

Interview #4

Name of Interviewee: Matt Selaya

Occupation: Father of Gabe

Date: 3/25/23

00;00;01;04 - 00;00;04;11

Speaker 1

All right. Could you please state your name and your relationship with Gabe?

00;00;04;20 - 00;00;07;16

Speaker 2

Sure. My name's Matt Selaya, and I'm Gabe's dad.

00;00;08;22 - 00;00;11;00

Speaker 1

How old is Gabe? And what does he enjoy doing?

00;00;11;00 - 00;00;39;20

Speaker 2

In his free time? So Gabe's 18 now. He loves playing taiko. He loves music. He loves playing video games, sports. He especially likes basketball, Baseball. He loves-I mentioned music. He loves singing. But yeah, I mean, I think it's kind of like he also likes going to concerts and stuff.

00;00;40;20 - 00;00;45;03

Speaker 1

Yeah. What are some of the best qualities of Gabe?

00;00;45;03 - 00;01;11;12

Speaker 2

Oh, gosh, he has an amazing heart. Like he isn't always the most vocally demonstrative, but he notices things and he'll just kind of step in to try to help someone or do something. And it's not necessarily what you'd expect, cause sometimes it doesn't seem like he's kind of like doing his own thing or maybe not really actively involved in other situations.

00;01;12;00 - 00;01;50;12

Speaker 2

Um, he has incredible enthusiasm. It becomes contagious. So he's really good with crowds and he has groups of people. He can definitely bring people together, get people excited. He is very passionate about the things he does with Taiko. He's been doing Taiko for almost ten years now, and he really loves it very much. He especially early on always practiced with anything that could be a drumstick and just kind of worked out rhythms and stuff.

00;01;52;10 - 00;01;56;07

Speaker 2

Yeah. Now those are some of the things that come off the top of the head also.

00;01;56;07 - 00;02;02;28

Speaker 1

I'm so sorry, I forgot to mention. Yeah. If I ask a question before you answer, would you be able to like, rephrase the question a little?

00;02;03;04 - 00;02;03;19

Speaker 2

Oh, sure.

00;02;03;19 - 00;02;16;15

Speaker 1

Yeah. If I said, um, how will this be given and what's he enjoyed doing in his free time? Actually, that one I think is fine. Okay. If I said what are the best qualities? Like instead of being like, Oh, this isn't like some of the best qualities.

00;02;16;15 - 00;02;20;20

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, totally.

00;02;22;02 - 00;02;26;25

Speaker 1

All right. Um, what is one thing you wish people knew about your child that they don't?

00;02;27;22 - 00;03;06;26

Speaker 2

So one thing I wish people knew about Gabe is that he's always present. I think sometimes when maybe it's a situation where he's not quite as interested or maybe where he dislikes when people start to question him or he feels like someone's testing him. And so it does point sometimes he might withdraw or seem like he's ignoring, but he's still present and he's still like engaged and he still understands what's going on.

00;03;06;26 - 00;03;33;17

Speaker 2

And I think a lot of people don't realize that. So then they'll shift the focus to a parent who's usually with him, myself or my wife. But at the same time, he's always, you know, absorbing, taking in the situation. And many times he'll, you know, surprise them. Hop back in and answer a question or afterwards, talk about the situation with us.

00;03;33;17 - 00;03;51;29

Speaker 2

But yeah, I mean, I think because sometimes Gabe's vocal expression isn't what folks expect or understand that they tend to maybe discount him or push him aside.

00;03;51;29 - 00;03;54;07

Speaker 1

Um, what is the biggest obstacle that Gabe faces day to day?

00;03;57;09 - 00;04;29;00

Speaker 2

So the biggest obstacle Gabe faces day to day. It's so, it's a tough question. Um, I think a lot of times it's similar to what I just said, you know, folks who aren't used to working with self advocates or folks with special needs, um, you know, don't understand the full capacity that they have to engage and participate and be a part of things.

