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[MUSIC] This is Tell Me Your Story special edition, where we address relevant topics for our community. The topic for this special edition is about autism. [MUSIC] Hello, everyone. This is Edgar Filho from the Equal Opportunity Office. My pronouns are he/him/his. Today, we are talking to Melissa Minaya, from the Legal Aid Bureau, who will tell us about her history as a parent of an autistic child. Thank you for joining us, Melissa, and please tell us a little bit about yourself and the work you do at Harvard.

[00:00:53]

Hi, everyone. I've been part of Harvard for 21 years and for the last 15 years, have been working at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, where I'm now the administrative director. Our clinic works with second and third year law school students who do practice in housing, family, and wage theft cases. I'm working with an amazing group of people and HLS in general, has been great. I currently live in Quincy with my husband and two boys, 6-year-old who's in first grade and a 9-year-old who's in fourth.

[00:01:42]

9-years-old already, Melissa.

[00:01:44]

Yeah. Hold on. Since the last time when we recorded your episode, were you living ready in Quincy at that time, or you just mentioned that most of your life, you lived in Lawrence.

[00:01:58]

In Lawrence, yes. I was born and raised in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which is about, I guess, 30-45 minutes north of here. Largely Hispanic population. I'm Dominican and moved to Dorchester in 2004, while I was working at Harvard Business School, and then have been in Quincy now for almost nine years.

[00:02:23]

That's a beautiful area, too, right?

[00:02:24]

Yeah.

[00:02:24]

For some reason, I kept in mind that you were more North Shore than South Shore.

[00:02:29]

I guess now I've spent almost half and half. [LAUGHTER]

[00:02:31]

Yes. I'm going to ask you first question, and I have asked every member the same question. I think it's more for everybody to have a sense of how everyone got that information, but I don't think everyone gets the same answer when they are first talking about this.

[00:02:56]

Exactly.

[00:02:57]

The question that we are asking is, how would you define autism to someone who has never met a person with autism in your own words?

[00:03:06]

The way I explain it and the way I think about it is that it's a different way of experiencing and processing the world. For my son, it's in how he learns and how he expresses himself might seem different than a normal typical child. It can look different in each person just as like every trait looks different in each person and so that's where I'm coming from. That's how I and my family have experienced it in terms of this isn't a disorder, but it's a diagnosis. We get diagnosed with all sorts of things as human beings, and everyone's brain learns and receives information differently. If some people are better at reading and language arts and writing than they are in math and some people are great with numbers, but might have challenges like analyzing stories and so for me, people who are autistic experience the world around them in a different way. It might be more sensory heavy. It might be more socially heavy, where it's like they have trouble getting social cues from other people and expressing themselves in social situations. If it's more on the sensory side, they might not really like loud noises. They might not like people touching and being close to them. They might like only certain surroundings that are like calm to them. Calm to them can be not calm to somebody else. It's very individualized, I guess I would say it is. The way that I see it more as a trait. The way that almost any trait is to any other person.

[00:05:13]

Works from one individual to another in their own particularity in terms of how they develop each environment that they are part of, right?

[00:05:23]

Yeah. The environment is a really heavy part of that. Environment that they are more comfortable with, they will react and behave one way as opposed to a new environment. They may react and behave.

[00:05:37]

The range as well, right?

[00:05:39]

Yeah, and that's why it's so great that it's a spectrum. Even throughout one person's life, how they experience and how they present being autistic can change and vary or it's like it might be more noticeable just to them individually. It might be more noticeable to others around them in different times of their life as they gain resources and tools as they then need new resources and new tools.

[00:06:13]

Sometimes when we were talking about autism, because it's a recent or I would say, in the past, I would say 20 years that we were talking more and seeing more cases more diagnosis coming up as well with other neurodivergent diagnosis as well that's becoming more used to talk about. Before, I remember the ADD, ADHD, bipolar, was a difficult conversation or people were uncomfortable to.

[00:06:45]

You never talked about it.

[00:06:46]

Yeah.

[00:06:46]

You never talked about it, you never said if you had it, if you knew someone who had it. It's a very private diagnosis, even though it was something that really affected your everyday life in the situations that you're in.

[00:07:02]

Then when did you first realize or suspect your child was autistic and how did you get to formally diagnose?

[00:07:12]

When my son was three, we moved him from a home-based daycare to a preschool center, that it's a Spanish immersion program, Pine Village Preschools. Their director was actually the one who approached me and my husband about it first. When she first mentioned it, he had been at the school maybe 2-3 months, and we were both like, no, that's not it. Pediatrician's office told us, like, he's experiencing terrible twos and, you three ager, and you need to be firm.

[00:07:56]

There you go.

[00:07:58]

We were like, oh, autism. Interesting. We were like, well, we'll look into it. She has been doing this a long time, worked with children for a long time, has seen and interacted with a lot of kids and even in that short time, we had grew to trust her opinion. We mentioned it to our pediatrician. At the time, Andre was three he would have really intense meltdowns and outbursts. For what seemed to other people to be really nonchalant things.

[00:08:35]

Was it a tantrum for people?

