

May 19, 2018

Dear Friends,

I never thought about life before John until it was mentioned recently by our oldest daughter and son.

We welcomed John, our fourth child, into our family in November 1995. We were busy with an eight year old daughter, a five year old son, and a 21 month old son. Life was good—and fun! We attended family gatherings, school and sporting events, and enjoyed vacations together.

But as John's little life grew and he turned one year old, things began to change. He was extremely active and required constant care while awake. He loved to climb ANYTHING to frightening heights, but he also had the best balance ever! Unfortunately, one day he climbed onto the kitchen counter and accidentally poured hot coffee onto himself; this led to a doctor visit and the beginning of our family's journey with John on the autism spectrum.



John at Bittersweet Pemberville

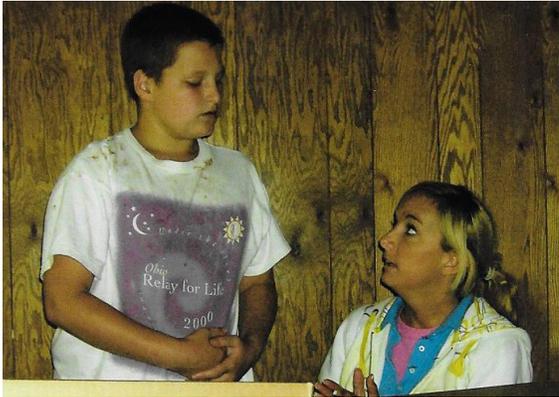
Fortunately, I was able to be a stay at home mom throughout all of our children's lives. With three older children and their various activities, we were already in the fast lane. When John was young, we were able to take him along and keep him engaged while we cheered for his older siblings from the sidelines. But as he grew older, his behaviors became more challenging, especially while in public and around loud noises. It was just easier for one parent to remain at home with him, so for several years we relied on other parents to carpool our older children to their games and activities. The reality was, we missed being 100% there for our older children as they were developing into teenagers and young adults.

During John's early years, we also missed out on the typical spring break family vacations, because traveling with John and his early behavioral issues caused us more stress than the vacation would cure! Even something as simple as attending church as a family became impossible because of all the sensory and social triggers that John struggled to process.

Throughout these challenging years, our family came to this realization: instead of thinking about life "before" John, we needed to "be FOR" John. We came to see that when we were proactive in maintaining John's schedule, routines, and sensory needs, we had more quality time to spend with one another. In other words, we learned that to be FOR John was to be FOR our entire family.

We were fortunate to place John in the Transition Program at Bittersweet Pemberville soon after it was developed. We quickly realized this was the right fit for John. At Bittersweet, John was able to develop in a safe environment with dedicated staff who understood that his behaviors were part of how he communicated his needs. Occupational and speech therapy directives were incorporated into every activity. Social and community involvement was encouraged as John was able to participate. During his years at Bittersweet Pemberville, John reached many significant goals and benchmarks.

As John approached age 22, the time came to make a decision about his future as an adult. Once again, we knew we had to be FOR John. Given his success at the Pemberville campus, we decided to transition him to the Day Program at Bittersweet's Whitehouse farm in January 2018. We had all the normal fears and "what ifs" as we made this transition, but John and Bittersweet have surpassed our expectations! He loves working in the barn each day, and he is thriving thanks to the structured, person-centered supports he receives at Bittersweet.



John with Miss Anne at Bittersweet Pemberville

For all of this, we are truly grateful to Bittersweet Farms! We have seen their mission in action: ***"to positively impact the lives of individuals with autism and those whose lives they touch."*** As a family touched by autism, we are not like other families, and Bittersweet understands the unique challenges we face. Bittersweet has not only been FOR John; they have been FOR our entire family, too.

Now it is your turn to be FOR people like John and families like ours! We are writing today to invite you to be FOR Bittersweet by making a generous gift to support their life-changing mission.

Did you know that today, one child out of every 59 is on the autism spectrum? With the increasing prevalence of autism, the mission of Bittersweet Farms has never been more crucial—and the high quality, person-centered services that set Bittersweet apart come at a high cost. Each year, Bittersweet faces a gap of approximately \$230,000 between the Medicaid funding they receive and the true cost of providing services.

In the face of these immense costs, Bittersweet depends on you to be FOR their mission. Without the generous support of people like you, Bittersweet would not be able to be FOR people like John, FOR families like ours, and FOR all those touched by autism.

Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for being FOR Bittersweet! We are living proof that your gift positively impacts lives.

Gratefully,

The Doty Family

Stan and Lela Doty
Jason, Rachel (Doty), and Otto Holden
Kevin and Brittany Doty
Aaron Doty

P.S. Please give as generously as you can to help Bittersweet continue to be FOR others as they have been FOR John and our family!



The Doty Family