



INSIDE *the* SPECTRUM

“Autistic”: a short word,
often misheard as “artistic...”

Chris Combs
703.304.8241 • chris@chriscombs.net

Preview 2006-02

Like most seven-year-olds, Danny Kramer's always on the go. What sets him apart is where he goes; as a child who has autism, he often retreats into a world of his own, singing to himself and moving ceaselessly.



Petco's pet carriers proved irresistible, and Danny climbed inside while waiting for check-out. This is not his primary means of transit.

Danny is "uncontrollable," in the words of his mother; yet the lack of understanding from other adults is more challenging than his misbehavior. Mrs. Kramer has printed cards that describe autism - "A Spanking Won't Help," to paraphrase - and distributes them when Danny's willfulness attracts negative attention.



To a parent, autism is heartbreaking. Children with autism seem to develop normally until around three years of age, at which point they visibly backtrack in development - regressing linguistically and behaviorally. This progress is hard regained, putting autistic children years behind their peers.

Yet they are still children; they delight in their private games and devices, and in exploring their parents' boundaries; they dance the light fantastic with gleeful abandon, as in Danny's creative use of a playground swing.



Young Mr. Kramer enacts a city in his living room, by means of Megablox and playing cards. He knows his city innately. Andrea Kramer once switched two blocks while Danny was at school; Danny immediately spotted and fixed the errant block. The city's design and order is so important to Danny that his mother is able to use this as a disciplinary measure - "Don't make me put away the blocks!"



Danny is “painting the beautiful
trees” passing by.



Mark Sherrett, 25, loves horseback riding. He rides every Sunday, weather permitting, at the Piscataway Riding Stable in Clinton, MD.

Mark has autism. He is largely non-verbal; although he understands language, he rarely speaks more than a few words at a time.

Here, Mark waits for a horse at Piscataway, as his younger brother Daniel and mother Marie converse. It was his mother's first time riding, and Mark surrendered his long-time horse to her, so that she would be sure to have a good one.



Marie Sherrett proudly displays her family's awards, including at least one bowling trophy won by Mark.

Mark bowls most Saturday mornings with a Maryland Parks and Planning bowling team, organized for adults with developmental disabilities. He scored 130 points, which significantly outpaces this photographer's bowling ability. Two games only - more would be practice, and practice "doesn't count."



Mark works at Cintas, a company that makes uniforms.

He is remarkably open-minded about exceptions to his daily routine, as long as an environment of constancy is available. Here, the Sherretts are attending a cousin's open house; the hubbub overwhelmed Mark, and he sensibly sought relief by locating a couch downstairs.

Similarly, Mark often travels with his mother; the shock to his routine is negated by using a Jacuzzi and pool at each host hotel.



But when he's on horseback, all of the indignities and minor outrages of a life lived slightly out of mesh with the rest of humanity melt away, and for an hour, he's John Wayne, riding off into the sunset - no less proficient than anyone else, no less happy, and as intent and noble as one can be.



To view "Inside the Spectrum"
at a less diminutive size, visit
www.chriscombs.net

Chris Combs
703.304.8241
chris@chriscombs.net