

## Raising a Child with Cerebral Palsy from a Grandparent's Perspective

Becoming a grandparent should be the most joyous and wonderful time in a parent's life. When my first grandchild was born my daughter was 18 and getting ready for collage. Two years prior our family moved from Staten Island to New Jersey when my husband retired from the NYCPD. Our 4 children were almost raised and my eldest child was engaged to be married. When our grandson, Christian was born he was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. This was caused because the right side of his brain was missing or never developed. Our retirement plans just flew out the window. "What do we do now?" was our first question to each other. Our lives changed in an instant and frankly we were not prepared. The life and plans we made for our future were no more.

At our lowest point, we found Children's Specialized Hospital (CSH) and Dr. Diamond, a Physiatrist. At CSH and with Dr. Diamond, our grandson received a diagnosis. This was the beginning of our journey to start getting Christian the help he would need to have a happy and productive life. Our retirement now consisted of therapy 5 days a week, from 9 am to about 4 pm and we also had early intervention providing Christian therapy in our home several days a week. With all that we were doing for Christian, we were also trying to find our happiness. My husband and I at this point had taken primary custody of Christian. Suddenly he was no longer my grandchild. Christian now was my 5<sup>th</sup> child to raise.

As Christian started to grow, we found out we were stronger than we thought. Our lives had not ended but just became different, in a wonderful, new way. We found our happiness again through Christian's eyes. As a family, we discovered what is truly important in life and our family became stronger. Christian taught us to laugh again. I would be lying if I said we did not have some bad days, but we also had some wonderful days too.

Almost 5 years ago my husband passed away after a long illness. As a family we were shattered. Christian became our anchor. I truly believe our special needs children are wise beyond their years and can teach us the true meaning of life. Christian now is 25 and in a wheelchair, and still diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, has attended and successfully completed high school in our home town. From there he went to a vocational school in Scotch Plains until he was 21. He enjoys video games with his friends and is also in a writing group online. Our lives are not what we had imagined them to be 25 years ago, our lives are so much more meaningful and have made our family better human beings, parents, grandparents', aunts, uncles and cousins. Christian's impact has positively affected my other grandchildren and they have learned how to be empathetic and have understanding for others that are uniquely different, uniquely special. I am proud to call Christian my first grandson.

