Winter 2013 Third Edition

WE

an AMJaMB publication

a magazine exclusively for everyone

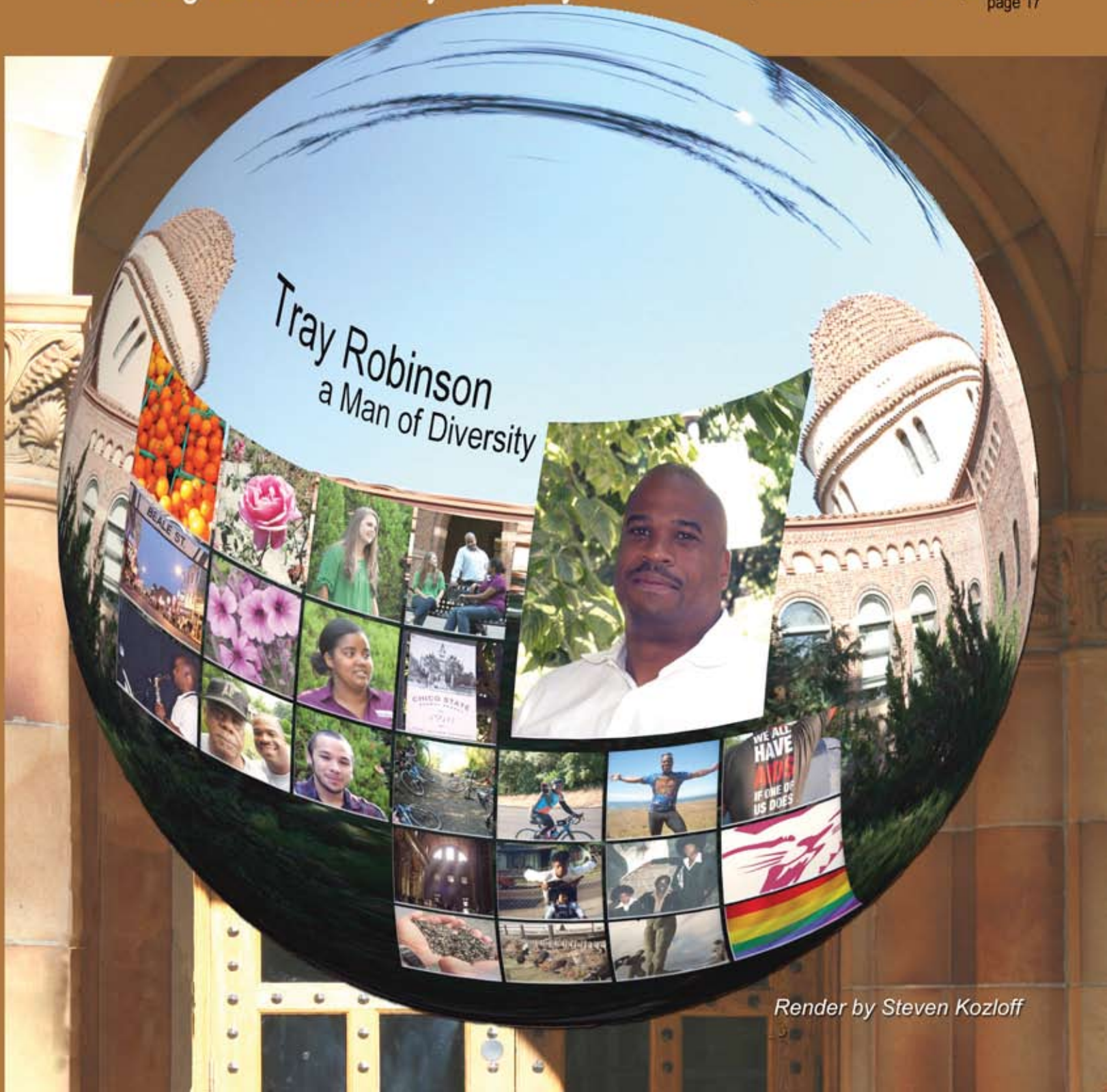
RETT
THERE IS HOPE

page 8

HOW DIVERSITY ROCKS

By the students in "Coffeeville" and "Taylorsville"

page 17



Render by Steven Kozloff

From the Editor

Welcome to **WE**, *a magazine exclusively for everyone!*

We feel honored to have the opportunity to become involved in the efforts that are bringing hope for those with Rett Syndrome, a devastating genetic anomaly that almost exclusively attacks young girls.

It has also been heartwarming to witness the excitement of the third and fourth graders from Paradise, California as they discover what "diversity," really means to them and to the world. They will be the future parents, teachers, business owners, grocery store clerks, policymakers, and scientists. They will grow up and not be distracted by what they see. By then, the term "diversity," will be just a word in the dictionary—not a concept to analyze so much or discuss at length. It will be a concept that just is.

Tray Robinson is the cover story of this issue and the interview touched me in more ways than I reveal in the article. I am a white woman in my 50s and was born and raised in Santa Barbara, California—a coastal town of middle- to upper-class people—in a predominantly white neighborhood. As I sat before Tray, a Black man in his 40s whose birth and story begin in the South Central City of Compton, California among one of the most violent gangs, I did not realize that our histories intertwined beyond the shared experience of all humans . . .

My roots can be found on Compton Avenue in Compton, California beginning in the early 1900s. It is where my grandparents lived and began to raise their children. My parents spent much of their childhood in South Central Los Angeles—my mother on St. Andrews Place, and my father only a few blocks away. My uncle was a Los Angeles Police Detective in the 1940s and 1950s, a time of tremendous prejudice and hate. It was a time of great police brutality and racial profiling.

Is the theory that there is only six degrees of separation—that everyone is on average six steps away from any other person an "academic urban myth?"

I don't think so. Terry

WE

a magazine exclusively for everyone

we-for-everyone.com

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Tray Robinson
A Man of Diversity

Brisco

a man who made a "difference."

By Domenic Console

As a child of the 1960s—an Italian growing up in East Boston, Massachusetts, I was a bit of a wise guy at twelve years old, and a leader in the gang of kids from the neighborhood. Whenever we saw Brisco on the street, who was in his 20s then, we would mock him because of his obvious physical and mental disabilities.

My grandfather overheard us one afternoon. He called us into the house, and after beating our butts, sat us down on the couch and began telling us stories—very long stories—of what it is like to be different. When my grandfather migrated from Italy to the United States and planted the family roots in East Boston, he was the target of mockery, insults, rejection, and threats, only because he was an Italian from Italy. The Irish, the Jews and the Blue Bloods controlled almost all of the commerce in Boston, making it difficult to start a business.

This made it very hard for other ethnic groups to succeed. Back in those days, the city of Boston was segregated into sections by ethnic groups. Despite the segregation and the rejection, my grandfather became the owner of a successful barbershop and ultimately went into a successful tuxedo rental business with my dad—all because he believed in himself.

Being a kid, it was a big struggle to sit through the long and what seemed like endless stories, but I respected my grandfather. His stories of struggles because of the ignorance of others meant a lot to me.

Brothers Left to Right - Joseph and Domenic

Domenic's Grandfather standing in front of the family home on Leyden Street in East Boston

Humbled, the next time I saw Brisco on the street I said, "Hi." I didn't know if he would respond because of the way we had treated him. But, Brisco said "Hi," back.

