

My Son

By Natasha Campbell-McBride, M.D.

Dr. Campbell-McBride, a neurologist who also holds a Master's degree in nutrition, lives in Cambridge, UK, with her husband and her autistic son, who was born in the autumn of 1992. Her clinic treats autistic children from around the world, and she is currently working on a book on effective autism treatments. This story was written in February 2003.

My son is 10 years old. He is in a mainstream school, doing well. His academic achievements are within normal range for 10-year-olds, although math is not his strong point. He can be clumsy as far as social skills are concerned, but he has friends, and children generally like him. He can be naïve and hyperactive at times, but amazingly mature at other times. His language is excellent with a wider-than-usual vocabulary, and he likes to write poetry and short stories. He is learning to play piano and is doing very well, particularly at composing his own music. No one would suspect what this child and his parents have been through. Nobody who meets him now would ever think of autism in connection with this boy. All this is now. I have been asked to look into the past and describe how we got here.

It is always painful for a mother to recall those years of desperation and hard work with an autistic child. It is particularly painful to realize all the things you were doing wrong. If only we knew then what we know now! If only we had done this and that, when he was smaller, he may have developed very differently.

However, I do not regret for a moment the mind-blowing educational journey my son took me through. When he was born, I was an M.D. trained in neurology with seven years' working experience. But as they say, doctors make the worst patients. When it comes to your own child, you are just as prone to denial and blindness as any other parent. Apart from that, as all the parents of autistic children discover, doctors know very little about autism. They are taught how to diagnose it, but when it comes to treatment, official medicine has nothing to offer. On the contrary, it is hell bent on convincing you that there is nothing you can do and that any other opinion is quackery. So, being a doctor has given me no advantage at all.

Our son was diagnosed autistic at the age of three. After the initial shock and grieving my husband and I started to learn as much as we could about autism. In those days there wasn't as much information available on the subject as there is now, but at least there was something offering our son hope. I remember that somebody gave us a phone number for Dr. Rimland in California. We had a long conversation with him and as a result our son was on an ABA program by the age of 3 1/2. At the same time he started taking DMG. This conversation with Dr. Rimland was like a ray of sunshine in our lives. Here was a person who knew so much about autism and who was prepared to share his knowledge with us and help us. Here was a parent who did not accept the official position on autism and who had devoted his

life to changing that position. I am sure that there are thousands of families around the world forever grateful to this man. I want to add my family to that list.

From the very beginning the ABA program was performing absolute miracles with our boy. I will never forget our first workshop with our excellent ABA consultant, who had flown to us from the U.S. At the end of an exhausting two days of training, she said that in three months' time she expected our son to speak in small sentences. All of us, including our five therapists, thought that she was dreaming, because our boy had no speech and his understanding of language was very questionable. But to our huge surprise, she was right! We have meticulously recorded that period in our son's life on video. In three months' time we were able to have quite a sensible conversation with him.

As our son was moving through his ABA program I devoted my time to learning as much as possible about biology, biochemistry, and nutrition in autism. It was clear to me that our son's extreme fussiness with food—and as a result, very poor diet—had a lot to do with his autism. I went back to university and took a master of sciences degree in human nutrition. I devoted particular attention to studying the digestive system's pathology and how to treat it by natural means. The reason for my interest was the fact that our son's digestive system almost never functioned normally. Beginning the day we introduced solids into his diet, he went through a period of severe constipation, which eventually turned into constant diarrhea. Again, consulting with official medicine was a complete disappointment. Apart from symptomatic drugs with lots of side effects, it could offer our boy nothing to help with his digestive problems, constant fungal nappy rash or tremendous feeding difficulties. At the same time it was clear to me that his immune system was in disarray due to his poor nutrition. Like many autistic children he went through ear infections, chest infections, impetigo, and fungal thrush. And of course, all my medical colleagues offered were antibiotics and more antibiotics.