00;04;29;29 - 00;04;55;00

Speaker 2

And so I think there have been many junctures where we've had to really advocate for Gabe being included in something or, or giving him an opportunity to do something. And you know, more often than not, if it's something he's interested in, he really, you know, becomes quite excited about it. And often it will excel. And that can be surprising to folks who don't know.

00;04;55;00 - 00;05;05;05

Speaker 2

But it's just getting him. The opportunity to get those chances is really challenging. Sometimes.

00;06;38;16 - 00;06;46;22

Speaker 1

Do you feel that Gabe has ample opportunity, socialize with his peers? And is there anything you wish was better?

00;06;46;22 - 00;07;16;02

Speaker 2

Um, I think at Mountain view High School, the experience has been good. I think the way the special ed is socialized with. With other groups, there is good Mr. Q did a really great job of being an advocate for Gabe and helping him out there, especially with the opportunities had with participating in pep bands, with participating with the dance groups.

00;07;16;02 - 00;07;46;07

Speaker 2

So I think from that perspective, yeah, as well as Spartan Buddies as well. I think it's, you know, as a parent you kind of wish that there are ways for him to be a little bit more included always. But I think, you know, it's the opportunities that are there for him at Mountain View. And obviously I'm not there too day to day, but hopefully it seems like whenever we go there, people are really excited to see him and engage with him.

00;07;46;07 - 00;07;52;09

Speaker 2

So hopefully that's also happening while he's at school.

00;07;52;09 - 00;07;54;23

Speaker 1

What are Gabe's plans when he finishes high school?

00;07;55;28 - 00;08;24;06

Speaker 2

So, um, there's within the school district, a post-secondary program that folks go to that I think takes him up to age 22. And so he'll be going to that. The program is moving to some of the construction on the other side of the parking lot from Mountain View High So it can be really close. I think we're talking about the possibility of him still coming back over, maybe assisting with some of the Taiko sometimes because he loves that so much.

00;08;25;22 - 00;08;54;09

Speaker 2

Beyond that, we're trying to explore options to help him continue to grow and do the types of things that he's interested in, in addition to all the stuff he doesn't do in Mountain View. He also does obviously, this type of kid and Taiko here on Saturdays. And he also does fit Buddies which is like a workout trainer type thing. So he's kind of interested in those things as well as doing Special Olympics sports as well.

00;08;54;29 - 00;09;14;19

Speaker 2

So I think those will probably be some of the main things that he'll be doing. Um, eventually I think he is really interested in animals and loves animals quite a bit and we've had some really great experiences with animal assisted happiness. So we try to explore if there's an opportunity for him to volunteer there and maybe help out there.

00;09;15;11 - 00;09;36;25

Speaker 2

Um, and yeah, I mean that's kind of the, the, the main thing that I can think of right now. I think once he's completely finished with school and he has more free time, we'll try to find more opportunities for him to be more engaged as well. Um.

00;09;37;24 - 00;09;40;00

Speaker 1

What are your biggest worries after high school?

00;09;42;03 - 00;10;02;07

Speaker 2

Um, so, you know, um, my wife and I work full time and my job has made it a bit easier for me to be able to be the driving parent. So I try to go to school, pick them up, take him to stuff, usually after school once he's no longer in the post-secondary program. And he really has a completely free day.

00;10;02;18 - 00;10;24;23

Speaker 2

I think, you know, I really want to make sure that he's still able to be active and stay engaged with things, not lose touch from pursuing the things that he's passionate about, as well as not lose touch with his friends. I mean, I think when you're in school, it's really nice to have kind of a preset area for socialization and meeting people.

00;10;24;23 - 00;10;40;14

Speaker 2

And so, um, yeah, I mean, I think keeping him active and involved in the community and you know, being able to facilitate that is probably the thing that I'm most concerned about. After he finishes school.

00;10;40;14 - 00;10;49;06

Speaker 1

What is a misconception about your child for children with disabilities in general that you wish other parents or others in general understand?

