

TRUE FRIEND

special interest of an autistic child



ELINA'S USUAL MORNING

Elina's Sunday morning began as usual. After breakfast, she looked with annoyance at the room, where balls of all kinds and sizes were scattered around.

“Johnny, I asked you to clean them up after you finished playing,” Elina muttered hopelessly.

John, seven years old and autistic, looked at her with his big, innocent eyes. When the diagnosis was first made, Elina struggled to accept that her son would forever be different. Terms like “special child” caused her deep despair. Over time, it became clear that John’s condition was a lifelong reality. Elina's life had changed forever.

John's father, who initially tried to support her, eventually left. Elina didn't blame him; she simply allowed him to go, left alone with her child. She was grateful for his financial support but couldn’t understand how he could leave a child who needed so much love and care. She resolved to give John a worthy future, no matter the cost.

She spent hours talking with her son, even though at the age of seven he could only say one word: "mom." It hurt Elina to tears, but the way John said it revealed a range of emotions.

John was a charming child, but his need for attention sometimes created problems. He was especially demanding when someone visited their home.

Alone, he could entertain himself, but with visitors, he became restless and insistent on having Elina's attention.

As he grew older, his autistic behaviors became more pronounced. He could sit for hours in an empty box until Elina got him out. Perhaps the small, enclosed space gave him a sense of security. His other passion was balls; he could twirl and twist them endlessly.

One doctor suggested removing all of John's balls, but Elina doubted this advice. The balls were one of the few things that soothed her child. Instead of taking them away, she bought him more, in various colors, sizes, and textures. John looked truly happy when she poured out this treasure before him.

“Mom...” John whispered, fascinated by his new toys.

Many acquaintances drifted away after learning about John's condition, but Elina didn't mind. She valued those who stayed, like her best friend Irene, who had been a constant in her life.

Irene always brought a whirlwind of energy into Elina's home, sharing news about mutual acquaintances, her family, and her acting courses. She made jewellery from beads and stones and often brought gifts, including new balls for John. Her visits revived Elina's zest for life.

However, Irene's visits also triggered John's need for attention. He would pull Elina away, show her his balls, and do everything to distract her from Irene. They saw it as childish jealousy, and they tried to understand and accommodate him. Their visits rarely lasted more than an hour due to John's persistence.

Elina dreamed of explaining to John how important Irene's visits were to her, how much she wanted to immerse herself in their conversations, even if only for half an hour.

Irene also wished to help Elina find some respite. About once a month, she would make timid attempts to drag her childhood friend out of the house to stir her up. One day, knowing that Elina wouldn't dare to agree in person, Irene preceded her proposal with a call.

FAILED PLAN

"Elina, what do you say if we go out for a walk on Saturday? Let's go to the movies, gorge ourselves on popcorn, and watch some sweet female melodrama, huh? Or vice versa, a raunchy comedy? And then we'll go to a restaurant and try different goodies until we get bored. I understand that you have John, but you can ask your babysitter to sit with him."

Elina thought. Few people could understand how much she wanted to accept Irene's invitation. Put on a beautiful dress, high-heel shoes, and stroll in a restaurant or even just in the lobby of a cinema, attracting the eyes of others. After all, she devoted most of her time to her son, completely forgetting about herself. And she had a nanny in mind: she used her services when she urgently needed to leave for work or other matters.

"You know, Irene... I agree! Let's go! I've wanted this for so long. Tomorrow I will call Mrs. Jones and ask her to look after John."

"Elina! You have no idea how happy I am to hear that! To be honest, I didn't have much hope. I'll pick you up at eight tomorrow, okay?"

The next day passed for Elina in pleasant anticipation. She seemed to fly, preparing a dress, picking up shoes, and doing her hair. She imagined how she and Irene would walk together, laughing at some funny stories, remembering their fun student or school years...

But at five o'clock in the evening, the phone rang:

"Elina, darling, I know I promised to come, but it just so happened that my grandson fell ill. Sorry, there's no way I can look after John today," Mrs. Jones said, obviously upset.

