

# Forever Christian

Tina Traverse



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**For Christian and to every parent, guardian and child.**



## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the following people who have supported me to make this book, my dream, possible.

First and foremost this book would not been possible if it was not for the star, my son, Christian.

He inspires me everyday to not only be a better Mom, but a better person.

Whenever I feel hopeless and overwhelmed I remember him and the obstacles he had overcome and will continue to overcome.

I feel renewed and truly blessed.

To my loving husband, Gerard who has been my faithful, unwavering partner in this journey we call not just autism, but parenthood.

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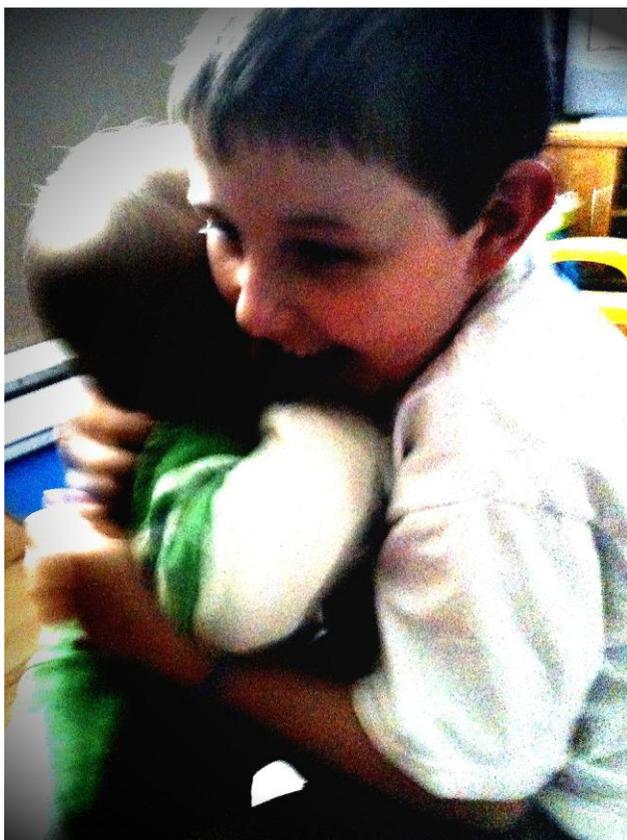
I found this great quote from this wonderful website:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/spectrum-solutions/201012/here-are-10-great-autism-spectrum-quotes>:

**This great quote comes from Ellen Notbohm, author of Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew:**

"Patience. Patience. Patience. Work to view my autism as a different ability rather than a disability. Look past what you may see as limitations and see the gifts autism has given me. It may be true that I'm not good at eye contact or conversation, but have you noticed that I don't lie, cheat at games, tattle on my classmates or pass judgment on other people? Also true that I probably won't be the next Michael Jordan. But with my attention to fine detail and capacity for extraordinary focus, I might be the next Einstein. Or Mozart. Or Van Gogh."

*Forever, Christian*





## Foreword

Hi my name is Christian Traverse and I am getting my Mom to type this for me because I have a hard time sitting long enough to type a word.

But these are my words, because I am telling her what to say(believe me that does not happen often)!

I am 11 years old and in sixty grade at a really cool school.

I live with my Mom, Tina, my Dad, Gerard, and my brother, Brandon who is now three and can be a real pain sometimes because he will not stay out of my room, grrr!

I have autism, and I sometimes do not like it because I get confused easily and frustrated a lot.

Sometimes people laugh at me because they do not understand why I say and do the things I do.

However, I am a normal boy otherwise.

I love Pokemon, I love to draw and play outside with my friends.

Taylor Swift is my favorite singer because she has a soft voice and is very pretty.

Maybe I marry her someday!multicolored

I even have a crush on a girl in my school.

My mom wrote this story you are about to read about me, but I wanted to say hi to you, introduce myself and tell you a little bit about me.

Remember, it is cool to be different.

Love you all,







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# Chapter 1

Imagine two brothers, one in red overalls and the other in green, running and jumping through pipes in a multicolored world. They hit their heads on blocks to gain health and special powers, and fight everything from tiny mushroom dragons with wings to evil twins, all in an effort to save the life of a fair princess.

