

OCALI | Podcast - Episode 3 Interview with Jeff

TERESA Welcome to From My Perspective. This is OCALI Family Center's weekly podcast. Each week
KOLBELT: you'll hear from people with disabilities, their families, friends, and others in their lives. You'll hear about everyday life-- their passions, their interests, and opinions. You'll be inspired. You might laugh or cry. But most importantly, we hope you'll better understand what life is like from our perspective.

On this week's podcast, we'll hear from Jeff. He's a dad of two boys with disabilities.

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm going to tell people that you're my husband. [CHUCKLING]

JEFF KOLBELT: OK.

TERESA: You're doing this somewhat against your will.

JEFF: No, I'm not. [CHUCKLING]

TERESA: I was thinking, when I was thinking about asking you these questions, that we never really talk about autism. We, kind of, live it every day, but we don't really talk about it.

JEFF: Yeah.

TERESA: And so, this will be interesting.

JEFF: Mhm. OK.

TERESA: Do you remember when Will first got his diagnosis?

JEFF: I remember-- I don't know if I remember exactly when it happened. But I just remember, at preschool, when he was two or three, that one teacher said, wow, there must be some issues going on with him. I didn't want to believe her at first, but-- how can you tell with somebody that young?

TERESA: Mhm. Yeah. Do you remember when we found out for sure, we met with Deb?

JEFF: Mhm. Oh, that's right. Yeah.

TERESA: How you felt about it, or kind of what you thought at the time?

JEFF: I kind of felt, sort of OK with it, because he seemed OK to me, you know. All he had were all

these little quirks. That sort of gave us an answer to why he was doing these different things. So, it was a bit of a relief to know exactly what was going on, or why.

TERESA: When you think about him, what do you think about? In terms of things that you hope for him, or fears that you might have.

JEFF: I'd hope that he has friends, that he'd learn how to make friends really well. And I want him to be a caring, thoughtful person, to give himself to others. He's a great guy. I love him so much, and I just want to be able to share him with other people. And I want him to be able to do that. I want him to be able to succeed with anything he wants to do.

TERESA: He is a great guy. How about fears? Things that you're afraid of, for him.

JEFF: That he'll be isolated somehow. That he won't be able to do all the things that a, so-called, normal kid would do, you know. I don't want anybody making fun of him, you know, teasing him.

TERESA: What's been, like, a proud parenting moment for you? Something that you feel good about when you think about him.

JEFF: I think last year, at the end of the school year, when they were giving awards to kids who completed all their reading stuff. You know, all the kids got an award, but he was one of the last ones. And when they called his name, he was so, so shocked, and overwhelmed with joy that he got this award. It just made me feel so happy. And he felt happy. So it was really fun to see his expression.

TERESA: It was like the Academy Awards--

JEFF: That's right, yeah.

TERESA: --seriously. [CHUCKLING] How do you think autism has affected our lives?

JEFF: Well, I think the really hard thing was figuring out school for him. We couldn't find the right fit for so long, and it was very disheartening and discouraging. Yeah, I think that was one of the hardest things. And for a long time, our younger son felt like he was, somehow-- not taking a backseat-- but somehow, having to accommodate to his brother, because of his autism and some of the issues that he had.

TERESA: What do you think autism has taught us, or taught you?

JEFF: Well, when I think about-- when I thought about having Will as a little baby, and growing up, I just thought, oh, he might do sports, he might do this, he might do that. He hasn't done that, but that doesn't make him any less than anybody else. He's got his own unique quirks, I guess, you know. He's very endearing. He's taught me to appreciate differences more.

TERESA: How about helpful people?

JEFF: Deb at the preschool was helpful and kind. His first preschool teacher, Ms. Christine, was fantastic. Just helping him feel loved and accepted. His friend, Billy, in the class. Right now, Olivia, his aide at school. Jamie, I don't know what her title is, but-- And the teachers there, and the school has been wonderful. We're really thankful for it.

TERESA: I remember thinking that, in preschool, that I didn't care if he learned A-B-Cs or colors. I just wanted them to love him.

JEFF: That's right.

TERESA: Care about him.

JEFF: Right, and I think we thought about, in school the first year, that we didn't care if he learned anything. We just wanted him to like school, and learning. And that has happened. I mean, he did learn stuff, and he still likes school.

TERESA: Yeah.

JEFF: Hardly ever would he say, I didn't want to go to school. He did a few times in the beginning of the year, but after that he was fine.

TERESA: It's been good. How do you think Will's doing now?

JEFF: I think he's doing really good right now. Yeah, I'd say the last few weeks he's seems a lot happier, which makes me happy. Have

TERESA: And when you think about his future, what do you think about? What might he do, or be?

JEFF: I don't know yet. Yeah, I haven't figured that one out yet. I think Quinn's a lot more verbal about what he might want to do. He keeps changing what he wants to be, but Will doesn't express what he wants-- He might be a scientist or something. I think he's got a good brain for that. He's good at math. A detective, something like that. Problem solver. He's very good at

destroying things.

TERESA: Yes, he is. [CHUCKLING]

JEFF: So whatever job would be-- have that. [CHUCKLING]

TERESA: Yeah, that's true. Thank you.

JEFF: You're welcome.