00;10;49;06 - 00;11;27;17

Speaker 2

Um, I think, you know, in terms of other parents or other organizations or folks who just don't work with self advocates, you know, some of the biggest misconceptions are probably, you know, their ability, you know, with a lot of folks. I mean, obviously it's a wide spectrum in terms of the way they're able to communicate and understand. Um, some folks who have Down syndrome are able to, you know, really express themselves verbally in a very in a manner which has received more thought than other folks.

00;11;28;04 - 00;11;59;14

Speaker 2

Um, so I think especially for folks like Gabe who can, you know, obviously he's not he speaks and he communicates, but sometimes it's not always directly corresponding to maybe the engagement that's been presented to him. The folks contend to discount maybe his understanding or ability or just kind of him generally and, you know, push him to the side or ignore him or treat him in a negative way.

00;12;00;09 - 00;12;39;16

Speaker 2

Um, so yeah, I mean, I think especially things like Spartan buddies where especially at a younger age, where you're able to meet folks with different disabilities or different different levels

of ability and develop friendships, understandings with them, I think that things like that will help, you know, folks as they grow older and society become more welcoming and open and understanding of folks and maybe clear away some of the hurdles that they have to go through.

00;12;39;16 - 00;12;40;11

Speaker 1

Are there ways that your friends and peers can gain more of an understanding of raising a child?

00;12;47;02 - 00;13;13;24

Speaker 2

Um, yeah. You know, we've had a few situations where people we've known have had a child that they knew prior to birth was going to have a disability and they reached out to us. I mean, I think on a macro level, there are organizations like in this area, there are parents helping parents and a few other organizations that are through the county that can help parents start to understand.

00;13;13;24 - 00;13;35;02

Speaker 2

But really it comes down to the family groups. So Silicon Valley Down Syndrome Network is the one that we've been with for quite some time. And the great thing about that is you have families at all levels of it in terms of how their kids are. So when there's a younger family who's coming in with the baby, you can be a support to them.

00;13;35;02 - 00;14;01;13

Speaker 2

But when we're talking now to folks who have kids who have graduated or are out of post-secondary and trying to get a nice data to understand what are the things we need to be doing, what are the things that we can, you know, work with Gabe to help him do? You know, it helps us kind of plan out and understand, you know, how we can best support him and what he wants to do.

00;14;01;13 - 00;14;28;14

Speaker 2

So, yeah, I mean, I think it can be challenging for, you know, peers or friends who maybe are entering into this experience and are not ready for it. But there definitely are supports out there. I wish they were a little bit better known but yeah especially if the diagnosis is made at birth. I think the hospitals have some good starting points for people in the right direction.

00;14;28;14 - 00;14;29;11

Speaker 2

But yeah.

00;14;30;09 - 00;14;46;13

Speaker 1

Um, another mother said that certain things bother her about the language people use regarding people with disabilities. For example, she said she doesn't like when people say "What's your handicap?" The thing is their language or a general sensitivity that you hear that people may be aware is offensive.

00;14;48;01 - 00;15;17;07

Speaker 2

So yeah, I mean, I think the big one is the R word. And that's I think we've done a pretty good job as a society over the last ten years of raising awareness of the harmfulness of that word and finding ways for folks to express themselves differently. Um, yeah, I mean, I think, um, language and the way it's developed has been problematic in a lot of different ways from a lot of different perspectives, not just with folks with disabilities.

00;15;17;07 - 00;15;59;28

Speaker 2

Um, that's probably the main one that I can think of. I know there's another word that was commonly used in the US, but in the UK it meant something very differently. So I think folks have stopped, you know, using, using that word as well, which is good. But I think generally speaking, you know, just being conscious of the, the not only the what you're saying, but like the, you know, what you're trying to express and you know, how the language you use affects not only the person that you're communicating with, but also, you know, taking a step back and understanding how that language develops within your mind.

