

The Wells Family

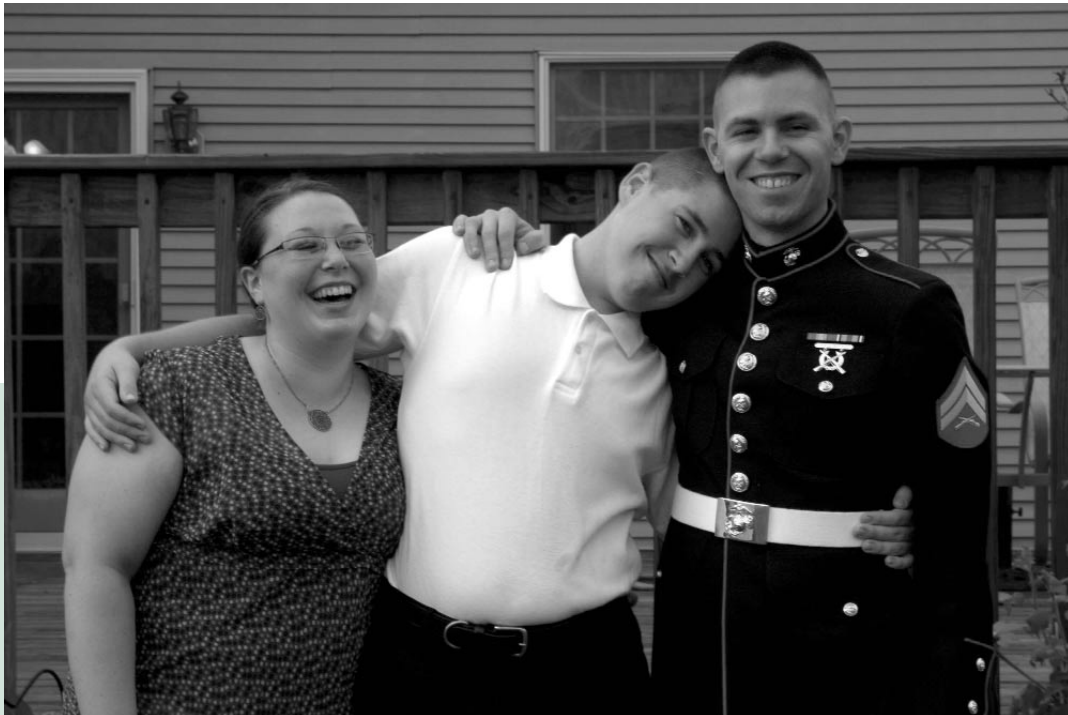


PHOTO BY SARAH TULEYA

| LEFT TO RIGHT: RENEE WELLS, IAN WELLS AND DEAN SMIRES IN FRONT OF THEIR BURLINGTON COUNTY, NJ HOME. |

DECEMBER 2006

DEAR COSAC FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Growing up with autism in our family has not been easy. My brother, Ian, was diagnosed at the age of three. At that time, I was starting high school and my sister, Renee, was only eight. I was at a point in my life where everything was changing, and this was a huge one. I can still remember the first steps that Ian took. I looked forward to the idea of watching my younger brother grow into a man. To know that his development was suddenly going to slow down came as quite a shock.

Autism and its classic characteristics, deficits in communication and social skills, have made growing up with Ian frustrating at times. Asking him "What did you do today?" often requires me to guide him through the question so he knows exactly what I'm asking. When he is playing, he often is in his own world, regardless of whether or not I try to interact with him.

There are many things I would like to share with him, but he simply cannot understand them. I will never be able to communicate my experiences with him in a way that will help him to mature. He will never be able to turn to me for advice. I think about this more and more as Ian, who recently turned 15, begins to face a new set of challenges as he transitions into adulthood. Still, I now realize that Ian will need to lean on me for other reasons.

