



When Andrew (who has Asperger's Syndrome) was in fifth grade, he was given a project by his elementary teacher. I expected the usual disinterest, but instead he came home saying he had to design a product, make it, market it, and sell it. During the same conversation he announced that he wanted to make "marble necklaces".

I got out my dremel that night and tried to drill holes in marbles, attempted to wrap them in wire, and tried various other things, expecting that, as usual, I would probably have to do most of the work if the assignment was to get done. But no, Andrew gave me funny looks about my ideas, and asked if we could go to the hardware store. We went, bought marbles, and everything he needed to make his necklaces, according to Andrew.

The next morning, the very impressive necklaces were complete. The assignment was a success, he was so proud of his necklaces, and when the kids "purchased" everyone else's products, Andrews were the first to be sold out! End of story? NO.

He went back to struggling with no friends, no birthday party invites, no interest in school, no social interaction. We never expected him to finish high school with a regular diploma.

At age 13, out of nowhere, Andrew announced he wanted to make marble necklaces again, and sell them 'for real'. The fact that he showed an interest in doing ANYTHING surprised me. I took him to the hardware store, bought tons of supplies to make necklaces, thinking it would keep him busy for a while.

When I woke up the next morning, he had made 500 marble necklaces! Now what? I called my mom to ask her what I should do because my original plan was that I would buy the necklaces, but 500? So...I made a display board, decided I would take them up to Helen, GA where hopefully someone would at least let us consign some in their shop.

Andrew and I went door to door, and finally, Gabby McKay, who owned a jewelry shop, along with a homemade ice cream store agreed to consign the necklaces. We went to Helen every weekend to pick up money and leave more necklaces. Andrew was so proud!

Realizing that Andrew did not interact with people, Gabby, who looked like Santa Claus, would ask Andrew to help him stock the ice cream store while we were in town. Each weekend he would increase the workload, and the conversation. Andrew really looked forward to seeing him from one week to the next, which was exciting for me.

Eventually, although it was close to a year of weekly trips, Gabby got Andrew to take someone's order in the ice cream store. It was a very rough "what do you want", but it was an order. So now he was waiting on people. It got easier for him each time, and although the customers thought he was rude, adults would explain he has Asperger's and they appreciated him. This continued for a while...

But sadly, Gabby passed away one weekend, his son closed his jewelry store, and ice cream store, removed all equipment, and moved on. Meanwhile, because we no longer had reason to go to Helen, Andrew, once again, wanted to be in his bedroom. He started to backslide. He little by little drew back into his shell. I talked to my mom, didn't know what to do, as I worked at a doctor's office full time, and had to watch him slowly regress. I couldn't watch this happen anymore, and had to do something.



"THE STORY OF THE STORE"

I talked to the landlord of the old ice cream store, asked if he would take a chance on us, and explained our situation. He did. I bought all of the required equipment (on credit cards that I am still paying), and opened a homemade ice cream store. With the help of employees local to Helen, GA., lots of trial and error (mostly error), we have run the store for 7 years now. During that time, Andrew got so comfortable with customers that he eventually wanted to work for Carvel during the week after school.

I contacted the owner of the local Carvel, and asked if he would give Andrew a chance. I explained the situation, and even offered to be the one to pay his wages. Jim hired him, and in no time, Andrew learned the ins and outs. He actually turned into one of the only loyal employees, and had to train new hires!

Meanwhile, his grades improved, he had an IEP and ended up graduating with a regular diploma. Saddest part was when everyone threw their hats in the air and went running to get to their friends, Andrew ran to his sister and I. No friends.

Anyway, we DID try college, but that was a complete fail. Carvel went well, changed hands, continued to go well for a while longer, and then a change had to be made.

Andrew applied as a drivers helper at UPS during the holiday season. He was so excited to get the job, however, he also said everyone that applied got the job. He would be called every morning at about 4am, and told whether or not there was a driver that needed help. Within a short period of time, a driver named Kelvin (who had taught kids with Autism in the past) and Andrew hit it off, and Kelvin requested Andrew to work with him every day he needed help. The two of them, during the course of the month that they worked together, broke a company record of number of stops in an hour!

Once the holiday season was over, Andrew was let go, as were all seasonal driver helpers. If he wanted to work there anymore, he would have to reapply. So he did. He announced that all he wanted to do was to become a UPS driver. He got a call from his application and with a reference from Kelvin, he became a part-time truck loader. This required him working from 4am-9am. He kept saying he wanted to be a driver, but that until he was 21, he could not apply.



Andrew turned 21 in July 2016. The very next day he signed up to become a driver and go through the classes required. He actually had to memorize and recite 2 pages of information in front of the class. In high school, if something had to be in front of the class, Andrew just took a 0. He also was required to drive a manual transmission, that he had never done before. He found someone to give him a lesson. I worried the entire time that I would get a call from a very sad Andrew saying he 'got kicked out', as so many of the other students had. But no! He did it! My son is a UPS driver, and I couldn't be any prouder! Against all odds, he did it! He has realized his dream!

Kathy Lemoine (Proud Mom)

Homemade Ice Cream, Gifts & More

8635 N. Main St. Helen, GA 30545
(706)-878-2394