00;15;59;28 - 00;16;17;04

Speaker 2

And it's important to kind of think about. So yeah, but yeah, I think, you know, in terms of language, like I said, the R word is probably the main one that's thankfully no longer being really used.

00;16;17;04 - 00;16;24;07

Speaker 1

How did you feel when you found out that your child had a disability and how have those feelings evolved as Gabe has gotten older?

00;16;24;07 - 00;16;59;12

Speaker 2

Um. Excellent question. I think we found out Gabe had Down's syndrome after he was born. So and they actually, they, they still do testing in utero to see if there's markers that would indicate and we did all that testing. It all came back like nothing. And I think prior to his birth, you know, as when you're young, soon to be parents, you have the conversation of, well, you know, if our child was born and there was something that, you know, a disability or something else with them, you know, you know, what would we do?

00;16;59;12 - 00;17;17;20

Speaker 2

And my wife and I did have that conversation prior to being born. And we did decide, you know, obviously, that like, it's still our child. We love them and try to help them as best we can. And so we were presented with that when Gabe was born, after he was born, he was taken away. They took the child away to clean them, etc..

00;17;18;17 - 00;17;36;25

Speaker 2

And it had been hours since Gabe was gone. And we were kind of like, okay, what's going on is okay. And um, we asked a nurse and they're like, Oh, they're just checking to make sure to see if he has Down syndrome. And we were like, Oh. And so the way it was presented to us was very shocking.

00;17;37;13 - 00;18;05;18

Speaker 2

Um, I think, um, you know, you kind of go through multiple tracks, you know, on the one hand especially, you know, Gabe is 18 now, so like almost 20 years ago, the way we viewed individuals with Down's syndrome was very different in society. Even now, it's still not, you know, my views, my view is a bit skewed because I work so much with families and other folks.

00;18;05;18 - 00;18;21;29

Speaker 2

But, um, and so we didn't know like, okay, we had these antiquated ideas. Okay, Does this mean like he's going to have a short life span? Is he going to be able to grow? He's going to communicate. And the first thoughts were on one track, really? Just like, what can we do to help him and help support him?

00;18;22;16 - 00;18;47;23

Speaker 2

And then I think on another track, you realize that, you know, as a parent, when you when you're going to have a kid, you kind of go through sometimes like scenario in your head, like, oh, you know, maybe they might grow up and do this or maybe they might grow up and do that. And so there's also a period of adjusting where you kind of learn to let go of those things a little bit and then it's okay.

00;18;48;00 - 00;19;17;15

Speaker 2

Like, you know, these preconceived notions of what it a good life is or what, you know, an active life is, are really limiting and the more you start learning and growing with your child and seeing all the things they can accomplish, all the things you're doing and understanding that you know their path is different, but it's not necessarily a more a worse path or a more limited path.

00;19;17;26 - 00;19;45;11

Speaker 2

Um, yeah, it's, it's a lot of emotions. It's a lot of, you know, to take in when you find out. But I think, you know, ultimately our first and most pressing thoughts were really like, what do we need to do? What can we do to help support our child and help them grow up and be healthy and happy?

00;20;55;05 - 00;21;02;18

Speaker 1

Do you think the Spartan Buddies club has benefitted your child?

00;21;03;04 - 00;21;33;05

Speaker 2

Absolutely. Yeah. Um, I. I know I haven't heard much about it this year just because I think it's seen here and it's really involved with a lot of stuff, but I know he's still doing it. That's right. But it's especially in previous years, he talks about people in Spartan buddies. He really loves, you know, the opportunity to engage with folks outside of his regular class, not that there's a lot of his kid gets in the class, but, you know, it's nice to have more friends and see people from the places and stuff.

00;21;34;12 - 00;22;04;09

Speaker 2

I think that especially, you know, opportunities like when he's been able to walk in the homecoming parade with Spartan buddies. He really loved that a lot. I think that was one of the first times where he was really kind of independent without an adult around, um, when he was able to, you know, walk around the corner and stuff and, um, but yeah, I mean, I, I feel, I feel a little bit as a parent because we don't get much insight into a lot of things that Spartan buddies do.

