

April 4, 2019

Dear Friend,

Our daughter, Katie, was born March 13, 1985. She was our first child, and we had little knowledge of the developmental and physical milestones children are supposed to reach.

When Katie was three months old, our pediatrician noticed she couldn't hold her head up. A CT Scan revealed she had a subarachnoid space. Thus began tests and trips to the Children's Hospital in Columbus, followed by physical, occupation and speech therapies.



Katie, age 3, has always had a love for animals

The therapies helped tremendously! Katie wasn't supposed to walk, but she did. She wasn't supposed to run, but she did. She wasn't supposed to talk, but she did. **To us and to her therapists, Katie was our miracle, achieving goals we thought were beyond her reach.** However, even as she reached new milestones, Katie remained behind other children her age. We kept thinking she'd catch up because the diagnosis at the time was "developmentally delayed," but as Katie grew older we continued experiencing new challenges.

Trying to find ways to better meet her needs was very difficult. Katie understood everything we said, she was just unable to communicate those needs and wants back to us. She talked, but not a lot. She was full of energy but struggled with proper ways to exert it. Katie was constantly getting into cupboards and the refrigerator, climbing, and taking and breaking her sister's toys.

While continuing our search to better support Katie, we struggled to participate in normal family functions. It seemed all we did was chase her and try to control her. On vacations my husband would take our other daughter fishing or somewhere while I would stay back with Katie. We tried going to a baseball game but Katie would cry and cry until we'd have to leave early. We went to COSI and I thought Katie was getting sick, she just wilted and her face turned red. The minute we got her out of there she bloomed like a fresh flower. There were additional sensory issues with her clothing... she would never wear blue jeans, nor gloves or hats. But she was oh so loving and had the best sense of humor, and loved to entertain close family and friends.



Katie with parents, Betsy & Ken

Katie's struggles seemed to peak during puberty. Katie started having major behaviors at school and we couldn't figure out why. Then she started having them in public. She would scream and cry out in church when we went up to communion. Soon we would only take her to the sitter's. This went on for a year until we found a pediatric psychiatrist who didn't seem at all fazed by the outbursts. With patience and a personalized medicinal plan we had our beautiful, funny daughter back!

Katie attended school until she was 19 and then she had to leave. The only option we thought we had was a multi-handicapped workshop that had a lot of people and was quite noisy. She was there for about ten years, but never seemed happy. She had no friends.

About three years ago we went through the same behavior problems she had at puberty. We went to OSU and through them found out she had autism. WHAT??!! Katie? Autistic?? We started researching autism and sure enough, all of the challenges Katie had - behavior, sensory, not liking large crowds, the noise at the ballgame, the meltdown at COSI, etc. did, indeed, fall under the parameters of autism. Suddenly new doors started to open for us.

We live right down the road from Bittersweet at Betty's Farm. We did a little research, and found their structure was more suited to Katie. It was small, quiet, and the director and staff were experienced in dealing with people with similar needs as Katie. We finally had people who understood her and understood what we had been going through! Not only are they experienced in working with adults with autism and developmental disabilities, but are compassionate, and kind.



*Katie with her friend
Alex at Betty's Farm*

Through Bittersweet at Betty's Farm, Katie has blossomed. Her social skills have improved dramatically. **She was given responsibilities at Bittersweet and has made it a goal to take on these same responsibilities at home.** She's happy, cheerful, loving and has made friends. She has very few behaviors, and is able to be around large crowds. She's no longer bored, as Bittersweet has so many community activities that expose her to all kinds of new experiences. Bittersweet not only works with the participants, they include the entire family while finding ways to overcome challenges.

Not only has Bittersweet opened up a whole new world for Katie, they've opened up a whole new world for us. We are writing to you today to invite you to help positively impact lives by making a generous gift to support Bittersweet's mission. Because of Bittersweet, our family's life has truly been impacted, and for that we are grateful.

Bittersweet Farms depends on you to support their mission. Without the generous support of people like you, Bittersweet would not be able to provide the high quality, person-centered services that has helped our family and Katie continue achieving new goals. Please consider giving as generously as you can today.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary E. Askins".

Mary E. Askins & The Askins Family

P.S. Please give as generously as you can to help Bittersweet continue to help the individuals we serve reach new goals.



*Katie with her family at her sister's
wedding where she was a maid of honor*