Based on my newly acquired knowledge I changed his diet dramatically. Our ABA consultant helped us work out a system of introducing foods into our son's diet. Without that system it would have been impossible to change his diet, as he was so finicky with food. Having examined diets that have been successful for children with severe digestive problems, such as ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, and chronic malnutrition, I realized that just introducing a gluten- and casein-free (GFCF) diet would not be enough for my son. So I have worked on a far more natural and focused approach, which also excludes gluten and casein. The result was amazing, as if somebody had lifted a toxic fog off his brain. He was much calmer, much more able to learn. His eye contact improved on its own and a lot of self-stimulation disappeared.

At the same time we introduced a strong therapeutic probiotic. There was no doubt that his gut flora was abnormal. From early on I have tried to give him various probiotics, available on the market, with no particular results, until I found a formula that worked. It was powerful enough to heal his digestive system to such an extent that we could cheat on the diet on an occasional basis without any problems. At the same time it gave his immune system such a boost that I don't remember now when

he last had a cold. Now he looks a picture of health with rosy cheeks and bright eyes and he is full of energy. Since then I have developed my own probiotic formula, which works very well for autistic children and people with digestive and immune disorders.

It is impossible to overestimate the role of the family in the struggle against autism. I have seen quite a few very sad situations, where one parent is trying to help a child without the support of the other parent. Treating an autistic child is a huge undertaking and united families usually succeed much better. I would like to say that what we have achieved with our son, my husband and I have achieved together. Without my husband's constant support, intellect, and organizational skills I would not have been able to do half of what I have done in these years. Our son is very lucky to have an excellent dad, of whom he is very fond.

A great part of the successful treatment of autism is the fact that parents of autistic children all talk to each other. This is where we get our strength and inspiration to carry on. Our success became an inspiration for many other families, who were calling me and who were willing to try what we did. That is how my clinic for autistic children started. Having seen hundreds of families from many different countries, I never cease to admire their determination and strength in trying to help their children. I have learned a lot from them and their experiences.

A few months ago at the end of a consultation, one of the parents looked at me and asked in a stern voice, "Why haven't you written a book yet?!" That was followed by a number of other parents telling me that I must write a book on autism. I am working on it now. I feel that it is my duty to share the knowledge and clinical experience that I have accumulated over the years thanks to my son and the many families of autistic children I have met. I hope, too, that my experience will help others to avoid the mistakes that we have made. We all eventually learn by our mistakes, but time is precious for our children. The earlier we start helping them in the right way, the better chance they get to recover from autism. I believe that every autistic child has a chance, given appropriate help.

And do not let anybody tell you that autism is incurable!

Update for Second Edition (November 2005):

It is hard to believe that more than two and a half years have passed since our story was published in 2003. My son just turned 13. He is tall and handsome and he is a delight.

In my previous story I mentioned that I was writing a book. Well, the book has been out for a year now and is very successful; a third print was done a month ago. It is called "*Gut And Psychology Syndrome. Natural treatment for autism, ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, depression and schizophrenia*" (www.MedInform.co.uk). The book describes in detail how these conditions develop and how to treat them using a

solid nutritional protocol. It has a large recipe section to help people start on the diet, as well as chapters on how to deal naturally with ear infections, constipation, toxicity, fussy feeding habits, and other issues.

My son was very proud to contribute to my book—he has written a beautiful poem, which is published at the beginning of the book. We still have not told him about what happened to him in his younger years; we decided to wait until he is older. There are no traces of autism in him now and he is leading a normal life. He is doing well at school and started playing rugby on his school team. His digestive system works like a clock now, though we still adhere to the diet, which I have described in detail in my book. The good news is that my son can have anything now on an occasional basis without it causing problems. However, the whole family is on this diet as it is very healthy and can prevent many health problems (such as weight gain, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, autoimmune problems, osteoporosis, and allergies) in all members of the family. When we go on holiday we eat what is available, but when we come back home we go back to our diet because it is good for us. Both our children have a considerable knowledge of nutrition now and we often hear them lecturing their friends on what is good for them to eat and what is not.

I hope that our story can be an inspiration for parents of autistic children. Never give up on your child, and your child will reward you!

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