

This month we have one of our own again. I am delighted to have Lynn Hamilton as a part of High Country for many reasons. Many of you may have seen Lynn's Academy of Children's Theatre advertised in the January and February newsletter and not realized that she is a High Country Mom and that she is the author of the book, *"Facing Autism: Giving Parents Reasons for Hope and Guidance for Help"* and a chapter author in *"Treating Autism: Parent Stories of Hope and Success."* She has presented autism workshops around the United States, as well as internationally. Lynn has been a frequent guest on radio and television programs, including Focus on the Family with Dr. James Dobson and the Hour of Power with Robert Schuller. Lynn and her husband, Roger, are the parents of four children.

When I called to enroll my son in the Academy of Children's Theatre program, I mentioned his special needs and I was delighted to hear that Lynn was very familiar with his issues: so much so that she had written a book on the topic! Talk about a divine appointment! So, I am really delighted to bring you the following interview from a mom who really understands your concerns and interests in learning more about Autism.

It is a privilege to have you as one of our High country Mom's and to be able to interview you about your book, [Facing Autism](#). Thanks for taking the time to minister to our group: by looking at your website and seeing your speaking schedule, I really want to acknowledge how thankful I am. Also, just to add to my respect for you, I am so excited to have my son participate in your Academy of Children's Theatre program. Thanks for advertising in our newsletter; I'm so looking forward to having him work with you!

I look forward to working with him.

Thank you. It seems like a great safe place for our kids to hone their acting skills. You mentioned that you and your husband are Navigators. What is your involvement there?

Roger and I have been with The Navigators since 1988. We were on campus at the University of Wisconsin - Madison for 14 years. We focused on outreach and discipleship of college students. In 2000, we moved to Colorado Springs to work with a division of The Navigators called The EDGE Corps. Roger oversees training and development of the EDGE Corps staff around the country and directs training conferences for them at Glen Eyrie.

I'd like to know more about your journey of discovering your son had autism.

Our son, Ryan, was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2 years 8 months. At that time he had no appropriate language. While other little boys would respond to their mother's love with words of love in return, our little boy remained silent. He couldn't tell us what he felt, what he wanted or what he needed. His main

avenue for communication was screaming, which he would do most of the day. When he was hungry, he would go into the kitchen and scream while I frantically pulled items from the cupboards trying to meet his need.

While other children played with toys and enjoyed being a child, our son lined up toys in straight lines or perfect semi-circles. He didn't have the ability to play or pretend. Instead he would rock on his rocking horse for hours on end watching Disney movies. Though he was unable to process the ever-changing world around him, he was able to relate to the movies since they were consistent time and time again.

At his diagnosis, Ryan's IQ was tested at only 53, which is in the retarded range. He wasn't learning and he wasn't developing. At this point his future didn't look very bright.

Fortunately, his story doesn't stop there. Though we were told that most autistic children would never speak, we refused to accept that. Though we were told that most would need supervision all their lives, we dreamed of Ryan having a life of his own, on his own. Though we were told that there was not hope for a child overcoming this disorder, we chose to ignore their "wisdom" and fight for our son.

Over the next several years, we treated Ryan's autism with Applied Behavior Analysis, dietary interventions, biomedical interventions, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, sensory integration and much, much more.

Now, by the grace of God, we now have our son back. His language is now at normal levels and he can tell me anything his heart desires. When I tell him that I love him, he hugs me and says, "I love you, Mom." These are words that many mothers of autistic children have never been allowed to hear.

His IQ jumped from 53 to 101. He plays with toys, enjoys life, and dreams of a future working with animals at a zoo.

As I read your book, I really identified with your description of knowing something wasn't right, but not knowing exactly what. People really wanted to comfort you when you were concerned, but didn't have the knowledge to confirm that there was a real problem. The website you gave me seems like it would help parents who are looking for help in knowing if they need to be getting professional help. It was http://www.patientcenters.com/autism/news/diag_tools.html. They can fill out the form and mail it in. I am going to do this with several of my children. I know you said this shouldn't be the limit of research and identification, but that it is just one tool, or a start.

