

Volume 1, Issue 4

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BECOMING YOUR BEST

Stories Of Hope And Encouragement About Individuals With Disabilities

Becoming Your Best Newsletter

Welcome to all of our new subscribers! We would like to thank everyone for their positive feedback and support of this project. The response has been very encouraging. It indicates to me that this project serves a useful purpose and was truly needed. We trust it will be uplifting to you.

This month we are doing something a little different. The first article is an excerpt from a Press Kit of a newly released movie titled *The Horse Boy*. This movie is based on the best-selling book by the same name. It is about a young boy who was diagnosed with autism when he was about two years old. This great movie (and book) exemplify the struggles that many parents go through in endeavoring to get help for their child.

The film's Director and Cinematographer was Michel Orion Scott and it was produced by Rupert Isaacson, who is the father of Rowan (the horse boy.) Rupert also wrote the book.

You can read more about the movie under the STORIES tab on our website at www.becomingyourbest.com. You may also go directly to The Horse Boy Movie website at www.horseboymoive.com.

The second article is the first in a series of articles written by yours truly. This article sets the stage for understanding the reasoning behind the title "Becoming Your Best." This series of articles will present, what I call, positive, practical practices that are the "basics" for anyone being successful and making gains toward "Becoming Your Best."

We would appreciate your sharing this newsletter with others. Please help support our effort by sending your inspiring stories about individuals with disabilities to the following e-mail address:
stories@becomingyourbest.com.

To subscribe to our FREE newsletter, please send an e-mail to:
newsletter@becomingyourbest.com.

The photograph of the eagle is by Bob Sumners. See his work at:
www.shootthebeach.com.

Mission:

We are dedicated to presenting inspiring stories of hope and encouragement about individuals with disabilities.

These stories of success are meant to provide support and the keys to "Becoming Your Best!"

Thank you for your stories and your support!

George M. Graham Jr.

THE HORSE BOY. LONG SYNOPSIS (EXERPT TAKEN FROM THE PRESS KIT.) A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE—2009

The horse bunches its muscles for the final steep ascent of the high mountain pass. The rider leans forward to help him, trying at the same time not to crush his five-year-old autistic son, Rowan, sitting in the saddle in front of him. Before them stretches a vast wilderness of high tundra. Somewhere in there is the shaman the father is seeking. "Will he heal my son?" the father asks himself. "Will he even know how?"

In *The Horse Boy*, filmmaker Michel Orion Scott captures a magical journey into a little known world. The documentary feature chronicles Rupert Isaacson and Kristin Neff's very personal odyssey as they struggle to make sense of their child's autism and find healing for him and themselves in this unlikeliest of places.



A complex condition that dramatically affects social interaction and communication skills, autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability today. With more children diagnosed each year than with cancer, diabetes, Down syndrome and AIDS combined, it is estimated in the U.S. alone, cases of autism could reach four million in the next decade. While theories on its origins abound, there is no consensus in the medical community on either causes or treatment.

Rowan Isaacson was diagnosed with autism in April 2004, at age two and a half. The charming, animated child had ceased speaking. He retreated into himself for hours at a time, screamed inconsolably for no apparent reason, flapped his arms and babbled. For the Isaacsons, as for so many other parents, autism seemed to have snatched away their child's soul.

Rowan's parents, Rupert Isaacson, a human rights worker, author and former professional horse trainer, and Kristin Neff, a psychology professor, sought out the best medical care for him. But orthodox therapies had little effect on Rowan.



Then came the day Rowan ran away from his father, got through the fence of their neighbor's horse pasture, and in amongst the hooves of the horse herd. Rupert had stopped riding since Rowan's autism had kicked in, thinking it unsafe for his son to be around horses. Now he froze, heart in mouth, praying Rowan would not get trampled. Instead, the herd's boss horse, a notoriously grumpy old mare named Betsy, pushed the other horses away, bent her head to Rowan, and began to lick and chew with her lips, the equine sign of submission. Rupert had never seen a horse voluntarily make this obeisance to a human being before. Something direct, something beautiful, was clearly passing between boy and horse.

So Isaacson began to ride with Rowan on Betsy every day, and Rowan—amazingly—began to talk, to engage with the outside world. He asked himself, was there a place on the planet that combined horses and healing? He did some research: the country where the horse was first domesticated, where the nomadic horse life is still lived by most of its people, is also the one county where shamanism—healing at its most raw and direct—is the state religion. Mongolia.

What if he were to take Rowan there, thought Rupert, riding on horseback from shaman to shaman? What would happen?

THE HORSE BOY CONTINUED

The Horse Boy follows Rupert, Kristin and Rowan through the summer of 2007 as they traverse Mongolia on their quest. From the wild open Steppe to the sacred Lake Sharga, and deep into Siberia, they are tested to their limits individually, as a couple, as a family. They find their son is accepted, even treasured for his differences. In a world steeped in mystical tradition and hardscrabble reality, Rowan makes dramatic leaps forward, astonishing—the film reveals—both his parents and himself.



