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Jim Sinclair's "Don't Mourn For Us"

Jim Sinclair gave us an interesting narrative about autism called, "Don't Mourn For Us." The article is very accurate because the author himself is in fact is autistic. This article that he wrote helped pave the way for the autism movement. His words were strong and power and made a lot of people see autism and autistic individuals from a different perspective. Sinclair began his article by criticising parents with autistic children and chastising them for mourning a child that never existed in the first place instead of accepting the one that they have given birth to: the child that God has given them. He addresses that parents have hopes, dreams, and certain expectations when they are ready to start a family. They imagine having this perfect child with the perfect behavior whom they will love unconditionally. However, as soon as they find out that the child is autistic, they think that all those dreams and expectations are destroyed. Some parents may try to act like they are ok with it and will say that they will indeed love the child unconditionally but Sinclair knows that deep down they wish that their child was "normal."

Just a couple of days after reading this article, I came across a situation that completely shocked me. My older cousin is pregnant and I went to the doctor with her for one of her check ups. We were sitting in the waiting room and I asked her what they are going to do today. She told me that the doctor is going to draw some blood from her and do a couple of tests. She went on to name the tests but the only ones that really caught my attention was the prenatal screening

test for cancer and autism. The cancer part did not really surprise me but I was shocked that they could detect whether a child might be autistic before they are born. However, when I asked her I was even more startled by her answer. She said to me, “Yeah they tell you early on if there is something wrong with the baby so you can decide if you want to keep it or not. I was speechless and immediately remembered Sinclair’s article. After a moment, I asked her if she would keep the baby if it turned out he was autistic, even though I was scared of her answer. She did not answer my question making me confirm my suspicions. Another moment later, I told her that I do not think the point of the test is so you could decide whether or not to keep the baby. She responded simply by stating that she hopes that it comes out normal.

In the article, Sinclair quickly knocks down this idea stressing to parents that them wishing their child was normal is the equivalence of them wishing they had a different child. “This is important, so take a moment to consider it: Autism is a way of being. It is not possible to separate the person from the autism. Therefore, when parents say, “I wish my child did not have autism,” what they're really saying is, I wish the autistic child I have did not exist, and I had a different (non-autistic) child instead.” (Autism is not an Appendage) He writes that people should stop thinking that it is ok to be sad or even angry that the child they have given birth to turned out to be autistic. There was another article I came across that compared this issue to the LGBT community back then. Parents would get upset and mad at their children for telling them that they are gay. Their children would then witness them grieving and mourning making them feel bad about themselves and hating themselves for being like “that.” These days though, being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer has become more acceptable. Now a lot of parents are more open-minded and quickly come to accept their child for what they are and love them

unconditionally. The author of the article writes that he wishes the autistic community will become as acceptable as the LGBT community.

I think as we go on towards the future, people will be more and more accepting. Hopefully, later on being told your child is autistic will be as normal as being told they are healthy because being autistic does not mean you are not healthy. Sure, it may mean that your child will have trouble learning some things but every child in this world goes through difficulties learning sometimes. Communicating with your autistic child most likely will be hard to do. It is sort of like trying to talk to someone who speaks a different language and neither one of you can comprehend what the other is trying to say. It will most definitely require a lot more work from the parents' side however, that should not be a problem. They should really get to know their child: understand their sensory needs; how they act in certain situations and what they do when they need something specific. They should not be underestimated so you should use the same tone of voice you use with other children. Something that is helpful to a lot of people and will really help your autistic child understand what you are trying to communicate are visuals. For example, instead of asking them what they want to eat, give them options, "Ryan, do you want to eat Fruit Loops, Cinnamon Toast Crunch, or Coco Puffs?" Holding up the three boxes of cereal will help them see their options and choose confidently. Parents should do whatever it takes to make their children happy regardless of their condition. Jim Sinclair concludes that all he and the autistic community want is for people to learn with and accept the fact that their child is autistic. I truly believe that this is least we could do.

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