Theirs is a bizarre world, that of the two brothers, but then, it is the world of a video game. More importantly though, it is the world that one sweet little boy lives in every day of his life.

In our world, of course, that boy is a typical ten-year-old child.

He loves to run and play like most children his age.

He loves to torment his baby brother.

He loves the Mario Brothers and playing his Nintendo DS.

He also hates doing homework, is beginning to notice girls, and does not listen to his parents. There is something about him, however, that distinguishes him from other children.

At first glance, you will not find anything unusual about his sandy blond hair, his big, deep blue eyes, or even the long, dark lashes that would be the envy of any woman. You will not be taken aback by his crooked grin or the bubbly personality that can make just about anyone instantly fall in love with him.

In fact, unless you know what to look for, you are not likely to notice anything different about him at all, but he is different.

You see, the boy I am speaking of lives in another world entirely because he has a condition known as autism.

That little boy's name is Christian Peter Traverse and he is my son.

Christian came into my life unexpectedly. I had been married only three weeks when I learned I was pregnant with him, but I cherished that tiny miracle from the moment I knew he existed.

Early on, his dad and I took him on his first trip across the country while he was still in my belly, and as we settled into our new home, we busied ourselves with making a nest for the bundle of joy that would soon be arriving.

Sixteen weeks into my pregnancy, my love for Christian was truly revealed when my doctor told me and my husband during a routine check-up that they could not hear the baby's heartbeat and that there was a possibility he had died.

Terrified that we had lost our baby, we rushed to the nearest hospital to have an emergency ultrasound performed. I did not know that I was carrying a baby boy at the time and though he was only a little person inside of me, his father and I loved him beyond anything in the universe.

Needless to say, I was both distraught and numb when we finally arrived at the hospital twenty minutes later.

## Chapter 2

Inside the examination room, the technician hooked me up to the ultrasound machine. Holding our breath as we waited for Christian's image to appear on the screen, my husband and I wondered if our world was about to come apart. Mindful of our fear, the technician did not take long to assure us that our baby was alive and well. In fact, he told us that Christian was more than just fine and was *dancing* and moving around inside of me with strength and vigor. I was so relieved!

The ultrasound technician even joked with our family doctor who had rushed to the hospital to be with us that he should get his hearing checked. He went on to further remark that our baby was definitely a Newfoundlander because he was doing the jig.

Thankfully, the remainder of my pregnancy was uneventful. Then, on April 6, 2001, at 5:19 a.m., after three long days of labor, Christian Peter Traverse came screaming into the world. I often joke that since I screamed him out rather than pushed him out, he was carrying on for me.

Little did I know the screams would gradually grow worse and become more regular.

I did not truly notice there was something seriously wrong with my baby until he was a few months old. By that time, his cries had turned into full-blown, and very scary squeals that the doctor assured me was not colic. The most frustrating thing was that

when Christian was not worrying his father and me with his horrific screams, he was a very pleasant baby and seemed to be developing quite normally. He hit all his milestones at the appropriate times. He ate, drank, and played as any healthy, happy, and full-of-life baby would.

During those times, all was right in our little world, but when he suddenly began crying, and the crying turned to painful screaming, we were helpless and confused.

I know that every new parent must go through an adjustment phase and that they become frustrated when they do not know what is wrong with their baby. I imagine we all look forward to the day that our babies can communicate clearly and tell us exactly where they hurt, but even as Christian grew older and developed speech, he would not tell us the cause of his pain or discomfort. Worse still, he would not respond when we called out his name, even if he was directly in front of us.

There is nothing more frightening than when your child disappears from your sight and there is no answer to your calls, but

Christian continues to give us that scare regularly. We might look away for just a second and turn back to find he has disappeared from our side. Of course, our first instinct is to call for him, but that does not work with Christian so we have to physically search for him.

Those are heart-stopping moments when he is nowhere to be found, but eventually, we do find him, usually hidden in some obscure place. When our hearts start beating again, he is met with a mixture of relief, anger, and frustration.

Despite our frustrations with Christian's *episodes*, nothing has been as frustrating and maddening as when the people we entrusted with the health of the most precious gem in our lives did not believe anything is wrong.

