So this man named Fred Dickey wrote an extremely exploitative article about 'why having an autistic child will completely and utterly destroy your life and make you want to die', or at least I think that's what the title was. Here's the link:

**http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/aug/29/tp-mother-keeps-going-despite-horrendous-challeng/**

I had a sort of reactionary moment after reading it, and hit "Contact the Author" and typed away furiously. After I hit send, I felt a little bad, thinking...I shouldn't have written an angry letter probably, so I wrote a second letter which was more calm and explained my position in a clearer way.

Very soon after, Fred Dickey wrote me back, a short message to my initial reactionary letter, and a longer email to my more thoughtful letter. Both demonstrated his absolute lack of understanding of the topic he had been attempting to write about, highlighted exactly why he was so unqualified to write on the topic of disability or autism, and showed his aptitude for self-reflection. I'd like to share our exchange, because I think it's important that people see the destructiveness of ableism and the affect it has on real human being's lives, and how the superiority complex of able-bodied and able-minded people who lack real knowledge on the topic tends to constantly add to very harmful stigma against vulnerable people. I will admit my words are a…bit harsh.

(Note: my words re: Alzheimer's are meant to help Dickey to understand that even the most able are not invulnerable to disability, mental or physical, they are not in any way words against those with Alzheimer's.)

**Letter to the author:** This article about autism is the most condescending and despicable thing

I've ever read. It makes me believe from the bottom of my heart that in a

near future you will develop some illness such as Alzheimer's and your

children, wife, and in-laws will sit around haunted, long-suffering,

chain-smoking, crushing glasses in their hands to avoid taking their

annoyance out at the devil that their father/husband/family member has

become, this great burden, this terror who is trapped within his mind and is

confused, and feels love for his family but all they feel for him is disgust

and resentment. And your old co-workers will stop by and ask "perhaps you

should put him in a home?" and your family will say "no, we couldn't, we

just couldn't", and smoke another cigarette down to the ash with shaking

fingers in anger at their lot in life, while another of your old co-workers

casually jokes that perhaps an exorcism would do the trick. You will have a

moment of clarity and remember the callous way you used to feel so superior

too, but then sink back into your bed wetting, muddled old age, and wish

that maybe you had lived a kinder life.

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**Letter # 2, sent a moment later:** I try not to use harsh speech. I shouldn't have written an angry letter to

the author in response to the article. I found the article extremely

offensive on behalf of disabled people, and I thought you should understand

why. The general population is sort of conditioned to believe that they

would be better off dead than being disabled. That they would be better off

killing a disabled child than raising a disabled child. That they would be

better off risking measles than risking autism. And articles like yours are

the reason for these thoughts. Please, do some soul searching. If you are a

good person, think about these things.

**Fred Dickey:** I am sorry for your pain, and sorry that you would deny Sonia her voice to  
tell her family's story.

**Fred Dickey:** I do not have to convince you I am a good person. Whenever you take a stand  
against openness and truth you emotionally disable yourself. Please tell me  
one thing in her story that is untrue. No, you can't without calling her a  
liar, and why would she lie about the horror in their family? If you have  
bitterness toward the effects of this disease, your argument is with God,  
not me.

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At this point, I realized that he was not getting it, and probably my angry words hadn’t helped. But it was clear to me too that he didn’t WANT to get it. He wanted to be the guy who had told the heartbreaking story of a down and out mother with the ultimate burden, and he patted her hand and helped let her truth be known. He didn’t want to understand the depth of depravity behind his work—he didn’t care at all, less than that, not even a little bit, about the autistic boy in his article. He didn’t want to understand that he basically had written an article that screamed of Eugenics--- rid the world of the different ones, the non-normal ones, they ruin the lives of the rest of us. He didn’t want to know that. But you know what? Whatever. He needs to hear it.

So I wrote him one last time.

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**Letter # 3:** Please, explain the purpose of YOUR article. Not of Sonia's difficult life, because hell, we've all got difficult lives, some more than others (Trust me, mine is a lot more difficult than hers, and I know many who have lives a lot more difficult than mine, and yet your article writes as though she is a survivor of Hiroshima). So let's move beyond Sonia. Let's get back to YOU. What was your purpose in writing this, and what was the purpose in the tone of your message? To make sure that everyone knows that autistic children are bad? To make sure that everyone knows that if they have an autistic child they are about to ruin their life? To make sure everyone knows that an autistic life is no life at all? To make sure that everyone knows that death is better than disability? To compare disability to being possessed? To make sure that women know that no man would ever want her if she, god forbid, let an autistic child stay in her home instead of sending "it" away to a home as you passively mentioned? To excuse the father for his bad temper and resentment against his child for daring to have a disability for nor fault of his own, because how can any parent be expected to put up with such a thing?

What was the purpose of your article?

Again, I harken back to a future in which you may end up in a similar situation, with something like Alzheimer’s, and ponder these questions a tad more deeply. But it's okay, your argument will be with God, not me.

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