It sounds like you went right to work helping your son. Many people are fearful of labels. In this case, it seems that early intervention and labeling are a key element in recovery.

Labels can be a scary thing, but getting a label allowed us to know what we were fighting. Once we knew he had autism, we began the fight help him. Early intervention is KEY! When the child is young, there is much that can be changed permanently. As the child gets older, it becomes more difficult to make changes. It doesn't mean that changes can't be made! It is just harder.

And, I read that it was a relief to you to have affirmation and acknowledgment. It's easy to question your parenting skills and to wonder if you are seeing things clearly. Also, I really appreciated the website you shared with me. You said that one of your friends established this prayer page. It is www.childrenofdestiny.org.

Could you tell our readers about the prognosis for recovery or emergence from autism when it is discovered early?

Recovery is not a guarantee for any child, but most will make improvement. However, there are children all over the world that are now recovering from autism and leading typical lives. If you visit www.Autism-RecoveredChildren.org you can watch two videos of recovered children being interviewed.

Wow, thanks! That is so encouraging!

What type of resistance did you meet along the way?

We had people telling us to just accept Ryan the way he was and move on. They believed that by treating his autism, we weren't accepting him. We were also scoffed by several medical doctors who didn't believe in the treatments we were using.

I often tell people that we've spent lots of time and money helping our son. When they say they can't afford it, I respond with, "can you afford not to?" What are your thoughts on the time and money commitment you've invested?

Some have told us that it is not "fair" to give Ryan's treatment a large share of our family income. But I don't believe fair is giving everyone an equal amount. If my daughter needs 2 pair of pants and my son needs only 1 pair of new pants, do I buy them both 2 pair so that I am fair? Ryan needed a lot of help and we did what we had to do to help him. As I look back, I don't know how the Lord provided all the funds we needed, but He did. We have always found a way to get what Ryan needed. The Lord is always faithful.

Amen to that! If someone is reading this and suspects that one of their children may be facing similar issues, what is the first thing you would advise them to do?

Look for answers. Waiting is not good and it wastes valuable time. If you look for answers and you find there is no problem, then you can breathe a sigh of relief. If you find that there is a problem, then you have bought yourself more time to help your child. To get an accurate diagnosis, I would look for a child psychologist or psychiatrist or developmental specialist who is EXPERIENCED with the autism spectrum.

Good point. I couldn't agree more. Can you link us to any good information that discussed the autism umbrella, so that people could see the continuum under which Autism, Asperger's and PDD fall? Many people may not realize that there are five labels that have some similarities.

This is really a hard question, because even though there are multiple labels, there are SO many variations within a label. This is why they now use the term ASD or Autism Spectrum Disorder. As a brief understanding, PDD is the overall umbrella that covers all the labels. Under that you would find Autism, PDD-NOS, Asperger's, CDD, and Fragile X. Most people know about autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

I found a website called www.O.A.S.I.S.com that really helped me get a handle on this. You told me that you have begun to homeschool your son. Would you mind telling us how you came to that decision

Over the last couple of years, Ryan began hating school. His attitude deteriorated and he became extremely frustrated daily. This led to him acting out in school. School said it was that the work was too hard, but I didn't believe this. When I went to watch him, I realized that he was in an environment that was not how he learned. He was being required to sit for 50 minutes at a time, not talking, and taking notes. Ryan needs more freedom and hands on learning. After seeing his day, I knew that he needed to be pulled out. The next day, I removed him from school. I had never homeschooled, nor had I ever felt that desire, but I knew it was what my son needed and HIS welfare was more important than my convenience.

Has it been helpful?

Within one week of taking him out of school, his behavior and attitude changed dramatically. We chose the Switched On Schoolhouse program, which is perfect for Ryan's learning style. He is now learning by leaps and bounds and is enjoying school.

That's great. There is a lot of curriculum out there that works so well. My son does so well with anything on the computer, or with any technology. He also

loves reading, so I just had to find something that fit him. I'm so glad you were able to provide this for Ryan.

