



Jewish Family Services



Thoughts from Adrienne

By Adrienne Rosenberg
JFS Director



"My child began reading at age 4." "My son just finished law school at Yale." "I have 5 grandchildren, all better looking and smarter than the next." "My daughter is engaged to a doctor." "My son just sold his business for \$6,000,000.

The stereotypical Jewish parent brags about their children and grandchildren, often based on their accomplishments. But what happens when this is not possible? What happens when our children's behavior is not mainstream, or when our children do not excel, or even when we find ourselves disappointed in their behavior? Should we then reject our children because of our disappointment? Should we put pressure on them to be something they say they are not? After all, how should we measure their success and what should we brag about? Are wealth, good looks, and professional status the measure of our success as parents? Could it be that success is not a measure of wealth or, status but can be viewed in terms of happiness and self-esteem?

I went through public school with a fellow student named Gerald. He had been born with cerebral palsy and an enlarged head. He never was able to keep his head straight; it was always moving because the neck muscles had no control. His father had been killed in

World War II, so Gerald grew up with his mother and grandmother. When he was born, the doctor's advice was to put Gerald in an institution because he never could do much; he would probably die before age 7. But his mother did not listen.

Although Gerald never played sports at recess or gym time, he was our score keeper. He did learn to walk, ride a bicycle, and to maneuver many of the same things the rest of us did—even if he did it at a much later time than the rest of us. I also remember that when we were in the 7th grade and it was "normal" to take dance and etiquette classes (remember I grew up in the South during the 50's and early 60's), Gerald was also in the class.

At our high school graduation, we choose Gerald to be one of our speakers even though his slurred speech may have made it difficult for those who did not know and accept him. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house, especially on the part of his mother and grandmother.

I have not seen Gerald since our tenth high school reunion. But I do know that he graduated college and obtained a master's degree in science. The last I heard, he was working in a lab for a company. I do not know if he ever married or had children, but I now firmly believe that the acceptance and support Gerald received from his family and friends helped him to feel good about himself and to feel successful.

The point is that success may be as simple as believing in our children even when they are written off by others as losers. It means supporting our children and bragging about them for who they are and helping them to feel good about themselves even if others have doubts.

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by Milton Tager, Campaign Chairman

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