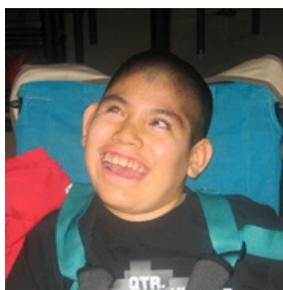


GROWING WITH YOUR CHILD

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What got me started thinking about all this happened recently. I was waiting to be called in to see Norman's (my son's) doctor, when I saw a young couple with a baby walking out of the office. I could see in their eyes and their body language some anxiety. They came over and introduced themselves, and told me that their baby was blind, and they asked about Norman. I have no doubt in my mind that I looked the same way back then when he was the same age, or maybe even worse! But it also reminded that it was now over fourteen years ago, and that a lot of things had changed.

Secondly, my husband came to me with a question: Is Norman still our baby? I said yes, he is, because he is our youngest child, but he is not a baby anymore. And I became aware that as much as I don't like the idea of his growing older, it is the reality. Norman is an adolescent now. And even though he still sees a pediatrician and still requires the same amount of support as before, he is growing up. That helped me understand what I have seen and experienced with Norman day by day and year by year--that he is getting older, and that sometimes I did not want to acknowledge these changes.

As a mom, I knew all along that Norman was growing up, of course, as he transitioned from early intervention, to elementary school, and then to middle school. I have seen changes in different aspects of his life, for example, **physically** his appearance is different, he is heavier and taller, body parts are changing, he is growing a mustache and needs to wear appropriate clothing to his age, and now even uses deodorant and cologne. **Emotionally** he is more mature, and his personality has changed. His behavior is more like an adolescent with mood swings, and he does not cry as much and sleeps better at night. **Socially** he likes to be with friends more than before, and he enjoys family gatherings and family outings more now that he can tolerate loud noises better. On the other hand, he can definitely let you know when he does not like something, or when he is tired or unhappy.

Health is a roller coaster in everybody's life, especially in our children's with disabilities. When they are very young, their health is our number one priority. I am not saying that it isn't now, but in my case I am blessed to say that Norman's health has been stable, and that I have learned to live with his condition. But, on the other hand, his disabilities have made me and my family more attached and overprotective of him, and have not allowed us to see that Norman is maturing. People still refer him as "the baby," or "el niño."

Now I understand that though I have been part of Norman's growing up, I have not been fully conscious of this process, and that deep in my heart I would like Norman to still be a baby, because it was easier to handle. But it is unfair and disrespectful to him if I do not treat him equally.

I thank God that these events--seeing the young couple and my husband asking me if Norman was our baby--happened now and not later in my life. It came as a "reality check" and made me think that as much as I would sometimes like to see my son as a baby, he is not. And I also had to say to myself that I really like the way he is now, the adolescent he has become, handsome and tall. And I remembered that this year is his last year of middle school, and he has already attended his first school dance. And that I would like to see him have spiky teenage hair, and blend in with his peers, and that soon he will be transitioning to high school, and then planning his adult life.

This has been a learning experience that I wanted to share with other parents. It is important to look at our children as they are and not to lose track, to grow along with them, with all its implications, to enjoy every change they have, to be conscious of the future, and to live fully as a parent. The new parents I met at the doctor's office helped me to realize all of this, while also allowing me to see the difference between us. Because I had to acknowledge that just like my son, I too have grown older, and have learned so much.