do so, but today I wish to give you a bit of what one of those chapters of the book I will one day write would say. I hope you hear what I have to say.

One of the first chapters in my book would be about childhood vs. adulthood. Exactly what should you teach in childhood that would carry

over to the adult years? I hear people try to teach their toddler with a disability to say or sign "I love you" or they begin with mom and dad (or mommy and poppa). Altruistic - yes, but reality? No. Imagine a twenty-five or thirty-five year old being asked if they are hungry, cold, hurt, being taken advantage of - just do you want to go to the store. Do you want them to know how to say "I love you" or just yes or no. Help, more, bathroom, etc. Think of the possibilities.

I believe that a child with disabilities needs to begin at an early age to embrace the adult years. I cannot tell you how many adults come through my doors that say "pee-pee", "pooh-pooh", or "potty" to name a few. At two years of age those are cute - at twenty-two or thirty-two they just highlight the disability.

If there may be a possibility that your child may only learn ten words or signs, then start with the basics. When those ten are learned then use nine of the next batch to be more basics and maybe a mom or dad thrown in. Then, as each ten gets easier, get broader. But, always think future needs to determine current teaching. That child will really benefit from that in the long run.

And now, a focal point that would be a part of the book you did not expect to hear about. Tom and I have been

surrounded by Scottish Terriers for most of our thirty years together. There are four terriers in our past and four that are currently around. They have also taught me so much. One in the past, MacDuff, I considered my "pet therapy" dog - with empathy and innate knowledge for anyone he met - including all the peers he met at RRAF. He knew who wanted the ball in their lap vs. on the floor at their feet. Or, who just wanted a face lick or who wanted to be left alone.

But, one in our current brood I consider my "dog with autism and/or sensory issues". And, the three Scotties around her have taught her the way I believe all with autism or similar disorders should be taught. There are so many examples that would be in the book based on her years of growing up - I will give you just one.

Our Ms. Belle has no sense of "stranger danger". She likes everyone - human or animal. She will let that rabbit run right in front of her, just wagging her tail - keeping it a secret from the rest of the brood. And, she likes every human she meets, even strangers

Everyone in our dog family worried about this "trait" from day one.

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Continued from page one.

Our then five year old, Chance, took it to be his job to protect her. Every time she would bark as someone or some animal would walk by the front door when she was looking out he would grab her by the nape and throw her back. Now, three years later a confident girl takes her turn standing watch at the door, barks proudly at what she sees, and then goes four/five feet back while the others run in front of her and pursue. Yes, she can bark but she cannot pursue.

The reality? They did not bother to teach her who was a stranger or a friend. She was not going to get it. And, think about that from the perspective of a child with a disability. You spend your life with strangers. Nurses, doctors, OT, PT, Speech – not to say teacher after teacher and aide after aide after aide. How would they easily know who is a stranger and who is not?

They just taught her that if anyone showed up – bark and stand back. They taught her what she needed to know now that she is an adult.

Many people with special needs spend their life in programs that focus on their current stage of development and simply push them up towards a visionless adulthood. However, this often leads to back tracking and emergency adaptations and modifications once an idea has failed. And, by then someone may have already lost their confidence and motivation to grow.

The process should be the opposite. And, as my Chance taught me, something that I have always believed made sense to him too. Think the end game first. Have that vision of a desired future and your priorities firmly in hand. Then teach how to reach that end from day one. And, be sure that vision covers your child through their entire life. Not just post high school but the transition into

residential as well. All that may mean circumventing the areas that may not be able to be taught by implementing immediate alternative strategies. In this way you can end up promoting a confidence that does not even register as being different from anyone else.

You will have a Ms. Belle that just believes she is special, normal, and always a good girl. And, those around her will keep her thinking that way so she can continue to grow and learn. A concept we need to build in for all of our special folks.

Ms. Belle



Our Annual Fall Benefit will be Sunday, October 3, 2010

**The Empress Banquets
200 East Lake Street, Addison, IL
11:30am—3:30pm**

*Here's just a sample of the prizes you could win during our Fall Benefit raffle!
Stay tuned for more details. Tickets will go on sale in July.*



Cookbooks and \$20 Gift Card
Omaha Steaks

Friday/Saturday Night Stay for Two
The Westin, Lombard

Skating for Ten
Lombard Roller Rink, Lombard

Two Free Lunch or Dinner Coupons
(Value up to \$21.99 each)
Epic Buffet, Hollywood Casino, Aurora

“Timeless Orchid” Pampering Collection

Admission Tickets
Marcus Theatres Corporation

VIP Passes

Improv Comedy Showcase, Schaumburg

Admission Passes

Zanies Comedy Nite Club, Chicago

Two Tickets (Sun thru Friday)
Raven Theatre, Chicago

\$10 Bonus Certificates
Dick's Sporting Goods

Swedish Massage (\$98-\$110 Value)
Eaglewood Resort & Spa, Itasca

One Year Family Membership (\$100 Value)
Morton Arboretum, Lisle

UNRESTRICTED CONTRIBUTIONS: (October, 2009 through February 15, 2010)

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An "Anonymous" Donor
Jim and Pauline Ashbaugh
Ron and Sue Metty

An RRAF Announcement!

As many of you know, RRAF is reviewed by CARF, a national accreditation institution. RRAF has historically received glowing reviews by CARF, which is a compliment to the management of RRAF since CARF is known as a tough reviewer. Since RRAF's last review, completed in October, 2009, Marilyn Flanagan, our Executive Director and President has been invited to the pool of prospective CARF surveyors. If she makes the final cut Marilyn will assist in surveying other organizations like ours, thereby giving her the opportunity to learn from those agencies "best practices" and to also spread the philosophy of RRAF and her own years of experience and beliefs. But do not worry. Marilyn is not leaving us. This commitment would take just a few weeks each year and surveyors must be individuals who continue to work in the field so they remain current in that field.

Congratulations, Marilyn !!



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“WHERE REALITY IS RESPECT, APPRECIATION AND FULFILLMENT”

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This donation is in memory of: _____
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Please send acknowledgement to:

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Please make checks payable to RRAF and mail to 613 South Main Street, Lombard, IL 60148-3341. RRAF is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. All donations not exchanged for goods or services are tax deductible to the extent allowed by IRS regulations. Should you wish a copy of our certified financial audit, please request it in writing to address above.

Newsletter, February, 2010

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Jill Mueller
Treasurer
Roberta Robison
Assistant Treasurer

**ACCREDITED BY THE
REHABILITATION
ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION (CARF)
THROUGH AUGUST 2012**

RECENT HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ⇒ A Costume and Antique Jewelry Sale, held at the American Legion Hall in Elmhurst nets almost \$2,000
- ⇒ We receive an anonymous donation in the amount of \$3,500
- ⇒ We also receive donations from the Knights of Columbus, Lombard Christ the King Council #11027, the Knights of Columbus, St. Matthew's Council #9893, and the St. Matthew's Council of Catholic Women, among others.
- ⇒ We are surveyed for three days by a State Quality Bureau representative who finds us 100% compliant for all federal Medicaid rules and regulations.
- ⇒ We lose employee Kelly Bowen, but welcome the return of seasoned Colleen Kelly to compliment the recent addition of Amy Morrison, as well. We are so pleased to finally be at a full staffing compliment, given the financial restrictions we have been under for so long.