

English 101

week 4-essay 2 final draft

10/2/2020

After I read Tadeu Velloso's "Brown" I was asked to ponder the question, "What am I?" (Atwan p. 229). I have never been asked that before. It is easy to answer the question, "Who Am I?" because those are things I choose to be, but <sup>what I am is</sup> ~~what I am is~~ who God created me to be. God gave me an Autistic son. I am the mother of a person with disabilities. When you are the mother of a disabled child you are many sub-categories such as advocate, therapist, entertainer, and all knowing with adaptable capabilities.

Not only is J.J. on the Autism Spectrum but he is also severely autistic. Aside from Autism, he also suffers from global developmental delay, sensory integration dysfunction, and bipolar disorder. He is also nonverbal and has maybe said thirty words in his lifetime. Those are his official diagnosis'. Currently, J.J. is 17 years old and living in a group home. The group home specializes in care for low functioning Autistics. J.J. still wears diapers and may never be fully potty trained. His schools, group home, and ~~his~~ myself have been trying to toilet train him for 14 years with no success. However, about a year ago he started changing his own diaper and changing out of his soiled clothes. J.J. also has trouble with his fine motor skills and cannot feed himself without assistance. He also suffers from behavioral issues and tends to self mutilate by scratching his head and scalp when he feels overwhelmed.

As J.J.'s mother I have become quite an advocate. Getting services for an autistic child was very difficult when J.J. was young. I used to attend Individual Education Plans (IEP) at J.J.'s elementary school. I had to fight with the school board just to obtain services that are standard today. J.J. was denied speech therapy because he did not speak. Their reasoning was that there was no language to

improve so he did not need those services. My response was that not all talking is done verbally and they should be trying to teach him sign language or use communication devices. I finally found a school that agrees with me and now he is receiving all of those services.

J.J. has helped me find my voice. I always wondered why my voice was so loud. After having J.J. I knew; my voice was built for two. My voice helps J.J. receive the services that he deserves to have. My voice spreads awareness about Autism, whenever given the opportunity. My voice asks the professionals questions and helps gain insight on the best way to help J.J. succeed in this world. My voice compliments my sweet son on a job well done when he completes a task. My voice vocalizes his needs and wants. My voice makes his world go round.

I am also a therapist. J.J.'s occupational therapists taught me a few things about sensory integration dysfunction. When J.J. was a toddler he could not feel. Anything. He couldn't feel pain, tickles, hugs, hot, or cold. So, his therapist taught me a method called the brushing protocol. She taught me how to take a brush meant for newborn babies' heads and softly brush J.J. all over his body to stimulate his senses. I would also make a bowl of very warm water and one of cold water dipping J.J.'s hands in it while verbalizing which one was cold and which one was hot. Within six months J.J. could feel me tickling him and he has never burned himself on a hot stove.

I am a great entertainer. I would pack up plenty of drinks, snacks, diapers, and clothes. Then I would pick J.J. up from the group home on a Saturday morning and take him driving all over our county. J.J. loves riding in the car. It's his favorite thing to do. When he got in the front seat he would hand me my phone and the plug for the tape deck so I could turn his playlist on, on YouTube and he would just jam out in the car. He loves anything with a beat: piano, rap music, and guitar. I had to keep the air conditioning on to help keep him calm because the heat can trigger a meltdown, ultimately, causing him to hurt himself. However, I would occasionally put the windows down when were alone

on a back road so he could stick his arm out of the window and feel the wind. We also used the sun roof a lot.

I am a mother who always knows. When J.J. was three I took him to an evaluation. The evaluator asked me how I knew when he was hungry or thirsty. I told her that when his sippy cup was empty I would fill it up and leave it on his little table. I fed him at the same times every day. I made sure his day was predictable. Now no one taught me to do these things; I just knew. Call it mother's intuition. Also, before J.J. was diagnosed with sensory integration dysfunction, I would squeeze him harder than you would a normal child and he would smile from ear to ear. That's because he could actually feel the hug and it made him feel safe and secure. Again, no one told me to do this; I just did.

When J.J. is trying to read what is going on in my mind, he will look deep into my eyes. He gets super close, nose to nose, and stares into the depths of my soul. I blink and unmask my eyes and then he is able to tell what is going on with me. Once I was going through a very hard and emotional time. I had survived a fatal car accident that killed a pedestrian. My car had been seized by Florida Highway Patrol and I was under investigation. Afterwards, J.J. kept getting frustrated with me, lashing out, even biting me. Then I let him look into my eyes. When he was done, a stray tear streaked his cheek, and he started running his hand down my hair and shoulders. I knew then that he understood. Some things just can't be explained.

I am adaptable. There are many situations that can cause J.J. to have a meltdown. Shopping at places like Wal-Mart causes J.J. to meltdown, so I avoid going there when J.J. is with me. I always make sure to shop while he is at school or at the group home. However, when I need to shop for clothes for him I have to take him with me. So, I started taking him on a ride on the motorized scooters stores provide for people with disabilities. Even though his disability is a mental one, the cart soothes him and provides a distraction from all the noise. We still have to be quick while picking out the clothes because I have to stop at the clothes' racks and he doesn't have much patience!

Most importantly, I am a mother. I am J.J.'s mother. I am so blessed that God chose me to look after His special child. I love him more than anything in this world. He is my heart, my soul. J.J. has made me become many things I never imagined I would be. He has helped me find myself. Most of all, J.J. has helped me find my voice.

#### Works Cited

Atwan, Robert. "America Now." *Twelfth edition*. Bedford/St. Marten's. Macmillan Learning. pg. 229. 2017. Boston, Massachusetts.