I remember going to our family doctor practically in tears, begging him to help us figure out what was wrong with our child. The doctor told me not to be so foolish and assured me that there was nothing wrong with Christian. He said Christian was only doing what other normal children were doing, and that he would get over it. He went on to tell me to not be so sensitive and accused me of blowing things out of proportion.

The doctor's words stung and angered me so deeply that it took me back to when I first gave birth to Christian in Alberta. During the days that

followed delivery, I fell into a deep depression, so dark that I thought I would never see light again.

Everything seemed hopeless. I did not want to see anyone or do anything. All of the joy disappeared from my life.

I could even not find joy in my newborn son.

I went about my day mechanically.

I fed, bathed, and did all the things necessary to care for a baby, but I did not do any of the joyful, normal things a new mom is supposed to do with her baby.

I did not cuddle him or play with him. Nor did I kiss him or hug him.

As I said previously, Christian was a very bubbly baby when he was not having an *episode*, but not even his smile and laughter could bring me out of that deep dark place. Moreover, when he began one of his screaming marathons, I experienced an instant desire to throw him clear across the room or strangle the life out of him, just to get him to shut up.

I realize that all parents have moments where their child is crying non-stop, and they lose their minds and consider extreme measures in order to get them to be quiet, but I am ashamed to admit that in my state of mind, my reaction seemed perfectly normal, justified even, and I actually threw my six-month-old son across the bed, hard.



## Chapter 3

That was the first and only time I ever committed such an awful act because after I did it, I realized that I had done something very, very wrong.

Christian stopped crying and though the doctor determined that he had not been injured, it was a wakeup call for me to do something right away. I was still in my dark fog and I needed help before I did something I would terribly regret.

Turning to my family doctor, I was referred to a psychiatrist who might help me cope with the cause of my depression.

The first appointment with the psychiatrist went well enough. We spent the time discussing my background and how I was feeling, and when the appointment ended, we scheduled another appointment.

My second meeting with the doctor began rocky, however, and did not get much better throughout.

In fact, he asked no additional questions and told me that after reviewing his notes from our initial session, he had concluded I did not need further counseling because my problems were not significant enough to warrant any effort on his part. Specifically, he explained that he counseled people who had been physically, mentally and sexually abused, and people who were addicted to drugs and other vices.

By his estimation, since I came from a stable background with plenty of emotional support, I could not possibly be depressed because there were no factors to contribute to it. Therefore, counseling was unnecessary.

Clearly, threatening my child's life was not sufficient cause for concern! He then ushered me out of his office without another word.

I was hurt and angry for a long time after my experience with that particular doctor.

Luckily though, I found the help I needed through a wonderful support group that my family doctor set up.

The support group was led by a brilliant and compassionate psychiatrist who told me that my depression was not a clinical form of depression, but a depression brought on by too many life changes happening all at one time, changes that had emotionally and mentally broken me.

So that you fully understand what I had dealt with, in a single year, I was married, discovered I was pregnant, moved across country, believed I had lost my first child, moved five times, lost two jobs due to my pregnancy, gave birth, and experienced the death of my paternal grandfather, followed two months later by the loss of my maternal grandmother whom I could not fly home to say goodbye to...

Okay, time to take a deep breath!

In the doctor's words, *no wonder I cracked!!!!*

In time, with the doctor's help and with the help of my new friends, I found my way out of the darkness, but that only solved half the problem.

Yes, *I* got better, but my baby did not. Thus, the stage was set for yet another move.

## Chapter 4

Alberta is a beautiful province with a lot of nice, caring people, but for someone in my position, it can be a lonely place. With my husband working, I was by myself most of the time. My sister-in-law was the only other family living nearby, but she was half an hour away and working long hours at her own job. Left alone with a baby, the solitude can get to you. I may have been better, but I was terribly homesick and so was my husband. Within three years, we decided to go back to the hills we once called home.

We should have known that Newfoundland is the only true home for us!

It would be a long time before we found out what was really going on with Christian and we have his first grade school teacher to thank for getting the ball rolling.

In the first grade, Christian began exhibiting unusual behavior and became very, very clingy. Consequently, he was never secure in his peer relationships or his teacher's affections for him.

