

Of Autism and Surviving Quarantine

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I am deviating from writing about agriculture as my previous blogs were about and write about something that is current and somebody I treasure.

At this time of Quarantine, having a child with Autism tries not only my patience but also my wallet. My son Gab, who is now 13 years old was diagnosed early on to have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is difficult for him to be homebound after being in school every day. Actually, he looks forward to going to school because it means that he will get to eat snacks and lunch from his favorite fastfood stores.

To people with children who have autism, they all know that they are creatures of habit. Gab is no different. Weekdays are spent in School, weekends on travel to Bukidnon where we visit my husband's family. Sunday, on the way home from Bukidnon is a sidetrip to the mall for groceries. For years that is always his routine. Then all of the sudden, COVID-19 happened and Gab's classes and therapies were cancelled. He can't get out of the house everyday and his routine is disrupted.

Disruption of routine for a child with autism means disruption to all of us in the family. At the early part of implementation of the quarantine, Gab cannot understand why we cannot go home to Bukidnon or why he cannot eat at his favorite fastfood or go malling. We tried patiently explaining to him about COVID. Almost everyday he asks when, what date can he go back home to Bukidnon or go to the mall. In Ilocano, we call it "dagdagulit", stubbornly asking when, when, when. However, with the TV news constantly on the subject, he began to accept the new normal, but of course with concessions.

Before all these happened, Gab always wants to eat inside the dining area of Jollibee or Mc Do. His favorite spot is in the second floor, if there is one. He likes to watch people, especially in his high perch at the second floor. I feel that he just wants to soak in the atmosphere where many people are eating at other tables. He always requests us, "sit down" and not take out. But alas, much as we want to give in to him to keep peace in the house, we really can't let him "sit down" for now.

In March, at the start of the community quarantine, Gab would request to go around the City. We have instilled in him that he must not go out or he might get sick. So he just sits inside the car and observe the close establishments that we pass by. He seems to want to validate if we are telling the truth regarding the quarantine. Along the way, he says, "closed", "closed" no bus", "wear mask". Eventually, knowing that he cannot eat his faves if he will not "take out", he reluctantly relented to a Drive thru. And in times where he can't go out, Food Panda came to the rescue. Tuloy ang ligaya, for Gab, and peace in the home for us. He also went back to cooking and baking. Frankly, his cooked products and baked pastries are delicious.

This quarantine has brought havoc to most, but it made us more creative, more wise in as far as dealing with Gab and his eccentricities are concerned.