One day, I was with my friends when Brisco came walking toward us. They were bantering among themselves, making the usual insulting comments that we had been known to make. I pondered what to do. Should I say, "Hi," to Brisco and risk the scrutiny of my friends who I had always joined in the mocking of Brisco in the past? Or should I ignore Brisco and say nothing at all?

"Because Brisco was in my lie, I learned about patience, acceptance, how to treat people kindly, and that a true gift comes from the heart."

I chose the right thing and said, "Hi." My friends were shocked, but said nothing. They looked at me very puzzled, but I just gave them a look back that told them, "What is your problem?"

We never discussed it, and none of us mocked Brisco again.

Over time, and one by one, my friends began to acknowledge Brisco and would say, "Hi," as they passed by. After a long while, Brisco began to trust that we weren't setting him up and would initiate cordial acknowledgements. He started to come to our football and baseball games and cheered us on. Brisco became our unofficial street guardian—watching over us to make sure no one picked on us. How ironic is that? Brisco would stop and play with us when he wasn't working and had time.

Brisco

continued

a man who made a "difference."

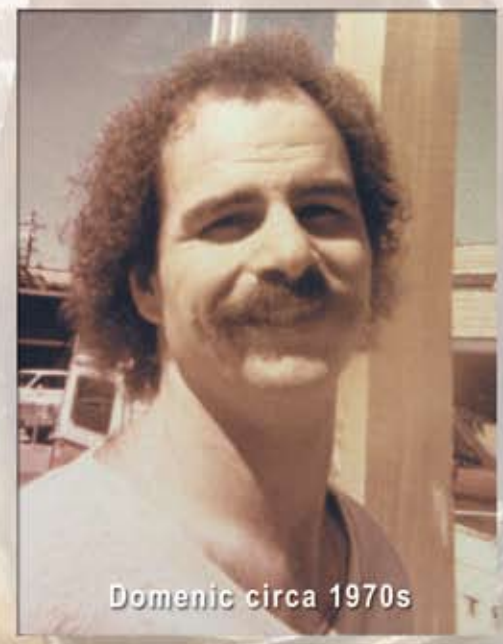
By Domenic Console

As an adult, my friend John and I opened a hair salon in a three story Brownstone in Boston. It was very difficult to keep the salon looking neat and clean—the hair dressers were not too concerned about it. I remembered as a kid seeing Brisco travel between jobs on foot. I knew he did a lot of maintenance kinds of things for people around the city.

I hired Brisco to keep the salon clean. I paid him a bit more than minimum wage at the time, and he worked very hard.

I began to notice that Brisco would remember customer's names, the names of their family members, and all their birthdates. One day Brisco said to me, "Dom, you are five minutes late for your appointment." I said, "Brisco, what are you talking about?" I looked at my calendar and saw that he was right. He overheard a conversation I had on the phone a few weeks prior and he remembered.

The customers and the employees enjoyed having Brisco around, so much so that I decided to give him a promotion to Salon Concierge. He would notice every customer as they approached the salon and was sure to be at the door to open it for them. He would greet the customer by their name, inquire about their families, and on rainy days, Brisco would run out the door with an umbrella to cover them until they got inside.



Domenic circa 1970s

During Christmas one year, I was handing out Christmas bonuses to the employees, Brisco included. His overly exuberant reaction surprised me.

I found out later that Brisco had given his bonus to a woman he knew with two small children. The family had run into hard times when the children's father was injured, and Brisco helped them out as much as he could. I only came to know this because the woman came to thank me.

Brisco never said a thing.

I learned about true gift-giving that day. It isn't about what a person gets in return for giving a gift, and it's not about fanfare, or accolades.

Now, I don't concern myself with getting something in return when giving a gift, but I am always rewarded by the good a gift from the heart can bring.

Because Brisco was in my life, I learned about patience, acceptance, and how to treat people kindly. Brisco was a gentle and kind man, just like my grandfather and my dad.

I learned a lot from those three men. They helped shape who I am today.

REM ENTERTAINTMENT
PRESENTS

RETT

REM ENTERTAINTMENT PRESENTS "RETT"

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JASON REM EDITED BY DAVE COLE MUSIC BY GAVIN KEESE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY KEITH SOLOMON JEREMY SAULNIER & BARRY GROSS

AUDIO BY MICHAEL BERGMAN & BARRY PINSKY SOUND BY ROB WASILAUSKI & GAVIN KEESE

MUSIC CONSULTANT ARON PINSKY ADDITIONAL MUSIC MATT GREENBERG VOCALS BY MICHELLE MUSIC SUPERVISOR JASON REM

COLOR CORRECTION NICK PEZZILLO POST FACILITY WISER POST TRAVEL BY PROTRAVEL INTERNATIONAL

ANIMATION BY HOWARD HUGHES MEDICAL INSTITUTE & RAJARSHI GHOSH PRODUCED BY JASON REM

SPECIAL THANKS TO RETT SYNDROME RESEARCH TRUST

rett syndrome research trust

WWW.RSRT.ORG WWW.REMENTONLINE.COM

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Jason Rem
producer, director, and writer
Rem Entertainment

There *is* Hope

By Terry Kozloff and Michelle Erstad

Jason Rem is a veteran filmmaker and has produced, directed, and written more than 1,000 interview and sports biography programs for ESPN and Fox Sports. For the past fifteen years, he has produced programming at the biggest sporting events in the world, including four Super Bowls and the Olympics. He has also produced, directed and written programming for Sony, Nike, Red Bull and the International Medical Corps, among others.

Jason's next project, however, took him in an entirely different direction.

It was by happenstance that Jason attended a fundraising event at the home of Jim Gianopulos, Chairman and CEO Fox Filmed Entertainment and Advisory member for the Rett Syndrome Research Trust (RSRT). "An acquaintance said he had an extra ticket for the event. The event was called "Hope for Hannah" helping a young girl afflicted with Rett Syndrome and raising funds for RSRT. "I knew nothing about the family or the cause," Jason recalled. "No way was I thinking I was there to become a part of their efforts."

And then . . .

A slide show happened. Monica Coenraads spoke and then Heidi Epstein took the podium to talk about her daughter Hannah. Both mothers spoke of their children and the challenges they face because of Rett Syndrome—a neurological disorder found almost exclusively in females, which halts a child's normal growth and development, leaving her with symptoms that resemble autism, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's (RSRT website)—and what the uncertain future holds. Monica spoke of her efforts to support research that will find a cure for Rett Syndrome through the Rett Syndrome Research Trust (RSRT), which would allow her daughter to enjoy her life in ways she can't because of Rett Syndrome.