Multiple times during the day, he would ask his teacher questions like, "Do you love me?"

He would interrupt his classmates' conversations at play time and get into their personal space by doing things like hugging them when they did not ask or want to be hugged.

He would not sit down for a moment.

Instead, he was always pacing around the room.

He could not concentrate and he had a hard time listening, even to the simplest instructions.

First grade, however, was mild and only just the beginning as compared to second grade when the flood gates began to open!

Suddenly, my sweet little passive boy became very aggressive with his classmates, doing things like pushing, shoving and hitting.

His insecurity regarding adult affections continued to escalate.

No matter how many parent/teacher/vice principal meetings were scheduled, I had to find solutions for how to handle this sudden, aggressive, and violent behavior. We tried everything from setting aside private time to assigning a student aid, but nothing really worked.

Then, in May we faced another medical scare.

## Chapter 5

Christian woke up one morning with a pain in his stomach. Though he did not act like he was sick, I decided not to chance it and kept him home to rest.

Appearing to be just fine, he spent the morning playing his favorite Wii game, playing with his toys, and watching his favorite television shows, but right before lunch, he said that he felt really tired. I had him lie down on the couch and covered him up. He quickly fell asleep and I left him to go to the washroom.

When I returned, I checked on Christian to see how he was doing. I instantly realized something was wrong.

He had gone deathly pale, his body was limp, and when I felt his forehead, he was burning up. I tried to get a response out of him by first lightly shaking him, and then calling his name, but there was none. His eyes had rolled back in his head.

Suspecting a seizure, I called 911 right away.

I tried to remain calm, but inside I was so terrified.

By the time the ambulance arrived, Christian finally came to and was slowly coming back to himself. I answered the paramedics' questions as best I could.

Once inside the ambulance, I became worried all over again when Christian's nose

began to bleed profusely, but one of the paramedics told me that the nosebleed was a good sign, that it meant the brain was releasing pressure.

When we arrived at the Janeway emergency room, Christian was subjected to a flurry of tests, and then we were left waiting for answers. The doctor finally arrived and told us that Christian had suffered a fever-induced seizure and while he was going to be regularly monitored, there was no

permanent damage. He was going to be fine. Thereafter, and despite the doctor's assurances, my husband and I could not help feeling anxious whenever Christian ran a fever. We would watch him constantly until his fever broke.

Christian never did suffer a grand mal seizure again, but he did have several absentee seizures, tiny seizures in the brain that made him "blank out" without warning. During an absentee seizure, he would stare off into space and become unresponsive. When the seizure passed, he would be disoriented for several minutes.

For a while, things with Christian continued on an even keel. We went through the motions of his ups and downs, his *good* days and *bad* days.

Once school was over, his good days became fewer and fewer, and his bad days slowly began to take over. His aggressive tendencies often became routine, with him pushing and shoving his daycare playmates, making unkind remarks towards them, and refusing to listen to his caregivers.

If Christian was confronted with his bad behavior, he would attempt to turn it around by berating himself.

Truly, he could never hurt any other child worse than he could hurt himself.

During this most difficult time in our lives, he did indeed hurt several of his peers, but once it was pointed out to him that what he did was wrong, what he would do to himself was far more harmful.

In those instances, he would hit himself repeatedly, pull on his hair, scratch himself until he bled, or punch himself.

The worst example of self-punishment, however, came when he hit another boy in the face and injured the boy's eye. I was not present at the time of the incident, but what happened was relayed to me by a co-worker, who had been told by a child who had witnessed everything.

After Christian realized what he had done, that he had really hurt the boy, he went to the sink, filled it with hot water, and then submerged his face and head in an attempt to *burn his eyes out* as punishment.

I could only be grateful that the water temperature had not been higher, or Christian would have received serious burns.

Things just got worse from there.



## Chapter 6

In October of that year, Christian had to deal with his first encounter with death when his paternal grandfather passed away.

He could not grasp why his beloved Poppy "Plete" was no longer around for him to play with, to give hugs and kisses to, or to share a cup of tea with when he went out to Ferndale for a visit.

He asked many questions, many tough to answer in a way that he could understand, but even our best efforts to explain could not make him understand why Poppy "Plete" was not at his house anymore.

