



## ***A Mother's Dreams; A Son's Reality***

*By Diane M. Baer*

I can remember the day that I found out that my life would be changing forever...and I began dreaming the "new mommy" dreams. We were going to swim together (something I love to do) and learn to fly planes together (something I always wanted to do) and we were going to be life long friends.

Cameron was born in the heat of the summer, and it was a HOT ONE!!! I remember the ceiling fans going nonstop for months and months, well into what should have been autumn. From the day we brought him home it seemed that he had a real fascination with the motion of the fans. He'd watch them go around and around, we were convinced that he would be an engineer. The intensity of his gaze amazed everyone that saw him. Looking back it should have been a clue, a warning sign...two years later we had a name for the intensity...AUTISM.

Cameron's challenges have been many, a delay in expressive speech, self-abusive behavior including head banging, isolation from friends and family and lack of appropriate social skills. Therapy has been our saving grace...speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavior modification...all of which are intense both emotionally and physically. Tantrums and tears, both his and mine, are the inevitable by-product of pushing your child out of his isolation.

Two years ago we started a new therapy...you won't find it on an IEP or in a behavior plan, but it works better than some of the therapies we've tried. **TREC.** When we started riding, TREC stood for Therapeutic Riding of Erie County, but now it encompasses a total equestrian center. From the very first day Cameron had no fear, which is not unusual for autistic children, but this was not a reckless lack of fear...this was quietness, peace. He would hoist himself into the saddle, practically twitching with excitement and grinning!! And I was grinning too! Then they would begin... "Walk On Toby", quietly at first but with each session getting a little louder, a little stronger, less prompting, more awareness.

We took this past winter off from riding, from the end of November until the end of March this year. One Tuesday afternoon in February when I picked him up from his after school care program I heard from the back seat of the car, "Going riding today". How did he know that? Tuesday was his regular TREC day. How did HE know what day it was? We had not spoken about NOT riding...I just assumed that he would "go with the flow". "Going riding today, please!" "Soon buddy...soon we will go riding again", I responded. For the next three weeks until the spring session started every Tuesday he would ask me...  
"Go riding today?"

It's mid April now and every Wednesday I pick Cameron up from after school care and I hear "Going to ride Toby today?" "Yep, you are going to ride Toby today" I reply. My rejoicing begins...almost a whole sentence...a complete thought verbalized!!! I think about all of the hard work that this child has gone through, the HOURS of speech therapy, the weeks and months of tears and tantrums trying to bring about awareness. It's then that I realize that a small horse named Toby and a staff of dedicated instructors and wonderful volunteers were able to reach a small boy named Cameron with autism in a way no one else could. That this connection was made by simply sitting on the back of a horse and letting the magic between horse and rider begin. Walk On Cameron! Walk On Toby!!!