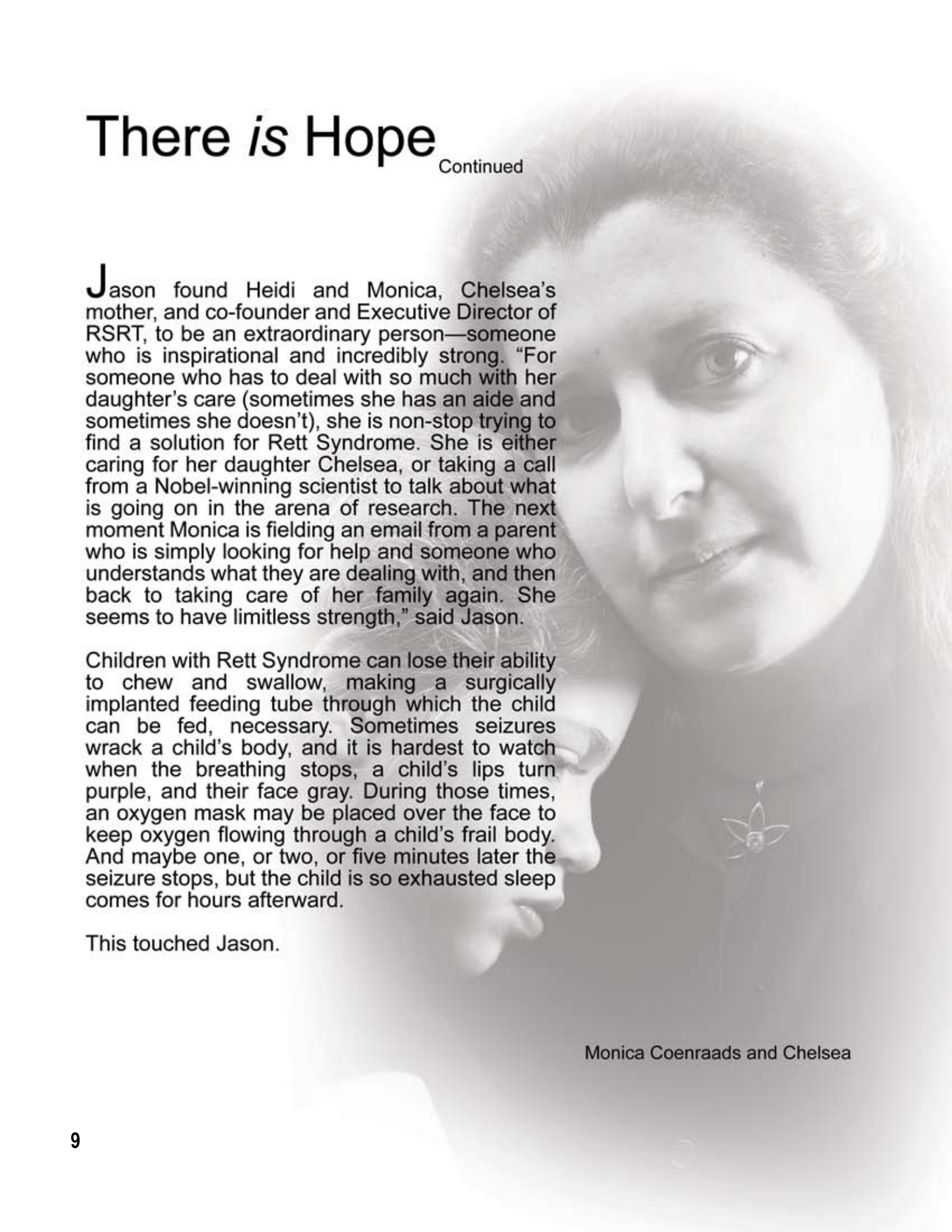
rett syndrome
research trust
www.ReverseRett.org

There *is* Hope Continued

Jason found Heidi and Monica, Chelsea's mother, and co-founder and Executive Director of RSRT, to be an extraordinary person—someone who is inspirational and incredibly strong. "For someone who has to deal with so much with her daughter's care (sometimes she has an aide and sometimes she doesn't), she is non-stop trying to find a solution for Rett Syndrome. She is either caring for her daughter Chelsea, or taking a call from a Nobel-winning scientist to talk about what is going on in the arena of research. The next moment Monica is fielding an email from a parent who is simply looking for help and someone who understands what they are dealing with, and then back to taking care of her family again. She seems to have limitless strength," said Jason.

Children with Rett Syndrome can lose their ability to chew and swallow, making a surgically implanted feeding tube through which the child can be fed, necessary. Sometimes seizures wrack a child's body, and it is hardest to watch when the breathing stops, a child's lips turn purple, and their face gray. During those times, an oxygen mask may be placed over the face to keep oxygen flowing through a child's frail body. And maybe one, or two, or five minutes later the seizure stops, but the child is so exhausted sleep comes for hours afterward.

This touched Jason.



Monica Coenraads and Chelsea

There are no 'voiceovers' in the documentary because, according to Jason, "The families are the people that are living the experience..."

"I come from a family of volunteering," said Jason. "Ideas started going off in my head. As a filmmaker I walked up to Monica and Heidi and said I would like to volunteer my time and do a documentary. In my head, I thought we could do some interviews with parents right here in Los Angeles, but I think there was divine intervention, because I didn't have a team behind me to make it."

Jason spent about three months conducting interviews and learning about Rett Syndrome, the children whose minds and bodies Rett Syndrome assaulted, and the families who love and care for them. "It just started to grow from there. It was time to grab a camera and figure it out."

Jason began the journey of making "RETT: THERE IS HOPE" in the Pacific Palisades, California. "I borrowed lights from a friend, a pickup from another friend and met our volunteer Director of Photography and cameraman there." Jason travelled from Los Angeles to Connecticut, Scotland, London, and Houston, to make the documentary. He speaks of the possibility of divine intervention because people he had never met stepped up to donate their time right at the moment he needed it. Others donated equipment to make filming possible, and air miles to make travel possible. And every donation was right there when he needed it for the next step. "Everybody cared," recalled Jason.

There are no 'voiceovers' in the documentary because, according to Jason, "The families are the people that are living the experience, and anytime I could get them to say it, to link a subject or a theme, the better the story—the greater the impact."

There *is* Hope
Continued

"The goal was to show the beauty and heart of the families who are dealing with Rett Syndrome." Jason Rem

"The goal was to show the beauty and heart of the families who are dealing with Rett Syndrome. The science aspect helped teach viewers about what is really going on and offers hope. The hope to reverse Rett Syndrome is in the science and research. I really feel like that the issues showed themselves in the documentary. It shows the family dynamics and it reaches into the psychology of the audience and it moves the audience. When we do a documentary like this, we want the audience to care and the only way to get them to do that is to show the emotion. Then, hope is where the science comes in."

"I don't have a child with Rett Syndrome; I didn't know any of these families before I went to the fund-raiser in Bel Air. When I was inspired to help, and all the volunteers that made the documentary come together are secondary to the issue. We just want to help in general. We want to help all the girls around the world with Rett Syndrome and we hope that all the work that we do will help.

"I can understand that people who have a child with disabilities may care most about helping their own child. We are able to come in with a different eye and say, 'of course we care about your child, but we also care about what is going on in the world as a whole.'"

When approached with the idea that there are a lot of adults with disabilities who get very concerned about efforts to find a cure when they just want to be accepted, Jason responded with, "It is important as a society that we accept everybody. It doesn't matter your gender, your color—as long as we are of the same mindset that we want good for the world. It shouldn't matter."

Awareness, fundraising for science and research, and acceptance, are the three things when working collectively makes the world work.

"Researchers are coming very close to finding a cure for Rett Syndrome..."

"Researchers are coming very close to finding a cure for Rett Syndrome and the reason Rett Syndrome is so focused on the 'cure,' is because they truly have something right in front of them that is a cure. There is a mouse that was raised with the Rett Syndrome gene and through gene therapy in a month it was cured. This is important information people need to know," said Jason.