To this day, when he visits his grandmother, he asks every now and then why his Poppy is not in his room, sitting on his bed waiting for him to come play with him.

The loss of his Grandfather Traverse sent him spiraling into even more unsettling behavior.

He spent the next few months stating that he wanted to join Poppy "Plete" in heaven, and he often mentioned ways on how he could get there. Some of his ideas were harmless, creative and funny like growing wings to fly up there, or getting on a hot air balloon, but others were disturbing like taking a razor blade to his wrist and cutting himself.

We worried for Christian's safety, but his doctor assured us that he spoke of such things not out of thoughts of suicide, but because his brain did not fully comprehend death. The doctor also thought it likely that Christian was merely repeating things he had heard elsewhere.

Then, somewhere along the way, step by step, Christian appeared to improve.

Through referral from his school, he was sent to a team of specialists at the Janeway Children's Hospital, who assessed and treated kids with similar behavioral concerns.

The team consisted of a psychologist, a developmental pediatrician, and an occupational therapist.

Initially, the team of specialists diagnosed Christian with ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and prescribed him medication to control his symptoms.

The medication seemed to work at first. He calmed down, was able to focus more, and did better in school. When the medication lost its effectiveness, his doctor adjusted the prescription.

Again, the medication had a positive effect. Not long afterwards, however, Christian began having terrifying nightmares, he would not eat, and he became restless.

This went on for weeks until his doctor took him off of the medication. Within days, Christian was back to normal.

Since then, we have decided not to put him on any more medication unless absolutely necessary.

At the same time that we were exploring remedies for Christian's diagnosed ADHD, we began seeing an occupational therapist for his sensory issues.

From the time he was a baby, he could not stand certain physical sensations. The slightest touch could provoke a violent struggle to get away or make him scream loudly.

As he grew, his sensitivity to touch expanded to include a negative reaction to certain sounds, such as hair dryers, vacuum cleaners, and sirens, as if the sounds caused him great pain.

He was also afraid of heights, not the kind of heights people normally fear, but places like steps that most people would not consider high at all.

He did love the water, but once when his friends dove off the side of a swimming pool with fun and ease, he stood terrified and frozen until he was helped down.

His fear of sounds even made an ordeal out of trips to the salon to get his hair cut, and to this day, his father and I have to remind the hairdresser to only cut his hair with scissors and not use an electric razor or hair dryer.

The one time the hairdresser forgot our instructions was a disaster.

She had made the mistake of turning on the hair dryer, which instantly sent Christian into an uncontrollable fit of screaming, struggling, hitting, and begging to be set free. We had to quickly remove him, after which it took well over an hour to calm him down.

His sessions with the occupational therapist were frequent and for the first year and a half, he saw her every month. For an hour at each session, his therapist would work on not just physical exercises that were designed to improve his walk and his gait, but writing, reading, and dealing with his sensitivity to sound and touch.

She taught my husband and me exercises for working with Christian, including a technique that used a special brush and joint compressions to help him become more *aware* of his body and personal space, and less sensitive to day-to-day touch.



## Chapter 7

Since beginning his sessions with the occupation therapist, Christian has made incredible progress, and at present, he only sees her every couple of months.

Though he is still sensitive to certain touches and sounds, it is so wonderful to see that he can now jump off small steps carefree, off the side of a swimming pool with his friends, and even on and off a doctor's exam table without help.

Even so, progress comes in waves, sometimes high, sometimes low, and sometimes it simply stalls.

Sometimes it becomes worse.

After being our one and only baby for eight years, Christian became a big brother in December 2009 when we welcomed Brandon Gerard Avery Traverse into the world.

My husband and I were overjoyed, but while we were celebrating our new blessing, Christian was silently fretting, becoming lost and confused.

For most of his life, long before the diagnosis of autism, he had thrived on a daily routine. He had never learned how to deal with disruptions to that routine, and when change occurred, as is inevitable in life, it would cause him inexplicable grief and distress.

So, despite nine months of getting ready for our new addition and explaining that mommy and daddy had to go to the hospital to get his baby brother out of mommy's belly, Christian was not prepared when the time came for it to actually happen.