00;22;04;28 - 00;22;12;14

Speaker 2

Um, but I, I do know that he really enjoys it and he really appreciates the time he has with his Spartan buddies.

00;22;14;00 - 00;22;18;25

Speaker 1

Would it be better to have a class of like people of all, all different backgrounds?

00;22;27;07 - 00;22;58;28

Speaker 2

Yeah. So, I mean, I think if we're speaking of a utopian view, then sure, Yeah. I mean, I think a fully blended class with folks with all levels of ability and such. However, that's not really the way our school is set up. I'm not my guy. I don't have anything bad to say about the guy, but I do think, especially as parents like us, it's inclusion in the regular classes, kind of, you know, an early goal if the child will do it.

00;22;58;28 - 00;23;30;16

Speaker 2

And especially at the primary school level there's just not the support in place to do what they're supposed to be. Um but I think our primary school experience was, um, was good for the first 2 to 3 years when he had a really engaged special ed teacher. And then the district did a really poor job of investing and supporting the needs of the kids with special ed.

00;23;30;25 - 00;24;02;26

Speaker 2

It was a very bad scenario. So perhaps we're a little bit biased in that way. Um, and then once he got to middle school, it improved a little bit. Improved credit would actually mean the middle school teacher was quite wonderful and um, at block he had a lot of opportunities. He went on like the Yosemite trip, he did a band and went down to L.A. and it, and so, like there were a lot of things he was included in and so, um, Mountain View High that's continued.

00;24;03;00 - 00;24;34;06

Speaker 2

I think Mr. Q has done an excellent job of really talking with us, talking to Gabe, understanding what his interests are, what his passions are. I think early on we wanted him to have the opportunity to continue with music, so we really worked with Mr. to get that worked out. And then if you ask my wife, maybe she remembers this story differently, but because of going to music, he'd always walk by the dance studio and kind of look in and say hi to folks, um, the dance teacher.

00;24;34;06 - 00;24;58;05

Speaker 2

Then, you know, I said, Well, would you be interested? And invited him in? And that was an amazing moment. I think Dance Spectrum has been just he wears dance spectrum clothes at least three days a week. He would probably wear them for seven days if we had enough of them. Yeah, I think I've been really pleased by his high school experience.

00;24;58;05 - 00;25;26;13

Speaker 2

I think in a perfect world it might have looked a little different, but I don't know if you know, it would have been better. But yeah, I mean, I think as a society we should be striving to really have the support in place to really allow individuals with disabilities, self advocates to be able to participate more fully in the regular curriculum.

00;25;26;13 - 00;25;29;23

Speaker 3

Yeah, Yeah. Um.

00;25;31;20 - 00;25;39;07

Speaker 1

Do you think it's more difficult for children with disabilities to make lasting friendships versus those without?

00;25;39;07 - 00;26;01;09

Speaker 2

So I think it's a little bit mixed. I don't think it's more difficult for them to make those friendships I've met, especially when you start working with Special Olympics or other organizations that work with individuals with disabilities. I've seen folks in there who have known each other for years and years and years together at that time. It's just like any other friendship.

00;26;02;09 - 00;26;34;25

Speaker 2

I think one of the challenges comes when, you know, in speaking about the high school transitioning experience, like he has people he's become friends with in high school who are not within the the special day class, who I think the trajectory of what they go through with looking for college and then going away and developing new friends. I think it's hard enough when you go to college to keep your friendships from high school or earlier.

00;26;35;13 - 00;26;59;09

Speaker 2

I think when you have the added, um, the added factor of it's with a person's disability and sometimes there's like it's not as it's not always, at least in our situation, as easy for folks to get together. It's not like just copying friends saying, Hey, let's go get a movie. It's going to do something. It's a lot more structured.