There *is* Hope Continued

Rett Syndrome and the research being done, is connecting many different groups and many different people, and the research being done to cure Rett Syndrome can help other groups. It can be a beacon to curing autism, Alzheimer's and so much more. "Let's break down the walls and see if some of the work done in one arena can complement the other. What I see with a lot of nonprofit organizations is that the groups become very insular and they don't exactly reach out to the group right next to them trying to solve the same thing. As a documentary filmmaker, as someone who just wants to help, I want everyone that can, to benefit from science and the research being done that will find a cure for Rett Syndrome.

"It is so important that the Rett Syndrome Research Trust grows so Monica can get the support she needs to get the money to the scientists and get away from only pure academic research. It is important to get it into more institutional biotech research and for someone to care enough to be able to say we see there is a shining light here and we see all the work that you are doing."

"I look forward to seeing the day there is a solution, a cure," said Jason.

Jason Rem

"I look forward to seeing the day there is a solution, a cure."

Jason began the journey of making "RETT: THERE IS HOPE" in the Pacific Palisades, California. "I borrowed lights from a friend, a pickup from another friend and met our volunteer Director of Photography and cameraman there." Jason travelled from Los Angeles to Connecticut, Scotland, London, and Houston, to make the documentary. He speaks of the possibility of divine intervention because people he had never met stepped up to donate their time right at the moment he needed it.

411 Optimistic Way

The nomination for “Queen”

By Kelly McSpadden

I was nominated to be a candidate for “Queen” in the 2012 Chocolate Fest by my former boss at Made in Paradise, Abby. Abby thought my participation in this annual fundraiser for non-profit youth organizations in Paradise and Magalia would be a great opportunity for me to grow by meeting new people and becoming more aware of the needs in my community.

I was excited to meet and work with other men and women in the community who wanted to help our youth by being in the Chocolate Fest. I had two sponsors that helped me be a part of the Chocolate Fest “Royale.” One of my sponsors was AMJaMB Supported Living Services and the other was Made in Paradise. Their support was vital to my campaign and I couldn’t have done it without them! Thank you!

It was time consuming and hard work to be a Chocolate Fest Queen candidate because I needed help raising money for my campaign. Every dollar I raised counted as one “vote” for me to become queen, and went right to 21 different youth organizations in the Paradise community, so I didn’t have any time or energy to waste. Made in Paradise helped me greatly in organizing two great fundraisers. One event was a movie showing with raffle and cupcake walk. The other one was an open house at Made in Paradise. I would like to thank my co-workers who donated the proceeds of the sale of their art to my campaign and to everyone who helped me organize the fundraisers and attended them. You made my campaign successful. Thanks for supporting our youth!

As our campaigns were drawing to an end, the Chocolate Fest Royale candidates were invited to be on a local morning news program to promote the Fest. However, I didn't make it because I arrived late. I felt disappointed at myself, but I had the chance to make up for it by speaking in front of 4th and 5th grade students at a local elementary school later that day. During my presentation, I shared with them a little bit about my life, where I work, and my involvement with the community in hopes of educating them about different disabilities. The students were really taking in what I was saying and several asked me questions at the end. I felt happy that I could contribute to my community by teaching local kids something they may have not known before.

On the day of the Chocolate Fest, while we waited for the coronation ceremony, my fellow candidates and I had a great time laughing together and eating chocolate. I was really happy that I had the chance to meet and work with such a great group of people. Although I didn't win the Chocolate Fest Queen position, the experiences I had, the friends I made, and the personal growth I experienced made me a winner anyway. I grew as a community member, becoming more aware of what my community needs and how I can help local programs, including ones I've personally benefited from. I grew as a public speaker, getting the chance to educate others by sharing openly and practicing the delivery of my message. I also grew socially, gaining new friends and a stronger bond to my community.

HOW DIVERSITY ROCKS

By the students in "Coffeeville"

Mrs. Coffee
Teacher
3rd and 4th grade combination class
Paradise Elementary School
Paradise, CA

Diversity is defined in the dictionary as "the condition or fact of being different." People are very diverse, and there are many qualities that make each of us unique.

We also, however, have a lot in common. Our class feels that similarities make us feel closer to each other, and our differences make us strong as a human family.

People are the same in many ways. Human beings are mammals. Mammals all have hearts, brains, and even blood vessels. They need to eat in order to have energy. Sometimes we get sick and don't feel well, while other times we're healthy and happy. We realize that all people have feelings and want something good or great from life. Everybody wants to protect the people they love, and each of us has the ability to make the world a better place. Clearly, we have a lot in common with each other.

Class of 2013
3rd and 4th grade combination class
Paradise Elementary School
Paradise, CA

People are also different in many ways. Some kids like school, yet others don't. Kids even go to a variety of schools: some of us are homeschooled, others go to public schools, and yet others go to special schools like a school for the blind. When we're at school, kids think and learn in different ways. For example, some of us are very artistic while others think of things more logically, or shine at reading or music.

Like abilities, different personalities also make people unique. Some people are good at certain swimming strokes; others are good at helping others, playing an instrument, or writing stories. Still other people can't swim, see, hear, or write at all. We also have our own things we like and don't like. For example, some people like Halloween and others are scared of it. Many of us have different accents, styles, and even skin colors. We know that people have many kinds of shoes, yet some people don't have any, and still others don't even have feet to put them on. Differences make each of us ourselves and unique.

HOW DIVERSITY ROCKS

continued

By the students in "Coffeeville"

These differences also make us stronger as a human family. If everyone was the same, hardly anything would have been invented because people's brains would all work the same way. Then we wouldn't have things like computers, medicine, cars, and even T.V. Since people are different, we can learn from each other. Our friends can teach us new games, new languages, how to kick a ball, and new points of view.

Because people have different abilities, they can also teach us different ways to look at the world. Deaf people can give us a whole other language, while handicapped kids can teach us about patience and even having a positive attitude. A blind artist can teach us about determination!

People with different personalities give us different perspectives, too. Some are funny, many are kind, and others are strong and stick up for you. Each shows us their own way to look at a situation.

One more important point is that without diversity, life would be boring. There wouldn't be different sports to watch, foods to eat, things to do, clothes to wear, books to read, movies to watch…our list could go on and on! We're glad that there are different people in the world!

As you can see, we have many things in common with other human beings, yet we are different in many ways, too. Our similarities make us feel closer as a human family, and our differences make our lives better, more interesting, and fun!

One more important point is that without diversity, life would be boring.

HOW DIVERSITY ROCKS continued

By the students in "Taylorsville"

Mrs. Taylor
Teacher
4th grade class
Paradise Elementary School
Paradise, CA

There are many, many different people in this world, and we are all very important.

There are many, many different people in this world, and we are all very important. Some people are more challenged than others because they have something called a disability. It is usually something they are born with, and it's not anyone's fault. A disability is not what defines a person. It is just something they need to work around. Even though things may be more difficult for them, people with disabilities can do amazing things!

All people are important. People with disabilities can have a special talent that not everyone else has. For example, someone with a disability could draw better than someone else, or could read higher level books. Everyone is important because we all play a part in this life on Earth.

