

FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Who Knows Best?

## I CONFESS I HAD DIFFICULTY COMING UP WITH AN IDEA FOR MY COLUMN THIS MONTH.

When I mentioned this at dinner, my 23-year-old son said, "Why don't you write about your wonderful son?" And so I shall.



One of my most memorable moments during my son's high school years was when he disregarded my advice—and things turned out better than if he had listened to dear old Mom.



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Steve had difficulty at school, and what Esther Falcetta and Nadine Taylor-Barnes write in this issue about their children's challenges resonates with me. Bright, charming, inquisitive, and active, Steve struggled with reading and writing due to his co-occurring learning disability. We were fortunate to have received an early diagnosis, treatment, and accommodations at school. With helpful interventions in place, Steve realized what supports and strategies he needed to be academically successful. He had some great learning support teachers and an excellent tutor.

I don't want to give you the impression that he had twelve years of smooth sailing. He experienced academic success in the subjects he enjoyed and struggled in subjects with a lot of required reading or dense textbooks. At times, he had to concentrate his energy on a few core subjects and let the other ones slide. His resilience sometimes amazed me. I did regret that Steve didn't share my lifelong love of reading and avoided novels or reading just for the fun of it.

I like to think I was a decent advocate on his behalf. I remember bringing mini-muffins to an IEP meeting once to show the school staff my attitude of

openness and collaboration. Steve devoured them almost as soon as I had set down the plate.

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During course selection for his senior year, Steve chose to participate in our school's workstudy program. After more than eleven years of academic strug-

gles, it was clear that he chose this option just to get out of the building! He'd had enough of swimming upstream to learn information he didn't find relevant. Having previously worked at McDonald's, he knew he could master job responsibilities. If he could earn a paycheck and a grade simultaneously, it seemed like an excellent opportunity. I encouraged

him to take a job at a grocery store or movie theater. I thought that this would increase his circle of friends and provide more opportunities to socialize with students from other area schools.

Steve listened politely to my suggestion and took a job at a local dry-cleaning establishment near a retirement community. So much for a larger circle of friends. Most of the senior citizens completed their errands before noon, so Steve worked by himself the bulk of the time. The company had a policy that as long as the customers were served and all of the work-related tasks were completed, employees were allowed to pass the time with quiet activities.

Since there wasn't much to do, Steve began to read novels. Paperbacks by Steven King, James Patterson, and other popular authors began to appear in our home and in his car. I enjoyed having discussions with him about the characters, plots, and storylines.

During our summer vacation that year, everyone in the Paxson family had a book open at the beach. This was unprecedented and has become one of my warmest family memories. I don't think this would have occurred if Steve had taken my suggestion to

work at a grocery store or theater.

Steve now attends college as a part-time student while working full-time for the same drycleaning company. Because of his tenure, he is cross-trained in several departments and has done everything from managing a store to driving the delivery truck. He is considered a key employee and enjoys his affiliation with the company. His employer and fellow employees value his work ethic and his sense of humor.

So while I could fill the rest of this magazine with stories of when I made the right call and things turned out right... or stories of when Steve really would have benefitted from listening to his mother... I'm grateful for his decision to go with his instincts. And while I would think he was a wonderful son, no matter what he does, I AM extremely proud of him!



Marie S. Papson