"Yes, of course. It's okay," Elina answered in a fallen voice.

As she hung up the phone, she nearly burst into tears. Why is that?! Why on the one day she decided to arrange a little holiday for herself, did everything turn out this way? Holding back tears rising to her throat, she began to dial Irene's phone number.

"Elina... Nothing, just don't get upset. Well, not the last day we live, well, what are you... You know, I have a great idea. What if I come to you? I'll go to the store for a cake, and we'll sit with you. And John will play in his room. What do you think?"

Elina agreed reluctantly. Knowing her child, she knew perfectly well that just sitting and chatting would not work for them.

Of course, the evening did not go at all as Irene had hoped and imagined. As soon as John saw her in the hallway, he began to pull Elina by the hand, trying to take her to his room. When this did not work out, he came to the kitchen, brought his balls, and began to show them to Irene. She looked thoughtfully at the boy.

IRENE'S IDEA

"Listen, Elina, have you thought about the fact that he needs some kind of constructive, purposeful activity to be involved in? It seems to me that this would do him good, and it would give you a little bit of freedom - you need it so much. I recently read how parents develop the abilities of their children with autism through photography. I will send you a link. In my opinion, you and John could make an excellent photobook on the subject of his balls. After all, it is obvious that they are his greatest passion," Irene suggested, having listened with interest to Elina's stories about John before and offering various ways to diversify his life with benefits.

Irene's words did not leave Elina's head for several days. The idea seemed very interesting to her. She thought about how nice it would be if John had some kind of productive activity, if his blind passion for balls grew into something more, something creative and interesting. In the end, she took out an old camera, which she rarely used.

"Maybe this could be the start of something new for John," Elina thought, holding the camera. She smiled, thinking of her son's excitement about the project, and felt a glimmer of hope for a brighter future.

ELINA GETTING STARTED

First, she took a couple of pictures of her son playing with balls in his room, office, and kitchen. Later, she looked at these photos, and some vague thought was spinning in her head. It seemed to her that John in the photographs looked somehow different.

Suddenly, Elina realised what it was. Her son's expression was unusually calm. Normally agitated, here he looked surprisingly peaceful. In the bustle of weekdays, it is sometimes difficult to notice changes in facial expressions and behaviour. Photography has become an excellent indicator of the real situation.

The idea of studying his son unnoticed, with the help of a photo, was inspiring. Elina began to take photos of her son and his balls more and more often and more and more inspiringly. The son noticed her actions, but was not particularly interested in them. When she had a small collection of such photos, she printed them out, bought a binder, sheets of multi-colored thick paper and transparent protective files, deciding that they would become materials for creating a photobook.

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At first, the child only enthusiastically examined the images of himself in the company of his favorite balls. Then he suddenly took a sheet of yellow cardboard and carefully placed on it a photograph of him embracing a yellow ball. He did the same with the others: very thoughtfully John laid out photos of himself and his balls on sheets of paper, according to their colors. Elina was impressed by the enthusiasm and taste, with which her boy coped with the task.

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Their first photobook turned out to be very cute. However, more importantly, John liked this activity, and began to devote a lot of time to it. When the book was ready, Elina realized that he was capable of more and it was time to move on.

– John, do you want to try to take a picture of your balls yourself? What if we make a whole photobook about them?

Hearing his favorite word "balls", the boy looked up at the camera and began to listen carefully to his mother. Elina diligently explained to him the essence of the camera in the simplest words. It turned out to be easier than expected. On the same day, John took the first beautiful photo: mom surrounded by his favorite balls.

JOHN GOT CARRIED AWAY

An unprecedented occupation unexpectedly captivated John. He enthusiastically took pictures of his toys. Like a real photographer, he meticulously chose angles. Previously, he always did everything in his own way. Now it was surprising that he listened to the advice of his mother, recognized her experience. And she showed how to make photos more vivid, how to choose the right angle and lighting. Now they work together. Every day John got more great photos.