Some people have something called autism. This is very different from person to person. Some people with autism are bothered by noises. Sometimes they like to line things up in a row. It is kind of hard for them to communicate, but they can definitely learn a lot! They can learn how to do good things. One good thing they can learn is how to play games. They could learn how to play soccer, football, or Go Fish. They can also learn how to take turns and be a good friend.

Some people can't see very well, or are blind. This does not mean that they aren't really awesome people. Did you know that some people see colors differently? It doesn't matter. Did you know that blind people can still sense light? They can still do everything just as well as anyone else. Some people that are blind can listen very closely to things. Their hearing can get so strong that they can even help people that can't hear! These people use their sense of touch to feel things. People that don't see well can still read books! Some books are talking books, and some books have bumps. That is called Braille. Blind people can use super special dogs that have been trained to help them get around. Sometimes they don't need a dog, but they use a special cane. Blind people can still go to the park and play board games. They sometimes learn to memorize things so they know where things are. For example, Helen Keller was a very famous blind and deaf woman who learned to read and even went to college. So, truly, people with a vision disability can still do many wonderful things.

HOW DIVERSITY ROCKS continued

By the students in "Taylorsville"

Some people can't hear at all, and some people have a hard time hearing. They can use sign language. They can have conversations with other people if they use sign language, and they will understand what they are saying even though their ears don't work that well. Some people who can't hear very well can read lips and tell what people are saying. That is pretty incredible! People can use hearing aids to help them overcome this challenge. They may just need people to speak up a little bit. That isn't hard to do, and it is worth it because they have so much to offer.

Some people can't walk and need to be in a wheelchair. They can still do lots of things. Stores and buildings have ramps so they can be independent. They can still go places by themselves because the wheelchairs have motors. Some people can just use their arms to turn wheels, too. It can be fun to sit on their lap and go down a slope. They can still take pictures of their family or places they like to visit. They can still play sports like basketball. We even know of people that do track and field activities in a wheelchair. Nothing is going to slow them down!

Even though there are billions of people on Earth, in many ways we are all the same. We can all breathe. We all eat and drink. We all sleep, and we all need exercise. We all have blood in our bodies in order to live. We all have families and enjoy having friends. We can all touch things. We all can go outside. We all have a favorite color. We all have feelings. We feel things like love, hate, sadness, happiness, relaxation, and excitement. We may do things differently, but we all feel the same. It's not like people have different emotions. We all have a dream for ourselves. Some of us may want to make videos, become a veterinarian, or become a famous singer. Everyone should be able to make his or her dream come true. We all have good things and bad things that happen in our lives. We can all have someone to love throughout it all. When you really think about it, all people have things that are tricky for them. No one knows everything, after all, and that makes the world a much more interesting place to live.

No matter what we look or act like, we are all important. Do you have friends with disabilities? If you don't, make one! Go up to them and give them a hug. They are smart just like us, so don't bully them. Don't forget: no one is worth more than someone else. How would you feel if someone judged you just by the way you looked or acted? Whatever you do, do not underestimate people with challenges in their lives. They are amazing and successful in life, and we feel privileged to know them!

Tray Robinson
A Man of Diversity

Tray Robinson is one of the most fascinating people I have had the opportunity to meet, interview, and write about. Tray is the Director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion—a respectable and influential department at California State University, Chico.

On the day of our interview, I was a bit early and decided to wander the school campus' Kendall Hall—curious about who worked in the same building as Tray. I found the Office of the President, the Office of Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, and other members of the leadership responsible for maintaining a "record of distinction in teaching, scholarship, research, and service" at Chico State.

What does diversity and inclusion mean when a university strives to maintain a record of distinction?

According to Tray, "There is still the assumption that diversity is only about race ethnicity. Many don't get the bigger scope about what diversity means. My role as Director at the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is to foster opportunities so that all members of this institution are accepted, welcome, celebrated, feel safe here, and that we all embody diversity."

Tray thought further and said, "There is something that bothers me beyond the subject of what people think what the term 'diversity' represents. I was watching the speeches from the Democratic National Convention and just cannot understand why any person should not have an opportunity to have equality in healthcare, the right to marry, the right to hold hands in public with their partner—no matter Republican or Democrat."

I *just don't understand.*

"I am often reminded of a famous quote in a speech delivered in 1857 by Frederick Douglass—a man born into slavery: *If there is no struggle, there is no progress.* Well, I am not a patient man when it comes to creating change. I want change now! Why should I have to wait for the next generation to receive equality? Why can't I experience that now? Why do I have to wait?

"I value higher education"

"I love to see students get here and go through the whole education process, see them challenged, and graduate. I love to see them learn about their identity and how that changes them. I watch how students build upon their self-esteem. I know a young man who moved from the Bay Area to attend Chico State. His style of clothing caused a few people to judge him without getting to know him. A comment such as, 'You look gay,' was hurtful. But since his involvement in diversity work, the comments don't bother him anymore. It is not a big deal to him anymore."

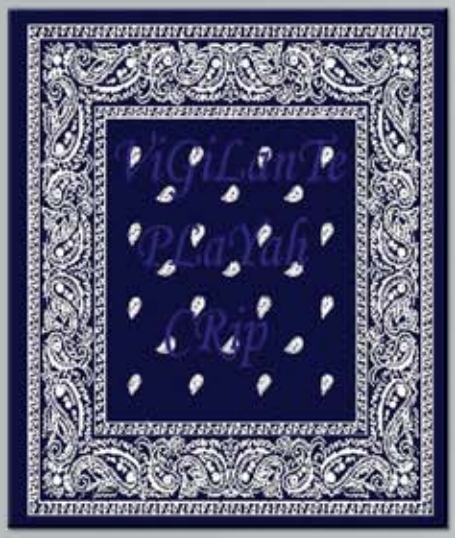
It is unfortunate that people do make assumptions about others without getting to know them as human beings. Often judgments are made based on how a person looks, their sexuality, their skin color, their physical or mental challenges, their traditions and holiday practices. Tray has been threatened by others and called many terrible names, especially when people begin to recognize that change is occurring in attitudes, in practices, and in the progress toward equality. "But as I see it, the bonus is that people are talking about diversity," said Tray.

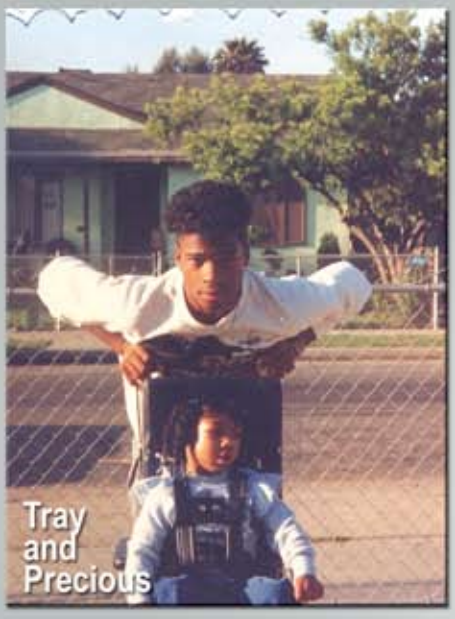
Carrying a flame that exudes the passion of diversity never dies out. But Tray always has to watch what he says, how he says it, to whom he says it, and under what circumstances. "It is mentally draining a lot of times. I am always in self-reflection and will sometimes tell myself, 'That was really inappropriate to say.'" Tray wants the world to accept and respect who he is, where he came from, the life he leads, and the beliefs he carries. But sometimes, the world is not ready to hear it.

