

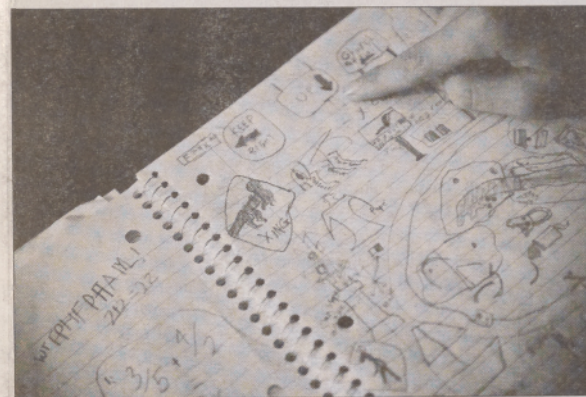
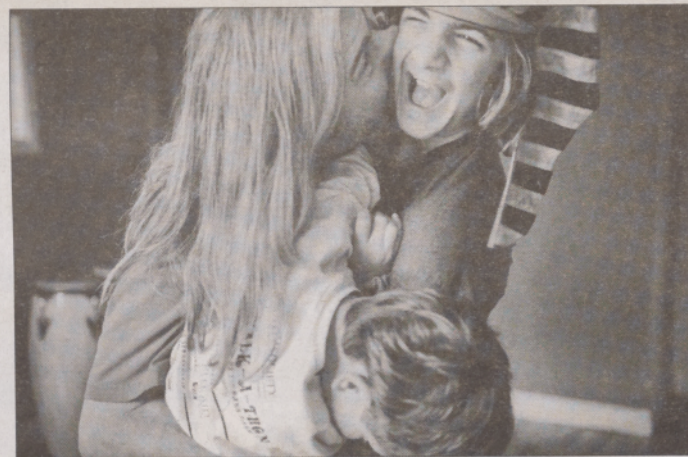
ASPERGERS from page 7

At right: Willie creating a movie set. "A lot of people go to school, go to college, and they get out and they get a job where they are sitting in a big office somewhere with a lot of people around them, working at a desk in a little cubicle, and hating it. And that's not something that you would be good at," Tobi says to her son Willie. "But that's not something I would want you to do anyhow. You'll be much better off following your dreams, which are to be a filmmaker, and being creative and doing interesting stuff."

Below: Hugs are a regular part of the day in the Rates household.

"We're a happy group here," says Willie's dad Dale. "We have group hugs, actually we have a family hug time. It's not like it's scheduled, it just happens. Very few things are scheduled around here, actually."

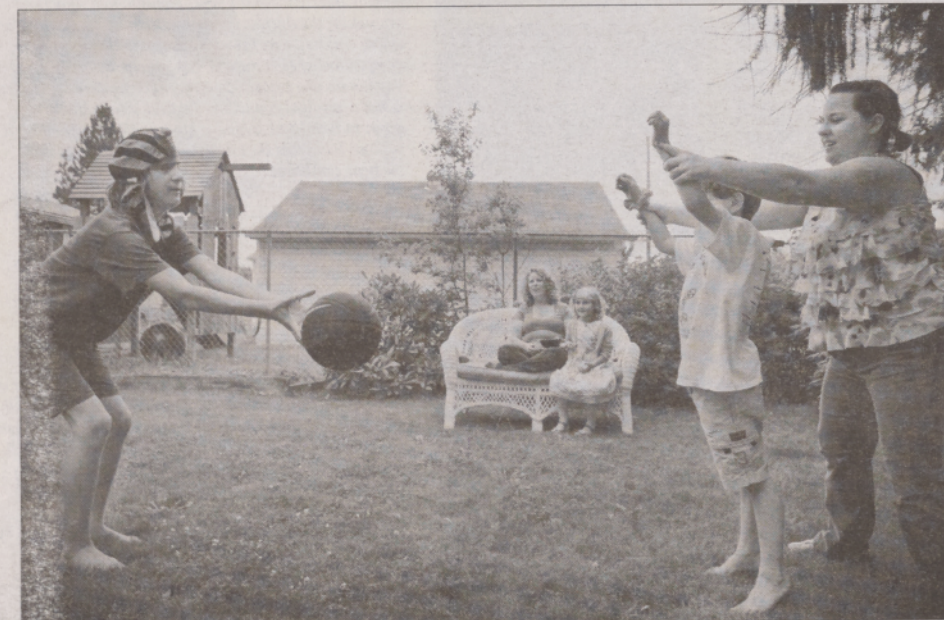
At Bottom: Willie plays ball with his brother Jacob, who is helped by his aide. Jacob is profoundly autistic and for the most part, nonverbal, though he can sign some words. Dale looks at his boys and says, "These boys; same dad, same mom, same delivery room, same hospital, same nurse, same delivery doctor, they grew up together. Diagnosis-wise, they couldn't be any more different. They look alike, you know, they are brothers, but, you know, this is the whole thing of 'show me one kid with autism, and I'll show you one kid with autism.' Jacob needs a school with a lot of aides. Jacob needs supervision around the house. Jacob needs to have a latch on his door at night. He can't say, 'Hi, my name is Jacob,' or 'I live down the street,' that's not his world. But he can get out the front door or the back door and down the street he goes."



"In comparison to my last school, it's a paradise," say Willie. "You can customize your own schedule. You actually get to say whatever you want." Plus they don't look twice at his headdress, he notes. And, Willie says, "Quadrupedalism is allowed," meaning he can walk on all fours. "They're much nicer at Pacific Crest, and there are a lot less kids so I don't have to make as many friends to be popular at the school. I now think I'm the kind of guy who has a lot of friends," says Willie, though he eats his lunch alone. Many people who have Asperger's have difficulty interacting socially. In 2010 the Oregon Department of Education reported a 6 percent increase in the number of children with autism from the previous school year with 7,300 children with a diagnosis of autism in Oregon public schools.



Above: In April, Autism Awareness month, Willie attends the 9th Annual Autism Walk-A-Thon at Oaks Park which draws record numbers every year as awareness and acceptance increases. Dale marvels at the changes time has brought, "In my day, in the 60s, there was one description, or two descriptions, really: retarded or normal. Now it's not a shame. It's everywhere. We're all a little weird everywhere you look. Everyone's got a quirk, or a strange little thing. And that's OK. That's what makes us unique. Otherwise we're just robots and rocks."



An avid stop motion filmmaker, Willie has made more than 120 movies through his production company, KhAnubis Productions, which he promotes through a blog ([khanubis.blogspot.com/](http://khanubis.blogspot.com/)), a Web site [khanubisproductions.weebly.com](http://khanubisproductions.weebly.com), and Youtube. His film topics usually center on ancient Rome and Egypt, with Playmobil figures taking the starring roles. His latest piece, "Dr. Tyrannus' Revenge," is complete with German Subtitles.



Above top: During math class, Willie's notebook fills up with drawings rather than equations. In general, his relationship with school is uneven, with him excelling in topics that fascinate him, like herpetology, the study and classification of reptiles and amphibians. Like many people that have Asperger's, Willie can spend hours fixated on very specific topics or interests, which is why many with the diagnosis make good lawyers or computer programmers.

As the parent of a child with profound autism, Tobi says that her perception of Asperger's maybe a bit different. "If Willie were an only child or if Jacob were neurotypical, we would probably be more focused and concerned. But for us, Willie is doing great. He's a terrific kid. He has challenges and quirks and whatnot. He's definitely a unique individual."

Photos by Leah Nash