00;26;59;19 - 00;27;25;21

Speaker 2

I think those can be harder to maintain. And so I'm hoping some of the friends that he's made, um, will, you know, find an opportunity to keep in touch with him. Um, not, you know, having been through expected experiences myself, there's, there's like not, you know, negative feelings if they don't necessarily, but I mean, it would be nice. I think he would enjoy that.

00;27;25;21 - 00;27;48;19

Speaker 2

Um, but I think definitely maintaining those friendships with the folks who have been within the different organizations that support individual disability will be the franchise. It'll probably be easier for him to maintain. And those friendships like I said before, are like any other friendships. They just, um, people are engaged and they're together and they're happy. Could you talk a little bit about the Special Olympics?

00;27;48;19 - 00;28;14;06

Speaker 2

I'm sure I'm not the best person to ask about it because guys participated only in a few ways. We came to it when he was, um, I think 12 or 13. Um, we had heard it's a good way for them to be active and kind of, you know, you always, you always look for trying to find multiple tiers of support because if something happens to one you want to be able to have.

00;28;14;24 - 00;28;39;24

Speaker 2

And so from that, I think the first thing he did was for hockey. When he played hockey was 13. He was probably not quite 50 yet. He was like four. Peter four, nine probably didn't even wear £100. And with the Special Olympics they don't tear it down by age level. So he's playing with like 20 or 30 year old people who are just ready to do it.

00;28;39;24 - 00;29;07;04

Speaker 2

And he loved it like the first the first year he was a little a little hesitant, but by the second year he was like going everywhere and and stuff. And that's still, I think, his favorite sport to play in the Special Olympics is hockey. Since then, he's done tennis, He's done golf. Um, basketball. I think those are all the ones he's done.

00;29;07;05 - 00;29;49;18

Speaker 2

In addition to that, there's also through the Little League, he's done Challenger which is not a big organization, Special Olympics, which has like multiple, multiple sports, but still an opportunity for individual disabilities to come together on a team and participate. He did his best. Boswell Nice thing as well is about the Special Olympics is it's an international organization. So there are opportunities to go to different places to participate so that, you know, when he becomes older might be something he gosh this last year they had one of their meets in Santa Clara and in addition to the meet, they also had like a little support village.

00;29;50;01 - 00;30;04;28

Speaker 2

And so we went. We didn't go to the meet because it was imperative eating in a sport at the time because of COVID, but went to the support village and to the support village he was able to go to. They had orthodontists there who were able to go and measure the teeth. And so he got an athletic, like, mouth guard for free.

00;30;05;28 - 00;30;29;00

Speaker 2

There were, um, optometrists who were there, who did all kinds of eye tests and stuff and ended up getting a free pair of, like, prescription glasses. There were folks who were, you know, podiatrists who looked at feet, and he was able to get, you know, suggestions on the best shoes to wear, but also a set of inserts for or a prescription for a set of inserts to get.

00;30;29;09 - 00;30;49;05

Speaker 2

So, I mean, it was just amazing, like the wealth of free things that people are looking to do. So when you have an organization like that that's really international, very well known, very well thought of, like things like that really do help folks with, you know, with all different sorts of abilities.

00;30;49;05 - 00;30;56;09

Speaker 1

What oh, is there any program or activity that you wish that the school would provide that they don't?

00;30;56;09 - 00;31;27;18

Speaker 2

Um, that's a good question. Um, you know, we've been really, um, fortunate that most of the things Gabe's been interested in, he's been able to really participate with. Um, I don't, I don't know about the high school curriculum, so I'm not sure if this is even something Mountain View offers, but there were things like shop class or, like maker lab type thing that he did in middle school that hasn't been an opportunity as much in high school, but that's pretty minor.

00;31;28;11 - 00;31;52;00

Speaker 2

I think he's been really fortunate in that way. But the key has always been, um, someone on the faculty who has really engaged and decided that they are going to put the effort into making this work with music. At first I think he was one of the first kids from his class who was able to go over and do music.