Disability is also a significant and important part of Tray's life. His mom has legal guardianship for his 27-year-old niece. "Precious cannot see, she cannot walk, and she cannot talk. She is an inspiration—her desire to live and to love is beautiful. So, when someone uses terms such as 'gay,' or 'retarded,' even as slang, and they have been educated about the hurt it causes, it is unacceptable. In college we expect more."

In Tray's mind and in his work, equality is not complicated but simply about humanity and loving your neighbor. This is a rather remarkable ideal considering where Tray's life began, and where he lived growing up. He did not choose the environment he was born in to. He did choose to find opportunity in his circumstances, and he did choose to teach others how to do the same.

In the early 1970s, Tray was born in Los Angeles and raised in its south-central city of Compton among one of the most violent gangs. He frequently witnessed prostitution, drug use, and murder, lost family and friends at the hands of another, and has even been shot at. Acts of violence were everywhere. Nowhere was safe.




Tray and Precious

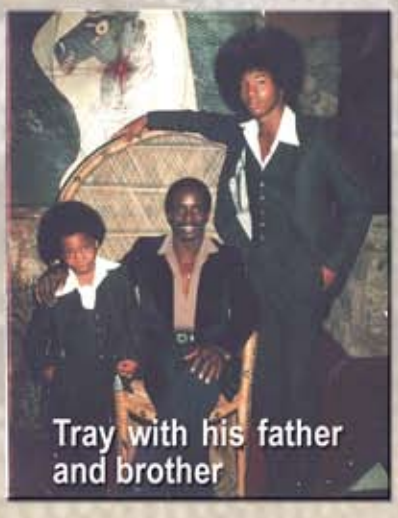
In the early 1970s, Tray was born in Los Angeles and raised in its south-central city of Compton among one of the most violent gangs.

Tray, a man of diversity

continued

Prior to his birth, his parents moved from Memphis, Tennessee to California so his dad could pursue a music career. Tray's dad was a keyboarder and lead singer in a Funk Band. "My dad got caught up in the musician lifestyle. After he moved his family to Compton he got involved in sex, drugs and rock and roll. This changed the dynamics of our family. He started seeing another woman and I will never forget the pain in my mother's face when she found out. I was very angry at my dad for what he did to my mom."

Beale St. Memphis, Tennessee


Tray with his father and brother

Tray and his Sax

Despite his decision to leave the family, Tray's dad came back to visit his children often. His dad's love for music was always a significant part of their lives. "Dad would dress us boys up in three piece suits and sneak us in to the clubs so we could hear and watch him play in his band." When Tray's dad came over to visit, he and his band would fill the streets with the amazing sounds of garage-band funk music. "People from the neighborhoods would flock to hear them play and dance in the streets." All the pain, all the violence was lost for a moment in the rhythm of the music. "Music brings people together."

Tray had friends that were members of the gangs in Compton. Although he chose not to join a gang or get involved in their activities, his friendships with them is what kept him alive. "Those were just the people in your neighborhood that you hang out with. They protected me." They protected Tray from the violence they lived by and embraced to survive. And perhaps in return, Tray was their ray of hope.

Tray lived and attended elementary and junior high school on the Crips side of town—one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. The high school he attended was on the turf of the Crips' archenemy, the Bloods. "I made an effort to change my look when I started high school, so I didn't stand out."

The gangs in South Central Los Angeles identify themselves through colors, clothing, tattoos, jewelry, language, hand signs, and symbols. What a person wore literally meant the difference between life and death.

"A bridge separated the Crips side of town from the Bloods side. I had to cross that bridge to go to high school and had to cross it going home. On my first day of high school, I was walking home across that bridge and I was shot at from the Bloods side of town. It was likely a shooting in retaliation to a shooting from a day or two before."

Now they knew where Tray lived and even his clothes could not hide the truth.

Throughout the interview, Tray never expressed regret about his life growing up, nor did he portray himself as a victim of life's circumstances. "Regardless of everything that happened, I appreciate how I was raised. It made me who I am and I make opportunity out of life's challenges. I chose to see the good stuff, not the bad stuff. It shaped my life."

Tray knew in junior high school that he would not stay in Compton. So, he focused on school, his music, and sports, which kept him out of trouble and was his ticket out of town. As the end of his public education approached, he wrote a letter and sent a highlight video of himself to the football coach at Chico State reciting his accomplishments in sports and in school, along with his desire to leave Compton and to receive a higher education. The coach was impressed enough that Tray was recruited to play football at Chico State.

Tray, a man of diversity

continued

Tray came to Chico in 1989 at the age of 18, and suffered significant culture shock. The city he grew up in, his neighborhood, and his family and his friends were mostly Latino and Black. Chico's population was nearly 90% white. One day, after living in Chico for two or three years, Tray witnessed something he had only seen in movies and videos. The Ku Klux Klan was standing on a street corner by a Chevron station near downtown. They were wearing their white robes, white masks, and white conical hats—intended to terrify, while hiding their identity at the same time. "I was freaked out when I saw the KKK as I drove by. But in Compton there is ignorance and discrimination, too. It is wherever you go."

Among the first things Tray did upon his arrival in Chico was to gather needed support. He had grown up going to church—an all-day Sunday commitment—and found support there. He thought that church would be a good place to start. "I attended one of the two all-black churches in Chico at the time. But the first service was about homosexuality and how it was a sin.

"I am a gay man."

Tray never went back to that same church. Still, he quested after a community of support that would appreciate the humanity of everyone's journey. He found a church and began serving on the worship team, but they did not know his secret. A profound desire to be accepted, to be honest with himself and others, Tray felt there came a time to let the church pastor know about his sexuality. The pastor "suggested" he leave the worship team.

"I have since found a church to attend and I have shared my homosexuality with the pastor. He has been very supportive and encouraging. He has been honest with his views and the church's views, and I have been honest with mine.

"It was hardest to tell my fraternity brothers and my mom that I was gay." Tray sent a mass email to his fraternity brothers hitting them hard with his true identity. He let them all know that if they were unwilling to accept him, then there was nothing more to talk about. It is admittedly easier to press "send" than to face the numbers who may judge you. But, telling his mom was especially difficult. "I planned on telling her when she came to Chico on vacation, but had so much anxiety about it, I just couldn't." The possibility of being rejected by his mom held his heart and his words hostage.

Although Tray did introduce his partner to his mom, he did not tell her the circumstances of their life together. His partner is older, white, and a farmer.

He got the strength to call his mom on the phone once she returned home. His mom said, "I always knew, Tray. I just waited for you to tell me. How could a mother not love her child?"
While Tray does not have many regrets, he feels badly about not having expressed the brotherly love he feels during his brother's time of need. Tray's older brother was gay. He contracted HIV and died of AIDS in 2000, and how he contracted HIV remains unknown. "Our family did not support my brother like we should have. We didn't talk about it enough and it never came out that I was gay. We could have done more. "

In his journey to heal from what he did not do to support his brother, Tray got certified to be an HIV test counselor. This year he is chair of the First Annual Chico AIDS walk/run, which raises money for HIV test kits and free local testing. Tray also participates in the AIDS Lifecycle Ride—a 545-mile bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles to raise awareness and financial support to end HIV/AIDS. "It helps me to forgive myself. There is a time during the ride that a candlelight vigil is held and I have conversations with my brother. I let him know that I continue to ride for him, and that I hope he and my dad are playing music together."