In spite of the obstacles, Renee and I share a special bond with him and dearly love him. When I was going through Boot Camp, I looked forward to seeing him more than most other people I knew. I had so many plans to have a good time with him while I was back home. I spent an entire day going to various places he enjoyed, especially the safari and the aquarium. I feel a great sense of pride whenever I see the strides he has made. I recall how hard our parents fought to place him in a special needs program in a private school. COSAC assisted them with that process and the school has helped Ian progress immensely. He is presently learning to read, and I look forward to finding books to read with him. I genuinely hope he experiences the same love of reading that I do.

continued on back

The COSAC FUND

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My gift is... in honor of _____ in memory of _____

Credit card donations accepted online at www.njcosac.org.

EACH AND EVERY GIFT, NO MATTER THE SIZE, WILL HELP US MEET OUR GOAL! YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS FULLY **tax-deductible!**

COSAC/1450 Parkside Avenue, Suite 22, Ewing, NJ 08638/609.883.8100/609.883.5509 fax/1.800.4.AUTISM (in NJ)

Renee and I agree that having Ian in our world makes our family different. We've learned to ignore the odd stares from strangers, cruel comments from unenlightened peers and inevitable questions about Ian's behaviors. Our family has adapted into its own version of "typical." Our home is filled with lively arguments, loud singing of Disney songs, feet stomping up and down the stairs, and smoke alarms chirping over the sounds of making dinner. These are the sounds we grew accustomed to before Ian was diagnosed with autism; they still resonate throughout our house today. Ian is not exempt from our family chores or from Renee's relentless, but loving, teasing. As she says, these are life's lessons that will prepare him for the future when he is capable of working at a competitive job.

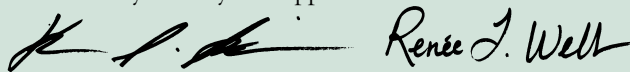
Before Ian's diagnosis, I never heard of autism. When I was younger and it was still a new part of my life, I had no understanding of the disability and how it would impact Ian and our family. Now it has become a part of my daily vocabulary. I see it more and more wherever I go, which is no surprise given the increase in rates since Ian was first diagnosed. It was frustrating trying to explain it to others when I did not even know what autism was. Autism remains difficult to explain and understand, even when you live with it every day like we do. There are continual challenges and obstacles to overcome. For that reason, our family is grateful that an organization like COSAC exists to provide information and support for families and raise public awareness about autism.

As siblings, my sister and I understand that we will assume different responsibilities in the future than our peers. Having Ian in our family has enhanced our lives and given us a different perspective on what family and responsibility are. We are growing to accept our roles as advocates and protectors. As we look ahead, we know Ian will continue to play an important role in our lives, as we will in his. We look to and will rely on an organization like COSAC that solely exists to support families like mine in making the best decisions for Ian at every stage in his life.

My brother has come a long way since he was first diagnosed, and we still have many years together. My parents will not always be there. COSAC can provide us with the information and contacts we need to take care of Ian later in life, a challenge which seems insurmountable without them. Thanks to COSAC, I can look down the road with hope.

So many families lean on COSAC and rely on their services and support. We encourage you to support COSAC with a contribution to The COSAC Fund. Become an active advocate for the autism community to ensure that the future is bright for our brother and thousands of other New Jersey residents living with autism.

Thank you for your support.



Dean Smires and Renee Wells



About COSAC

COSAC IS NEW JERSEY'S AUTISM RESOURCE, to which parents and professionals can turn for information, advocacy, support and training. With more than 40 years of expertise, COSAC provides assistance at all stages of an individual's life — from first diagnosis to early intervention to school programs to transition strategies for teens and options for adults. The COSAC Fund is our annual fund drive, which provides valuable support for COSAC's efforts on behalf of families like Ian's.

For more information about COSAC or autism, contact our helpline at 1-800-4-AUTISM or visit www.njcosac.org.

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Don't forget to forward a matching form so your gift to COSAC can double.

COSAC is a nonprofit organization that is registered with the State of New Jersey's Attorney General's office.