

Our Reality Living With our Autistic Grandson

Submitted by Elisa and Donato Montecalvo

It broke our heart when our grandson, Giancarlo, was diagnosed with autism. We were angry and had a hard time accepting it. We wished he would just grow out of it and become like other children. But our love for him didn't stop. It only got stronger, because we needed to protect him at all costs from the obstacles he would face.

With our daughter's help we learned to research strategies and ways to understand him and help him. Some strategies work, while others only make him angrier. It's still a work in progress, but we won't give up. His meltdowns are very violent. He hurts himself and his mom. It breaks our heart to see him suffer, and we wish we had the power to make it stop. When it's over, he apologizes profusely and needs to be hugged like a baby, all 190lbs. of him. We reassure him that we love him and that he's safe.

Giancarlo is verbal, but expresses himself better through facial expressions. He's curious about how others feel and absorbs their feelings. He constantly asks us to repeat his favorite phrases, while he's watching his funny vines on his tablet. He asks for his pizza to be cut in triangles, his cheddar cheese in cubes and his meat cooked on the BBQ.

He enjoys chilling out on our bed and out of nowhere, he runs to give hugs so strong that we must brace ourselves not be knocked down from the impact.

Our wish for our grandson is that he'll never notice the stares and pointing fingers from ignorant people when he's having a meltdown in public places for not conforming to society's standards. I wish that they would mind their own business and not judge our Giancarlo. People say he's a spoiled brat; the parents should punish him. They don't understand it's not a tantrum, it's a meltdown. That means Giancarlo is on overload from sensory issues, maybe it's too loud, too bright, he's tired or having a bad day. Any of those factors can trigger his meltdown and he's unable to convey his frustrations, so he goes into survival mode, freeze, fight or flight. His emotions erupt like a volcano spewing hot lava. He goes into a destructive mode, banging on walls, hurting himself and others around him, especially his mom. He feels a lot of pain and has no control, it breaks our heart. We wish we could take away his pain.

Despite his difficult moments, he's a funny, happy and loving child. People don't see how loving amazing and sweet our Giancarlo truly is.

This is our reality and we wouldn't change a thing, except that we wish that one day he'd express his frustrations without violence. He's perfect, and we accept him just the way he is.