Tray participates in the AIDS Lifecycle Ride–a 545-mile bike ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Tray, a man of diversity

continued

Tray's dad died in 1995 of a massive heart attack. "I did tell my dad I loved him, but I wish I would have told him how much and more often."

Unspoken feelings can make one feel tremendous regret.

"I don't deal with death well. I have lost so many good friends and my dad, my brother, and my grandma. A lot of people I love in my life are older than me, like 20 years. Getting close to people scares me. I feel vulnerable—something could happen to them."

Tray is an exceptional member of his community. He holds a position of the utmost importance at a major university—a position that changes lives in significant and important ways. He serves on the board of the Chico Arts Commission because he loves art. He serves on the Chico City Police Advisory Board, and remains committed to honoring his brother through his involvement in HIV/AIDS fundraisers and other awareness campaigns. Then of course, he has his music and still every now and then opens the case where his saxophone rests—the one his dad brought home as a gift when he was in the 3rd grade, nearly 35 years ago.

Tray's advocacy and the choices that he has made along his life's path has left an indelible mark on everyone he has met.

photo by Tray Robinson

Photography by Tray Robinson

An Invitation *to know* Steve

By Terry Kozloff

I do not believe many people know the depth of who Steve is. But, God does.

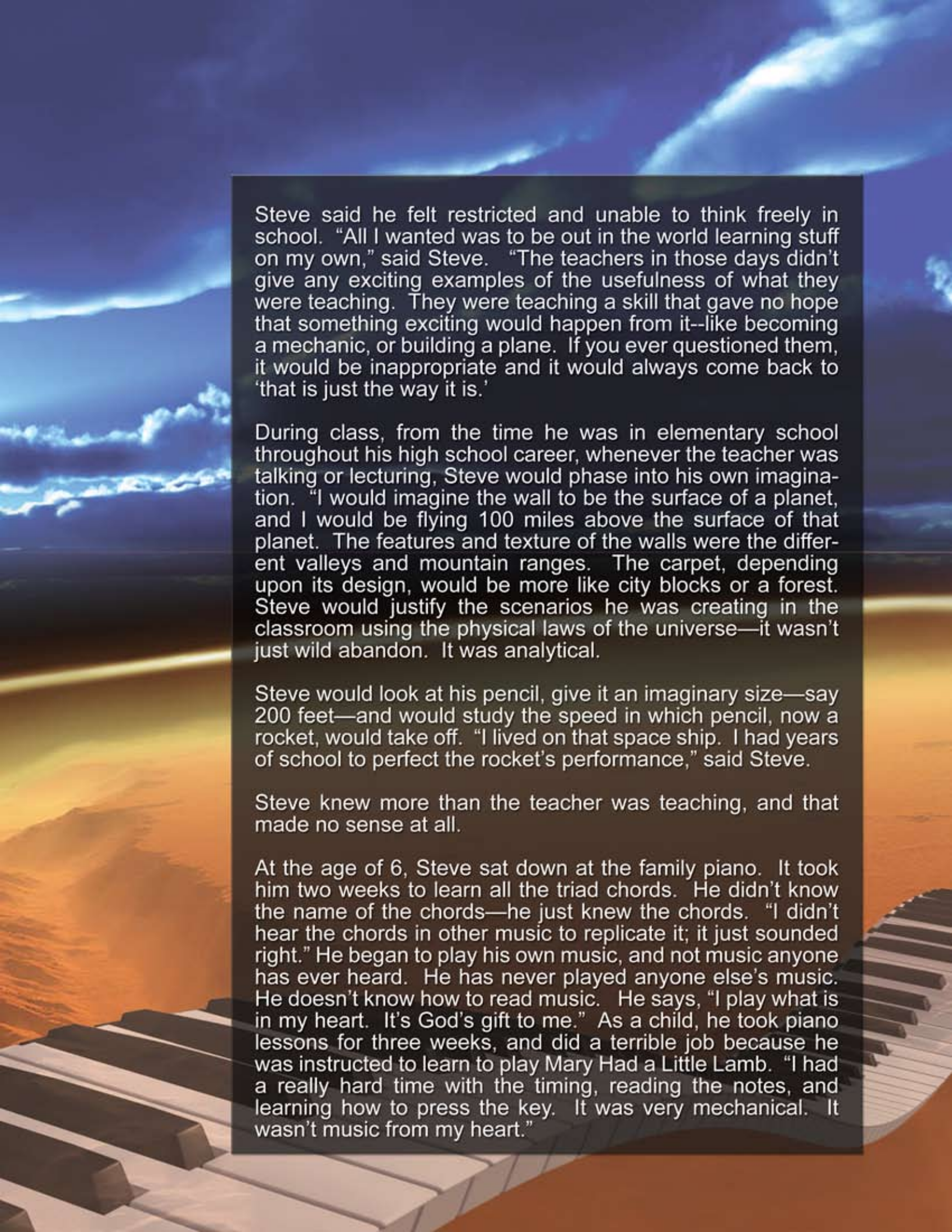
Steve is a very humble man--a Godly man. He has long hair that he wears in a pony tail, and doesn't wear shoes unless he has to. His repertoire of shoes consists of flip flops that he leaves in the car in case he needs to throw them on to enter a public building. He wears shorts all year round, and doesn't need shoes for the snow.

Steve had a very difficult time in public school and never pursued college. The only book he reads is the Bible and he learns everything else from observing others, talking to others, looking at pictures, and watching videos.

As a child, Steve says he had trouble in school because he could not understand what the teachers were trying to teach him. "It didn't make any sense to me," said Steve. He would find his mind wandering, using his pencil as a rocket, and imagining he was travelling in space witnessing all of the beauty and miracles space has to offer.

In fact he shared with me the other morning the dream he had the night before. He was an astronaut traveling to Mars. It took him nearly six months to get there. He described the atmosphere, the feel of the rocks he touched, and said, "Mars is a lot like Earth." He even described his return toward Earth, the welcoming he and his fellow astronauts were expecting, and how he looked forward to holding me again.

I asked Steve to explain to me, in simple terms, what he meant when he said he couldn't understand what the teachers were teaching. He said, "For example, we would be given a test in class with several questions and the class was instructed to select the most appropriate answer from four possibilities for each question. A question might be, 'What color is the sky?' The four possibilities might include blue, red, black, and orange. To me, the answer was all four, but we were told there was only one right answer. I would become very confused and unable to answer the question at all, or would simply circle anything. I didn't do well."



Steve said he felt restricted and unable to think freely in school. "All I wanted was to be out in the world learning stuff on my own," said Steve. "The teachers in those days didn't give any exciting examples of the usefulness of what they were teaching. They were teaching a skill that gave no hope that something exciting would happen from it--like becoming a mechanic, or building a plane. If you ever questioned them, it would be inappropriate and it would always come back to 'that is just the way it is.'