00;31;52;01 - 00;32;13;15

Speaker 2

It was really because the music teacher at the time was very engaged and very, very supportive, and that's how he got into the band as well. At one point she wanted him to go into the marching band too, and we were working towards that. But once she left this year, it's still been a good experience. I think in the classroom, it's been a good experience.

00;32;13;15 - 00;32;37;23

Speaker 2

I think the band experience has been, um, you know, different because you don't have a teacher who has that investment and engagement. That's nothing against the teacher. They're doing a fine job and they're accepting him. But there's a difference. Been like allowing him to be there and really like engaging and really like trying to help him understand how to be a part of the community more fully.

00;32;38;29 - 00;33;04;02

Speaker 2

Dance has been phenomenal. I mean, outside of Mr. Q that's been the best thing at Mountain View High School, and with then Spectrum, it's never we when talking with Ms. Keto like there's never been a question of, you know, whether Gabe can participate or whether he can do it. It's just been like, you know, make sure he's ready to do this and make sure he's got his uniform on and he's going to be there and doing it.

00;33;04;02 - 00;33;37;01

Speaker 2

And so I think I know that a lot of the faculty who are engaged with him and support him have gone to bat for him with the district and such and getting the support that are needed to help him participate in. And I really appreciate that. But I really feel bad that they have to do that. I really wish the supporters were just there naturally and that they really did take an invested effort in trying to actively support individuals and mapping to what they're wanting to do and interested in doing.

00;33;37;24 - 00;34;20;07

Speaker 2

And it wasn't, you know, any sort of discussion or struggle there. But like I said, that having been said, there's not there's not a lot curriculum wise. I think that he hasn't been able to participate. And so that's been really, really nice. That's great. Yeah. What are your hopes and for my hopes and dreams for Gabe, you know, really that he grows up and is able to do something that he feels is a fulfilling you know, that he is, um, able to be in a situation where he feels happiness and love, that he's able to be active in his community.

00;34;20;14 - 00;34;44;11

Speaker 2

Um, whether he's able to continue with Taiko that's going to be a question. But I mean I think he, when asked to describe himself, I think and I can't represent middle school or high school the thing he said he chose as a descriptor is an athlete. I'm an athlete and I think now he would probably say he was a musician as well.

00;34;45;23 - 00;35;32;11

Speaker 2

But I think, you know, there's opportunities to make sure that he can stay active and keep pursuing what he wants to pursue. I mean, that's really my biggest hope. You know, I know that society isn't always as welcoming of folks with disabilities. And so I know there's going to be a lot of challenges there. But I just hope that beyond myself and his mom, that we're able to find like minded support systems for him to help him, um, navigate through all that and really be able to continue to, to live a happy and fulfilled life.

00;35;32;11 - 00;35;46;29

Speaker 3

Um, based on my research, there are programs that are employing students with disabilities like grocery stores. What do you think about it? Companies like Google and Facebook made more of an effort to see the value in hiring adults with disabilities.

00;35;47;27 - 00;36;29;15

Speaker 2

I mean, I think they'd be excellent. I know. So I know that Google has hired some individuals with disabilities to work in their cafeterias. And I think, um, as well as doing something low level, like maybe mail workers or things like that. But I also know like once cuts come, that's one of the first things that goes, I think, you know, their things are changing but there have been laws in place that one inhibit the ability for of individuals with disabilities to to earn a living and also allow companies to take advantage of individuals with disabilities by paying them a lesser amount than, you know, what would be a living wage.

00;36;30;29 - 00;37;21;06

Speaker 2

Um, so I mean, I think overall it feels like we're at a very large inflection point, generally speaking, when it comes to labor and how businesses are able to operate, um, not only in the States but especially in California. And so I'm hopeful that eventually businesses will see the value and, you know, not just having some with disabilities around because, you know, they can get a tax break or because they make other people feel good, but really valuing, you know, what things individuals disabilities can can bring to their company and how they can, you know, positively contribute to the success of the organization.