My mother had come in from Dunville to take care of Christian while we were at the hospital. Though he had been made aware of our plan, when he came home from school to find me and his dad gone, he became very distressed with the belief that we were never coming home.

My mother relayed to us that he had cried so hard he lost his breath and began to hit himself over and over.

It took everything in her to try to convince him that we were indeed coming home with a new baby brother, but nothing worked until both his father and I were able to speak to him over the phone.

When he came to visit his new-born brother two days later, I saw a mixture of pure happiness about seeing us again and confusion about the little being in the basket next to his mom.

After introduction to his new brother, it took a long time for Christian to even look at Brandon, let alone to come near him, but once he did he began to warm up.

The adjustment period lasted a long time for Christian. While he hugged and kissed his brother, he still did not know how to act around him.

He would often hit Brandon in his tiny head, and though he was supervised at the time, he would haul Brandon's arms and legs and attempt to throw him when he picked him up.

The worst that happened was when Brandon cried, Christian would attempt to stop him by trying to smother him with whatever was around, usually his hand.

I tried my best to include Christian in Brandon's day-to-day care. Sometimes he would be a wonderful helper. Other times, he wished to do nothing but to sneak in a smack here and there before returning to his room to play his Nintendo DSi.

One of the most frustrating things with disciplining Christian was not the fact that he did not listen, but when in the course of discipline, he would look up at his father or me and laugh like he did not take us seriously.

Christian has spent years living in a world of his own, mostly in the video game world of Super Mario brothers believing that everyone and everything is related to the video game, but nothing brought this fact out in the

open more than the day we were out for a walk and he wanted to push his baby brother in his stroller.

We were on an incline and I was *assisting* with the pushing of the stroller by keeping one hand on the handle when Christian, out of the blue, decided that he wanted to do it on his own. Naturally, I would not let him do it on his own because we were on a hill. I told him to wait until we were on a flat surface.

Without warning, Christian pushed my hand away and proceeded to run really fast with the stroller before letting go of it.



## Chapter 8

I took off at a run, desperate to catch the stroller before it went into the ditch.

Thankfully, I caught it just in time!

When I asked him why he would do such a thing, his simple explanation was that he was Luigi, his brother was Baby Mario in his baby stroller Mario Kart and he was winning a race. I told him that Brandon was not Baby Mario and that his brother could have been badly hurt.

Christian responded by saying that there was no way that he could have been hurt because another character in the race would have lifted him up and saved him.

We would later discover that was exactly the reason why he was and is so carefree and rough with his brother. He believes he is playing his video game and no one can get hurt.

Christian's agitation has continued to grow since Brandon's birth despite our efforts to show him that we love him just as much his brother.

Frequent meltdowns have become a daily occurrence both in and outside of the home.

His meltdowns consist of uncontrollable crying that escalates into red-faced screams and hitting himself in bouts lasting anywhere from five minutes to an hour.

Sometimes I am able to calm him, but there are times that I just have to ride it out until he stops on his own.

Anything could bring on one of these meltdowns, from taking away his favorite DSi game as a means of discipline to him not being able to win at a favorite outdoor game.

The biggest cause for a meltdown, however, is when he feels he has to go the bathroom to pee and he cannot do so.

There is no physical reason to explain his frequent trips to the bathroom or why he feels he has to go so often. Of course, it is impossible to successfully pee every time when making such frequent trips to the bathroom, but to him, if he goes to the bathroom every five minutes, he must likewise pee every time.

It is hard for me to hear his cries of anguish and to see him hitting himself in his crotch so hard in an effort to harm himself, but during those times when he just cannot be calmed down, the fit has to run its course.

Once it is over, it is over.

Until the next time, that is.

Just as we thought we were at our wits end, my husband and I finally got the news we had been waiting nine years to hear.

Christian was diagnosed with High Functioning Autism in October 2010.

I cried not with sadness or grief, but with pure joy.

The relief on my husband's face was a wonderful sight to see.

I heard from other parents whose children had been diagnosed with ASD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, how they were so devastated with the diagnosis that they grieved as though they had lost a loved one, and that it was not until they learned more about ASD that they realized dealing with the condition was going to be hard, but doable. With help, their children were going to be okay.