During class, from the time he was in elementary school throughout his high school career, whenever the teacher was talking or lecturing, Steve would phase into his own imagination. "I would imagine the wall to be the surface of a planet, and I would be flying 100 miles above the surface of that planet. The features and texture of the walls were the different valleys and mountain ranges. The carpet, depending upon its design, would be more like city blocks or a forest. Steve would justify the scenarios he was creating in the classroom using the physical laws of the universe—it wasn't just wild abandon. It was analytical.

Steve would look at his pencil, give it an imaginary size—say 200 feet—and would study the speed in which pencil, now a rocket, would take off. "I lived on that space ship. I had years of school to perfect the rocket's performance," said Steve.

Steve knew more than the teacher was teaching, and that made no sense at all.

At the age of 6, Steve sat down at the family piano. It took him two weeks to learn all the triad chords. He didn't know the name of the chords—he just knew the chords. "I didn't hear the chords in other music to replicate it; it just sounded right." He began to play his own music, and not music anyone has ever heard. He has never played anyone else's music. He doesn't know how to read music. He says, "I play what is in my heart. It's God's gift to me." As a child, he took piano lessons for three weeks, and did a terrible job because he was instructed to learn to play Mary Had a Little Lamb. "I had a really hard time with the timing, reading the notes, and learning how to press the key. It was very mechanical. It wasn't music from my heart."

An Invitation *to know* Steve continued

Over many years as an adult, Steve played in numerous church bands and while there was established music to play, he would play the piano around the music of the rest of the band. Every time it was different. "The only sheet music I had were the chords A, B, and C, etc. written on a piece of plain paper. Not the notes, just the letter. I didn't always play the chord, but would play notes encompassed by the chord."

Before his teenage years, Steve would study how airplanes flew--the wind and the controls. "I would look up the controls in the encyclopedia and would visualize how to use them. I would make airplane models and imagine how they would fly. I was studying airplanes for years and years," said Steve.

At the age of 15, Steve took a weeklong course in the desert and flew 8 times a day and became a certified glider pilot. At 16, he took lessons to fly a power plane.

Schweizer SGS 2-33A the training glider Steve learned in

When I first met Steve, he tried to explain how his mind worked. He said, "Terry, when you see a car driving down the street, you notice the car, its color, its shape, and maybe the make and model. I see the individual parts that make up the car."

Steve and I went to the same school in Santa Barbara, attending the same classes together in the 1960s. Our paths crossed many, many times over the decades- having friends in common and countless times I passed by the house he lived in for 20 years that was only a mile away from mine.

We met only nine years ago and celebrated our 8th wedding anniversary this year.

There is no doubt, we were meant to be.

An Invitation *to know* Steve continued

Steve is an engineer--not an engineer of one discipline, but an engineer of many disciplines.

I have witnessed firsthand Steve building a 20-feet wide by 30-feet long by 23 feet high, metal building with 400-pound steel beams, without anything but a used ATC and a pulley, while wearing shorts, no shirt, and no shoes. If I hadn't witnessed it with my own eyes, it just wouldn't seem possible.

Steve is a jeweler of fine jewelry, a carpenter, an electrician, a builder, a mechanic, a plumber, graphic designer and so much more—a true Renaissance man. He is designing and engineering a private plane that he has named "Pegasus," so we can travel the world together.

Steve is a man that understands what people are saying in other languages, even though he does not read or speak the language. He knows what I'm thinking even though I'm thinking in secret. So, when he says to me, "What's your brain doing?" I say, "Nothing. It's empty." Then, he tells me what I'm thinking anyway.

There are no secrets from Steve.

Steve is an animal whisperer. I've seen him pick up a little bird sitting on the ground as if the bird was waiting for him. The bird just sat in his hand for ten minutes until it flew away. I've seen him train dogs without one word or even the simplest of gestures. It's as if they read each other's minds. I've seen hummingbirds fly up and hover inches from his face looking straight at each other in the eyes. Steve says they are having a chat.

Steve is a quiet man and speaks in a tone that is barely audible at times. It's almost as if he spoke too loud, it would shatter the peace he shares with God. Steve described to me one day what it will be like when I arrive in Heaven—the music playing and the angels singing. Tears were rolling down his face—tears of joy that I have never witnessed before.

Steve has travelled the world, all on a dime and the gifts he carries with him. His gifts are so plentiful, that the value is far greater than any amount of money anyone could have. His gifts are what pay his way and he never runs short.

Life with Steve is always exciting. I asked him once, "How could you possibly have known what I was thinking?" He said, "It would be too much for me to share everything with you all at once, Terry."

I wonder what I will uncover next.

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A company that does it right

In Motion Fitness
Chico, California

By Domenic Console

My family enjoys an In Motion Fitness health club membership. The staff are wonderful! They treat everyone the same. No matter a person's age, gender, or disability, the staff never misses a beat in treating people kindly, respectfully, and they are always helpful in every way possible.

My youngest son has autism. On the first day of swimming lessons at In Motion Fitness, I mentioned this to Megan, the swim instructor from North Valley Swim School. Megan was reassuring and shared with me her experience teaching other children with autism. As frightened as my son was of the water, Megan's patience gave my son the opportunity to learn how to be "water safe" on his own terms and at his own speed.

When Megan interacted with my youngest son, she treated him no differently than she treated my two older sons. She did not speak loudly to him or treat him like he was broken. My wife and I want and expect him to be treated like everyone else. In return, he learns an important lesson that tells him, "I am not different than other children." He enjoyed the swimming lessons so much he continues to ask when we are going swimming again.

Little do people understand how important they are in other's lives. This is my opportunity to let In Motion Fitness and Megan know how important they are and have been to my family.

Thank you to the leadership of In Motion Fitness and North Valley Swim School, and all of their staff—you set the example for others to follow.
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Early Signs of
Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

AT 12 MONTHS

- A child with typical development will turn his head when he hears his name
- A child with an ASD might not turn to look, even after his name is repeated several times, but will respond to other sounds

AT 18 MONTHS

- A child with delayed speech skills will point, gesture, or use facial expressions to make up for her lack of talking
- A child with an ASD might make no attempt to compensate for delayed speech or might limit speech to parroting what is heard on TV or what she just heard

AT 24 MONTHS

- A child without an ASD brings a picture to show his mother and shares his joy from it with her
- A child with an ASD might bring her a bottle of bubbles to open but doesn't look at his mom's face when he does or share in the pleasure of playing together

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Far Northern Regional Center

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AMJaMB

AMJaMB *Supported Living Services and Beyond Inclusion Day Services* strive to be examples of how people with disabilities can be and are a part of the natural course of life. AMJaMB is about giving, quality of life, self-esteem, and being appreciated for one's presence in the world in which we all live.

AMJaMB grew from the hearts of its co-owners, Domenic Console and Terry Kozloff- each of them a parent of a child with disabilities. Domenic's son Michael, has autism; Terry's son Ben, is deaf-blind, and quadriplegic.

Every letter and color in "AMJaMB" represents the love and respect Domenic and Terry have for all of their children and their uniqueness. Before entering the office, they glance at the sign on their office door and reaffirm AMJaMB's philosophy that every person is as much a natural part of the human experience as **A**nthony, **M**ichael, **J**oseph, **a**nd **M**ichelle and **B**en are.

Ben is not a victim of his blindness; he can see things those of us with eyes cannot. Ben is not bound to his wheelchair; it gives him freedom.

Michael's autism is not who he is; it's a perspective he has.

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