

## **Taking In The Sights In A Whole New Light**

- Mhel, parent of a 5 year old son with ASD

One afternoon this past summer, I piled my two kids in the car and we took off for what turned out to be a 9-hour play date. We started with lunch at Fenton's, which was so amazingly joyful and conflict-free. At some point while we were eating our ice cream, I remembered that it was just 3 months ago that I had told my sister we could not accompany her there because Matt, my youngest, could not keep it together there (we had 2 episodes fairly close together in November & December last year where Matt had complete meltdowns there). We actually DID go in March and it turned out ok, but it was difficult. Today at Fenton's, there was not the tiniest problem (EVEN when I told Matt that he could not have the dessert he wanted – I offered an alternative, and he accepted it without missing a beat). He never even noticed that they accidentally bussed our table when we were perusing ice cream flavors and threw out the picture he had drawn, as well as his milk.

From there we headed off to the Cal Academy of Sciences, where we had a full 2 hours. He let me pull him away from things he was engrossed in to go see other things, he had no issues with the noise or the crowds and had a great time playing with the penguins through the glass and seeing all kinds of creepy-crawlies. Not a complaint, not an inflexible moment.

We then (accidentally) went to the Golden Gate Bridge and then (on purpose) to Pier 39 to see the sea lions. Again, Matt did everything I asked him to do, went with the flow without complaint (like climbing back in the car when it turned out I had parked illegally and we had to move the car). He LOVED the sea lions (he has never seen them before). Walking back through the Pier, he asked for ice cream (are you kidding me??? After Fenton's???) and asked to go to a restaurant (I am NOT going to pay 2 restaurants in one day to make Kraft macaroni and cheese) and accepted my "no's" without any trouble.

We all got home happy and cheerful despite the fact that it was 7:45 and they had not had dinner. Even after 9:00 PM, when Matt was trying to get our dog to chase him and he (the dog) was not cooperating, Matt did get frustrated and started to cry, but it only took about 30 seconds of a hug and gentle words to turn him around and have him laughing and playing again.

Six months ago, we could not have gotten through the first hour of this afternoon without tears, yelling and all of us at wit's end. What an amazing difference his talented therapists have made!

I have heard ABA criticized by people who say it can make children "robotic." For Matt, nothing could be farther from the truth. I really believe that BIA's behavioral approach helped Matt find ways to be more truly himself and have freed him from the inner struggles that made him not able to engage and enjoy his life. Today, I witnessed a little boy who was able to absorb and enjoy so much of what his world has to offer, and so much of that is what you have given him. No robot here - just a little boy who is blossoming and coming to terms with how he can fit in this imperfect world.