00;37;21;06 - 00;37;21;21

Speaker 1

Would you be interested in your child working at a job with days off, with an understanding of flexibility?

00;37;28;29 - 00;37;54;22

Speaker 2

I mean, I would, I would be happy with anyone having, you know, but, but with Gabe. Yeah, Yeah. I mean, I think like, I mean, sure, there's, there's challenges with, you know, in terms of how much he can earn for some reason, you know, he loses some of his benefits if he earns too much money. And those are attached to his medical, which is a challenge.

00;37;56;06 - 00;38;12;17

Speaker 2

So we have to be really mindful about that. But I mean, I think generally speaking, like, um, yeah, of course, you know, if you were able to find a job with a salary and they, you know, were understanding and able to, you know, offer employment, that would be wonderful. Um, yeah.

00;38;12;17 - 00;38;19;17

Speaker 1

Um, what should peers be taught about children with special needs and what do you wish other kids your age understood about performance?

00;38;21;02 - 00;38;48;04

Speaker 2

Um, I think that's a good question. Yeah. I mean, I think at some level, you know, when we're all really young, we're taught that, you know, oh, everyone is equal. And some people may look different, some people may do things differently, but everyone's the same. And I think somewhere along the lines, as you know, humans are growing up.

00;38;48;14 - 00;39;22;02

Speaker 2

Adults don't always model that with individuals with disabilities. And I think, you know, kids, young people pick that up and it just kind of becomes a perpetuating cycle. So I think if we really, you know, we're invested in really valuing everyone, you know, equally and understanding that, you know, um, different people have different ways in which they're able to communicate and, you know, communicate, move, process, share, etc..

00;39;22;20 - 00;39;45;02

Speaker 2

And we really respected that and made an effort towards you know, trying to meet that person where they are then. I mean, I think that's really what I would like to see kids growing up learning and understanding. Um, yeah, did I get all the questions? I kind of went on a tangent. That was good. Okay.

00;39;45;14 - 00;39;51;10

Speaker 1

Um, for a last question, do you have any stories about Gabe you want to share?

00;39;51;10 - 00;40;23;17

Speaker 2

I probably a lot, Yeah. Um, he so Gabe, um, when he was really, really little, wasn't as verbally communicative, but early on we got these videos for sign language, and so we started learning sign language. We worked with him and we found, you know, by age three, he had something like 400 signs that he could use to communicate.

00;40;23;17 - 00;40;54;03

Speaker 2

So even though he wasn't speaking, he could communicate very fully with us. And we always read to him, um, we had both studied English lit in college, so books are always around and we never really understood how much he was tracking with reading and what we were saying. And really understanding that the words we were saying were the ones on the page were the ones that he was communicating.

00;40;55;07 - 00;41;27;01

Speaker 2

And so he started, um, you know, looking at books and looking at magazines and stuff, and he started saying a few words here and there. But, um, I've always, I've been a lifelong Giants fan. I grew up in the area and I've always, you know, taken give the Giants games and stuff like that. And there was one time where he couldn't have been. I don't even think he's five yet, where we were at his grandparents house and his grandparents had like a little nativity set out for Christmas.

00;41;28;13 - 00;41;51;08

Speaker 2

And he had just, you know, we had been reading through the Giants they put out every year like a yearbook of like, here's all the players, here's like Sabrina, throw that. And so he goes up to the Nativity set. And he points out when he says Barry Bonds that Christmas, which really starts naming the Giants as he's putting all the people in attendance.

00;41;51;08 - 00;42;11;22

Speaker 2

And I think that was like a real eye opener for me, like one. Not only is he always absorbing and understanding and adjusting and that too, I was happy that he obviously likes baseball. That was great. But it just made me laugh so much. And that's always one of the finest memories I have of him, just like during that many, many more memories as well.

00;42;11;22 - 00;42;14;12

Speaker 2

But like, I think that's probably a quick one for you.

00;42;15;13 - 00;42;17;01

Speaker 1

That was great. Thank you.