Hearing these stories, all my husband and I could think, all we could see was that beautiful bright light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

Someone believed us! Christian's condition had a name! There were a slew of resources and people out there to help him, to help us!

Christian was going to be just fine!

Five months have passed since Christian's diagnosis and our lives have been a flurry of so much information that I feel I am going to burst from the overload.

Our doctor has thrown us a lifeline, not just with the diagnosis, but with an introduction to a group that was added to our list of teams of blessed saviors.



## Chapter 9

The day we walked into the ASNL, Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, also known as the Elaine Dobbin Centre for autism, my husband and I felt nervous and unsure about the journey we were about to take. Christian, however, felt none of that. He waltzed right in just like he had been there before and instantly made himself at home by walking up to one of the staff, introducing himself, and upon seeing there was another boy there, asking if he could go into the conference room to play with him.

That first day, we met with the program director, Jason Geary, who was the first of our ASNL saviors.

We received a tour of the facility and learned all about what they did there.

It did not take long for us to realize just how wonderful this place was going to be for Christian with its therapies, programs, and social get-togethers with other children with autism, and for us with the monthly parent support meetings. The encouragement we get from hearing from other parents that are going through similar circumstances is both informative and enlightening, as is just knowing that we are not alone.

I stated earlier that my husband and I had decided not to put Christian on any medication unless it was necessary. Unfortunately, that time did come.

While he continued to improve physically through his therapies, Christian's mind remained unsettled.

He spent twenty-four hours a day highly agitated. He was quick to anger at the slightest personal question, such as how he was feeling, and he hardly slept due to frequent nightmares.

He paced all around the apartment nonstop and was a disruption in his classroom, often getting up and roaming around, and at times, even leaving.

He could not sit down to eat and he became frustrated very easily over slight things like not drawing a picture correctly.

He was a restless child.

When I mentioned this behavior to Christian's doctor during a recent check-up, he recommended starting with a low dose of medication that would help calm Christian's mind.

Considering our last attempt to medicate Christian, I was at first hesitant, but after thinking long and hard, my husband and I agreed that something needed to be done to allow him to have as normal a childhood as possible.

It has taken some time, but his body is adapting to this new drug, and we have seen improvements.

He now sleeps soundly throughout the night, with only an occasional bad dream.

While he still experiences frustration, agitation, and restlessness, and will continue to do so, we are now seeing a significant improvement. He is returning to the calm, loving and fun boy he once was.

Like most parents with children diagnosed with autism, we will continue to fight those who remain ignorant to this condition, seeing only the disability rather than the beautiful, creative child in front of it, but we will also take tremendous pride and joy in the extra special gift God has given us.

Every day Christian continues to challenge us, push us, and frustrate us. However, when he does do this, I remind myself, as does his father, that as frustrated as we are, we cannot imagine just how frustrating it must be for him.

He is struggling right along with us. After all **he** is the one with autism. It is something he will have to deal with for the rest of his life. **He** is the one that must suffer the stares when he is doing something other people think is weird and he must endure the rejection from his peers when they refuse to play with him.

**He** is the one who has difficulty understanding why he cannot go to his grandmother's every day, why school is so hard, why his friends can understand what the teacher is saying and he cannot, and why his baby brother will not stop crying and hurting his ears.

Every day, my husband and I try to look at him, just as he is. Christian is a kind, loving, caring, and forgiving soul that loves to draw, is super creative and imaginative, loves Super Mario, Phineas and Ferb, has a crush on Sam from ICarly, loves swimming, and enjoys dancing to music.

His smile and laugh are contagious and there is quiet wisdom behind those baby blue eyes.

His hugs too, are healing, during those rare moments that he senses another's sadness. He may not understand why a person is sad, but he will walk up to them nonetheless and put two arms around them. Giving them a big, loving hug, he tells them not to be sad, that he is there with them, he loves them, and that everything is going to be okay. I cannot speak for the others, but whenever I receive one of those little miracle hugs, and his honest, unconditional words of pure love and affection, I feel better!

These, and numerous other qualities, **not autism**, are what define Christian Peter Traverse, these qualities, gifts, and ideals that will always be forever, Christian.