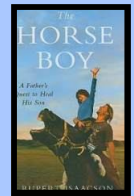
The film also includes interviews with some of the foremost experts in the field of autism including Dr. Simon Baron-Cohen (cousin of comedian Sacha Baron-Cohen) of Cambridge University; anthropologist and researcher Roy Richard Grinker of the George Washington University; and Dr. Temple Grandin, who is a professor of animal behavior at Colorado State University and who herself has autism. She is also the author of [Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior](#), and, more recently, [Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals](#).

The Horse Boy is part travel adventure, part insight into shamanic tradition and part intimate look at the autistic mind. In telling one family's extraordinary story, the film gives voice to the thousands of families who display amazing courage and creativity everyday in the battle against this mysterious and heartbreaking epidemic. Above all, it gives insight into how, in life's darkest moments, one can find the gateway to joy and wonder.



[The Horse Boy](#)
(the movie)

[The Horse Boy : A Father's Quest to Heal His Son](#)
(the book)



Both the movie and the book can be purchased through the www.becomingyourbest.com website. Or you can order direct through the www.horseboymovie.com website.

SEE IT BIG BUT, KEEP IT SIMPLE

By George M. Graham Jr.

A wise man once taught me a great principle to utilize when I was confronted with an apparent overwhelming obstacle in my life. He told me that I needed to “see it big, but keep it simple.” By endeavoring to heed his advice in several difficult situations, I was finally able to comprehend what he meant.

When we are dealing with any of life's challenges, we should strive to maintain a positive mental attitude, with high expectations— “see it big.” Additionally, we must keep in mind that in order to achieve any worthy goal, we must take one step at a time to accomplish it— “keep it simple.”

If we will put forth the time and effort necessary, while maintaining a positive mental attitude with high expectations, we can be more successful. By practicing the principle of “see it big, but keep it simple,” we can more effectively deal with stressful situations and overcome obstacles. We can achieve goals and objectives by taking one step at a time.

For over 30 years, this advice has been instrumental in helping me in my work with students with disabilities. It has helped me to provide encouragement and support to the parents of these students, and it has helped me to provide helpful advice when consulting with teachers.

When I began my career in 1975, special education in the public school system was still a relatively new concept. There was very limited knowledge and understanding of what special education really entailed.

SEE IT BIG, BUT KEEP IT SIMPLE CONTINUED

Up until 1975, there was little implementation of special education in the public school system. In fact, there were some disabled students who were not even allowed to attend school because they were perceived as not being capable of being educated. Parents were placed in a position of either keeping their disabled child at home or placing their child in an institution.

In those early years of special education, the students with disabilities who were allowed to enroll in school were usually taught in a separate area of the building or in a separate building all together. I can remember special education classes being housed in basements of school buildings or in rooms that were small enough to be closets. It gave the appearance that keeping these students separated from the rest of the population was a priority.

Things began to change when in 1975 Congress passed Public Law 94-142 (Education of all Handicapped Children Act) which later became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.) This was among the first of many laws to be passed by Congress to help protect and assure that there would be no discrimination of individuals with disabilities. IDEA, more specifically guaranteed that all students with disabilities would have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE.)

Today, students with disabilities are afforded an education under drastically improved circumstances as compared to just 30 some years ago. These strides are due to a variety of reasons that include enacting and implementing laws; the lobbying efforts by parents, educators and organizations on behalf of students with disabilities; and the on-going research in best practices in special education. These have all helped to contribute to many positive changes in the way services are provided to students with disabilities.

As I reflect on my early years in special education, I remember feeling somewhat unprepared and inadequate for the job that I was undertaking. Much of what I learned came through trial and error or by observing other educators. I came to realize that I was learning about special education as the field of special education was also going through its own stages of growth and development.

The purpose of this series of articles is to share some of the basic positive, practical practices that I have learned over the years. These are practical practices that parents can use to help their children, teachers can use to help their students, and students can use to improve themselves. These positive, practical practices are based on my years of experience from four different perspectives.

One perspective is that of a student educated in the public school system. The second perspective is that of an individual with a disability. I have a hearing impairment, and as a result I have to wear hearing aides. Another perspective is that of a parent with a child who was diagnosed with ADD at an early age. The last perspective is that of having been an educator and an administrator.

All children have basic wants and needs that must be addressed in order for them to be able to grow, develop, and become successful. I believe these basic positive, practical practices can be implemented in helping students with disabilities to address these basic wants and needs. In fact, they can be implemented to help any child to be more successful.

Anyone who has participated in sports or who has strived in any field of the arts knows the importance of mastering the basics. Not only must you master the basics, but you must consistently continue to work on them on a regular basis. The basics are the foundation upon which anyone can build to improve themselves.

I believe that each of us has been blessed by God with special talents, abilities, gifts, and skills. Yes, even students with disabilities have been blessed with them. It is vital and necessary to help everyone master the basics and to develop their own special talents, abilities, gifts, and skills. This will help each individual to be as successful as they can be and help them on their way to Becoming Their Best.

In the next article, we will begin to take a look at some of the basic positive, practical practices to help build success.