I know you said that most of the resource people who helped you were from your previous hometown, but what types of therapies and resources have you utilized?

There are too many to list. If you look at chapters 6-10, you will see what we did. The main three were Applied Behavior Analysis dietary interventions, and many biomedical interventions.

I was impressed with all you learned. You show a lot of commitment and perseverance! I have to say that I was amazed too that there were so many more things out there than I knew about. I have a lot to learn still and am thankful for your book. In the reviews, it rightly says that if you could only buy one book on Autism, this should be the one. I agree! You mentioned that there is a Doctor here in town who is especially good with pervasive developmental disorders, if you would like and he would be comfortable, we could recommend his practice.

There is an excellent MD in town that can work with biomedical interventions. His name is Dr. John Kucera (596.1118) I would strongly recommend him.

Thanks, a lot of people ask me for the name of someone that is familiar with all of these issues. I know this will really help.

What brought you to a place of writing your book?

I have NEVER dreamed of writing a book. Writing is not my gifting or passion. But the Lord made it clear that I was to do this and I did it out of obedience. Usually, people will write a book and then try to find a publisher. We had a contract with a publisher within 3 weeks of having the idea of writing this book. It was truly the Lord's working.

Could you advise any of our teachers on how they should respond to children who seem a little different or are difficult to work with.

Learning about the disorder can be very helpful. Also, realizing that each child is different even if they have the same diagnosis. What is the CHILD like, not just what is the label like.

Many teachers find it difficult to talk to parents and just try to make it through the semester. I have tried to point out that they may be a part of the discovery process, or that they may have much more compassion and understanding if they address the issue and listen to the parent. I feel that many parents don't

share what is going on for a variety of reasons. What are your thoughts in this area?

We found it helpful to disclose information to teachers so that they could work with us. Without knowing what is causing certain behaviors, the teachers may believe it merely bad behavior. We had to teach them how to distinguish between bad behavior and autistic behavior.

When a teacher ignores a problem in a child, it doesn't help the child. Unfortunately, many parents want to ignore issues as well, which again leads to the child not getting the help he needs. I think we need to focus on what is best for the child and not whether we will upset the feelings of the parents. It is a tough thing to do to point out issues with a child, but it can lead to improvement and a better life for the child.

Yes, I agree. Thanks for putting it so succinctly. Before we had any formal diagnosis, we were very frustrated as parents. I feel that God is calling me to write a book to encourage parents to face the music and get help. It's hard for many parents to go there. I feel concerned when I see kids struggle, and not receiving help. It's so easy to make excuses and compensate. In fact, one therapist said that many families have so rearranged their whole family infrastructure, and they begin to believe that their chaos is normal. Any encouragement in this area?

Follow what the Lord tells you to do. I remember when God told me to write the book and I asked Him, "What if nobody reads it?" He softly told my heart, "That is not your concern. Your job is to write it. What I do with it is my concern."

Another area I struggle with is that parents deny that their children are truly struggling. With any learning disability or problem, we can make excuses and say that our kids are lazy or have character issues. It grieves me to see kids who may have vision problems, coordination issues, core muscle strength issue or who simply struggle with processing, but their parents think the child can just "stop it." I want to be a beacon in the dark and help people have a little more grace for their own children. Once you know the issue, then you end up having to advocate for your child, so other people can give your child the chance they deserve. How can we raise awareness with parents that it's OK to get help when you are really frustrated?

Do what you are doing and be available for those around you. Keep sharing what is helping your son, and maybe they will want to find the same help. Pray that they will be open to new ideas, but you can't force someone to be open.

I appreciate all your time and your thoughts. It's always good to hear from someone who understands and who has gone ahead of you a little. I hope everyone will read your book. It was really touching and encouraging. We wish

you the best in your homeschooling journey and hope that the High Country Support group will be a great blessing in your life. The newsletter, field trips and mom's groups are amazing. We are so blessed to have a group like this. Many places have support, but I am so impressed with what these moms have pulled together to become. I pray that you will know and feel God's affirmation through us as you homeschool

Blessings to you! Lisa