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TAP INTO IT.
The
AUTISM
perspective



SURFERS HEALING



You Eat So Healthy



THE BUDDY BIKE

INSIDE AUTISM

The Synergy of Horse and Rider

By Barb Rentenbach



*Working with Older Children,
Adolescents, and Adults with ASD*

**The Autism Perspective magazine
TAPS INTO a new direction**

The BUDDY BIKE

By Samantha Nelson

My dad, Barry Nelson, has three great loves in life: his family, helping people and exercise. So when I was growing up, academic excellence wasn't enough. My dad would always say, "I'm glad that you're using your brain, but you have to exercise your body too."



A high IQ didn't get me out of exercising with my dad, and when my youngest brother, Jesse, was diagnosed with autism, it was clear that he wasn't going to be excused either.

In fact exercise became extra important for Jesse. Even though all he wanted to do sometimes was watch Barney over and over again, my parents made an effort to keep him moving. They taught him how to swim. My dad also loved to put him in the kiddie seat on his bike so that we could all ride together as a family. Autism is an isolating disorder, but those bike rides helped bring him out of his own world and into the much bigger world outdoors.

My parents made sure Jesse exercised his body on the weekends, and they also ensured

he was exercising his brain too. Because no suitable programs existed in our area, south Florida, they founded a new school for children with autism. While therapy helped his mind develop slowly, nature moved at a faster pace. Soon Jesse was too big for the child seat but still not ready to ride a bike on his own.

Even though Jesse could get plenty of exercise in the pool, my dad wasn't about to leave him out of those family bike rides. He bought a tandem bicycle, a bicycle built for two, where my dad would steer from the front and Jesse would pedal in the back.

This seemed like a good solution, yet things still weren't quite right. With Jesse in back, my dad wasn't able to keep his eye on him, nor did he have the security of knowing Jesse was safely strapped into the bike seat anymore. Dad couldn't be sure Jesse was pedaling at all, and when he looked back, he'd often notice that Jesse was actually pedaling backwards. Sometimes he'd crash while looking back to check on my brother. These complications made long rides more difficult and our family's favorite bike path, a 14-mile bike trail at the Florida Everglades, became impossible. Navigating traffic was scary enough and my dad wanted to be absolutely sure he knew where Jesse was when we were biking through the Everglades trail, which winds around the swamp homes of alligators and many less dangerous native animals.

My dad started looking for new solutions again. In

2003, he found a different type of tandem bicycle, which a neighbor was selling second-hand. The Love Bike sat the secondary rider in front of the rider in control. It was perfect for riders who couldn't normally bike themselves and it let my dad safely keep an eye on Jesse throughout the ride.

Without the complications to slow them down, biking became a regular part of my dad and Jesse's routine. Every Saturday morning they'd spend quality time together biking 15 to 20 miles around the Miami beachfront and then stopping for breakfast.

The bike rides haven't just been fun for Jesse; they've also been educational. Jesse not only pedals, he also helps my dad steer, pointing and saying "right turn" or "left turn" as they ride around the familiar

route. Instead of just seeing his dad's back, Jesse now sees the whole world before him, though he often looks back at my dad with a big smile on his face.

People started to take notice of the

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unique bicycle and my dad got thinking. The bike had already helped him do two of the three things he loves. There had to be a way for him to use it to help people too.

So my dad sought out the bike's inventor, purchased the patent, and restarted production of the newly-named "Buddy Bike."

Since then, he has committed himself to sharing the fun and benefits of the Buddy Bike with more families like ours - families that want to share good times outdoors with their special children but aren't sure how.

The response has been great so far. Several other families who have children with autism have tried the bike and have been thrilled with the results.

"Our nine-year-old son, Connor, was diagnosed with autism when he was about three years old and my husband and I have been working on many "everyday" life lessons for Connor to master," said Mary E. Ferguson of Manasquan, NJ. "Riding a bicycle was quite a struggle. The standard bikes left all of us frustrated. The Buddy Bike seemed like the perfect fit and so far it has been."

Buddy Bike, LLC gives price discounts to families, schools or programs that want to purchase a Buddy Bike for use with

Samantha Nelson



Barry and Jesse

someone with special needs. Although children with autism have been the main benefactors so far, the bike can also help the visually and mentally impaired.

The Buddy Bike is currently available for rent at Bike Chicago (at Navy Pier in Chicago) and my dad has traveled the

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country to show it off at bike conventions, hoping to raise awareness and make the bike available to more families.

Buddy Bike, LLC is also currently planning a Buddy Bike Everglades ride, to show families the same happiness we feel as a family every time we're able to include Jesse in something that has been so special to us for so many years. **TAP**



Buddy Bike
special needs special bike

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BUDDY BIKE VISIT
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