

I am a high school English as a Second Language teacher, but my most important role is being a mother.

Before having children, I used to think I would have so much to teach them, but the greatest lesson I have learned is that they have so much to teach me. That is especially true about my eldest, Giancarlo, who is on the autism spectrum.

Since Giancarlo's diagnosis I have had to question so many of my previous belief systems and my ways of doing things. I have done research, read literature by experts, and attended several conferences, but my most valuable lesson has been to trust my instincts regarding what is best for my son.

I know all too well what it means to stand up against cultural norms, broken school systems, wait lists, and other challenges that other parents face. I also know what it means to lose yourself in the process. And, I know too about the sheer joy in the daily victories, regardless of how small.

Given all of our family's experiences over the last 11 years, I greatly value the importance of education, awareness, acceptance, and everyone's ability to succeed given the right conditions. Everyone.

Despite how difficult it can be, I continue to share my experiences with students and parents alike, whether it be to teach, inspire, or simply to be a voice reminding you that you are not alone, and this journey, albeit a challenging one, can lead to beautiful things.

Submitted by Elena Jennifer Montecalvo