Over time, he liked to photograph the same ball, against a different background. Elina bought him large sheets of multi-colored paper for this. He could spend hours doing this and clearly liked the combination of different colors.

The days flew by. Elina was incredibly pleased with her son's new occupation. In addition, she felt more freedom than before, as her son began to find his own activities. In addition, this joint work revealed many simple concepts as “closer, far away, in the middle, etc” that John did not know at all, and Elina had a great opportunity to explain them to her son, showing them in practice, as if in passing, and then, on occasion, make sure that he had learned them .

It is often difficult for autistic children to explain to others what they feel or want, and John was no exception. His speech was limited to the word “mom”, that is why it was so important to establish contact with him: in order to better understand him and develop his abilities.

CREATIVE UNION OF MOTHER AND SON

Elina was able to appreciate that photobooks were a great opportunity to establish better contact with her child. First they made a photobook called "Colors" ' a photobook about the colors of a rainbow, placing there photographs of balls of various shades, of which John had many. After that, the idea of a size book came up: "Large, medium, small." Elina saw an opportunity to teach John new concepts and the words ``more”, "less ", "equally ". A book about the positions of objects: "before", "right", "between". And, of course, they made a photobook about numbers: “one ball”, “two balls' '.

Usually John resisted attempts to give him some new knowledge, but now he received them in passing, as if in between times, "for your photobook." For Elina, this in itself became an exciting game - to choose the words, categories and concepts that she wanted to teach John, and then come up with and select stories for them for filming. John flourished from this new, high-quality gaming attention, and participated with pleasure in these games with his mother during the filming.

- Johnny, put the orange ball in the middle. Right here. The middle is between two other balls.

And later she saw the result:

"What do you think would be a good ball if you put it in the middle between these huge green ones?" Little red? Great. Put it down soon. I want to photograph them myself.

Elina had fun, rejoicing to herself that he understood about the "middle".

- In order for the balls to be evenly positioned in the photo, you need to move the ball, which we have on the edge, which means at the very end. Yes, everything is fine now. Well done. You can shoot!

In the future, she already planned to expand the field of their activities and walk around the nearby shops that sell balls, and at the same time introduce her son to the concepts of "address" and "route".

Next in line was the idea of a photobook about different shapes: a circle made of balls, a square, a triangle. The idea of sports is tennis ball, soccer ball, basketball. Elina imagined how she would tell her son about different sports and even show short videos about each of them. Fortunately, the necessary balls and the Internet were at hand. She felt that she herself had already fallen in love with these magic balls.

Elina got the idea to talk to John's teacher in special program he attended, so she'd demonstrated photobooks there

ORDER FOR THE MASTER

When Irene came to visit a small family, Elina asked her son to bring his photobooks. Irene was amazed at the quality of his work and openly admired the boy's talent. An expression of pride and satisfaction gradually appeared on the face of John. Then the friends sat together in the kitchen, and John took pictures of the new balls that Iren bought for him, choosing the best angles and background colors.

- Elina, he is very talented. Just look at the quality pictures he took. These balls seem to have a lifetime. As if they have their own characters and destinies, but

only John sees them. And in the photographs, he shows them so clearly, so vividly ... Listen, I have an idea. How about John makes a portfolio of jewellery that I make? It could be the same photobook as with balls, only there would be pictures of my bracelets, pendants and earrings. I could show it to my clients, and we would put John's name on it. It's like he's a real professional photographer. What do you think?

- In my opinion ... that is a wonderful idea; - Elina struggled to find words that could express her feelings. - I don't know. Let's ask John.

– John, could you make the same photobook for Irene? Only instead of balls there will be her earrings and bracelets. She loves them as much as you love your balls.

The child thought for a moment. Then he went up to Iren and took her hand, touching the shiny bracelet. Then he shifted his cautious gaze to her earrings. He nodded to his mother and went to his room for a camera.

Elina felt involuntary tears rolling down her cheeks. She looked at her friend and whispered:

- What would I do without you, my true friend!, and began to devote a lot of time to it. When the book was ready, Elina realised that he was capable of more and it was time to move on.

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