

HOMETOWN HERO:

Frankie D'Erasmus

"I must say, to this day he wears his AS proudly!"

My son Frankie was diagnosed with high-functioning autism/Asperger's syndrome at 4 ½ years old. He did not hear when I called his name, did not make eye contact -- always off in his own world. When he turned 2, he started to talk and read.

"Mommy why don't I have friends? Why am I different?" Frankie was 10 years old when he noticed he was not quite like his peers. He was at a good age to know and understand he has Asperger's syndrome. That was a changing day for my son, being different from his peers. Now it had a name. For me, it was like giving him the AS badge of courage to wear. I must say, to this day he wears his AS proudly!

Frankie went through so much during his elementary years. He was picked on, bullied, mentally and physically by his peers. Fourth through sixth grade were so hard, he lost hope in the school system, and was losing hope in everything, saying he wanted to take his own life. In his late teens, he told me that during these hard times he remembered the exact time when he lost his passion and love of learning. It was when he was in the 4th grade at the beginning of the worst of the bullying. Life got better when he was in seventh grade. He was placed in a school that he loved through high school.

Frankie always has a kind word to say about people, no matter what they do. He has learned patience, he is kind, always looking to lend a helping hand. (Sometimes you may have to ask for it, but he always says, 'Sure!')

When I told him that his school was looking to raise funds for sports equipment, he was there to donate money. Every year, he makes a donation to his school; he said he wants to give back to them for what they gave him.

He enjoys giving presentations to students, parents, and professionals on his life experiences. He wants to help make life easier for other students with AS. He loves giving parents insight on what life was like for him as a youngster and now as a young man. Frankie's best part is when the parents and students come up to talk to him after his presentation.

For the last two years, he has been working at the Severna Park library while going to AACC. He just earned his Associates of Science Degree in Information System Security and will be going to Towson as a junior in the fall. He is looking forward to getting his own apartment off campus.

You have taught me so much, you are like the gift that keeps on giving. What you teach me is not in any books; no workshop can teach it. You are a true pioneer.