[00:08:37]

It was a tantrum for people. It was him wanting to get his own way. But his classroom teacher in that preschool was a trained psychologist in her home country in Dominican Republic. Then, when she moved here, she started teaching in preschool. I think she really connected with him and so it really helped them develop ways to help him regulate because a small thing would happen that would cause a transition issue for him. Then he wasn't able to process that. He would fall out on the floor screaming and kicking and get really upset to get him to, like, recover. A child around three years old should be able to recover within a few minutes or with distractions. Andre would scream and cry for up to 30 minutes. It was really hard to get him to soothe and get back to a calm level. I think those were some of the first indications that we saw that were really, like, apparent. We then approached our pediatrician about it, and he again, was like, oh, maybe he's a little, like, high anxiety, but I don't think he's autistic, but here's the number for a couple of developmental pediatricians. The Boston Children's Hospital has an autism center and we went through their intake as well and tried to get a developmental pediatrician. Tough wait time for Boston Children's Hospital was like nine months for an intake. We got on that wait list. Then, while we were waiting for that happened to be called off of, like, the cancellation list for a developmental pediatrician and filled out a ton of paperwork. Paperwork. She had interaction with him where she observed him. She asked him questions. She asked us questions. Then we met again with her for the diagnosis. By that time, he was almost 4.5.

[00:11:02]

4.5. Two questions that I just want to learn about this. When you said that they had a nine-month wait list, this was because they were dealing with different neurodivergent or were all related to the autism aspect.

[00:11:24]

I believe they were all related to autism.

[00:11:26]

That is a big number of cases that they were studying and examining. The other question you said that three years old, more or less, he was at school and then the teacher or person.

[00:11:45]

Yeah, the teacher and the director.

[00:11:47]

Tell me a little bit more. How was the approach? I don't want to judge the person. But I think it's nice to see that someone has a perception when even the parents sometimes don't, your pediatrician didn't have a sense and felt that was a different behavior. How did the teacher approach to say because I can't be a difficult conversation?

[00:12:10]

Yeah. Oh, absolutely. She had asked us to meet with her as your child is starting in. Let's see how things are going. We had been part of other smaller conversations about, like, oh, he's having a hard time today, or, like, this happened. With our permission, she had actually recorded a couple of situations that had happened with him just so that she can show us, this is what we did. This is how it progressed and led up to. Pine Village Preschool was also working with other psychologists. They have a partnership with a school that handles children with behavioral needs. They have someone that would come into the school and, like, observe, help teachers with any of their preschoolers and toddlers who, might be having, like, behavioral issues. They're very into, the whole social-emotional awareness of a child and figuring out the root cause of behavior. That's where they were coming from. When we set up the meeting, it was like, let's talk about how Andre's doing. Let's talk about ways to make sure that he's having good, successful days while he's here with us. It was in that meeting that she mentioned whether we had wondered or if any of his doctors had brought up autism to us. She pointed out a few things. One, having a hard time with transitions, not providing eye contact. Which is something that as parents we never noticed because, again, he's comfortable around us, and he would look at us. Andre's other diagnosis is mixtraceptive and expressive language disorder, which means he needs speech therapy. He has trouble processing language and also expressing himself orally with words.

[00:14:29]

At the time at three, he still wasn't really talking. He was saying words, but it wasn't communication. It was a repetitive language that he would use. He would watch something and he could recite orally the entire thing that he would watch [LAUGHTER]

[00:14:48]

Wow.

[00:14:48]

Or he would just echo what you're saying. Echolalia is a common thing that either people with autism might do or who have a language-speech disorder might do, as well.

[00:15:03]

Like you said, some develop that IQ.

[00:15:07]

It's how he would communicate and interact with the world is he was not communicating, but to him, this is how words come out. [LAUGHTER]

[00:15:18]

Interesting. He could repeat something that he watched the entire. Sometimes we would be driving in the car. He came in to work with me. The preschool is in Brighton, and so we had, an hour-long commute in the morning. He would just be in the back seat reciting things that he watched or things that he heard. I would, as my first, I'd be like, oh, that's just what he likes. I didn't really even think anything of it. But I was so glad and appreciative that she did mention something.

[00:15:53]

That's really nice.

[00:15:55]

I honestly did not see anything that was intrusive or off base. I was caught off guard and so was my husband.

[00:16:06]

Even bring the information, for example, the reason that I'm talking to you about this is because of this, this and that that required. It is such a good way to approach and talk about that and give information so you can understand because sometimes, like I said, you are taking a back lit, no, I don't think it is. That doesn't feel like that. They said, just let's take a look about this a little further.

[00:16:31]

At the time, when Andre was three, we also had a one-year-old. I was pregnant when Andre was two when he was having all of these expressing of emotions where all to us seemed to suddenly come out. But it really was around two o'clock around two years old is when a child starts to express themselves, what they like, what they don't like, how to figure out their way in the world. He was having a hard time with that. We just didn't know how hard of a time he was having with that. To us, we were only seeing the time that we had at home. She really put in perspective, the whole picture for us of how he's having trouble at school, how he was having trouble with things at home, and how they tied together. That's oftentimes I feel like things that parents either have a hard time seeing or the family around them don't want don't want to see and piece that puzzle together. But seeing the whole of Andre and in ways that he may have been struggling. I think, more importantly, to me, as a mother is how do I help him get past the struggle? Because obviously, there was a struggle somewhere. Meltdowns are not fun for anybody including the child who's having them. Then it became really clear and evident. He's really struggling in some aspects. What can we do as a parent and how will this diagnosis help or hurt? That was then our struggle in the early days.

[00:18:22]

What your winter face? How are you able to move from that point?

[00:18:24]

What does this mean for him?

[00:18:26]

Yes.

[00:18:27]

It was a time of perhaps a level of grief of not knowing what lied in his future, not knowing how him being autistic would manifest for him specifically at any given point. To a certain extent, a fear of what the stereotype, and what the impressions were from other people. It was a level of grief of how will he be in school. Will he have friends? I was glad to have at least a few people around me who reminded me that that was normal and okay. It was normal as a parent to picture your child's life one way and now have it be a little different. You have to go through that process of, okay, what does that mean going forward? I think as a parent, there's always a level of fear for the future. You can't get away from it. It's a level of anxiety. What will happen when he goes off to school by himself? What will happen when I don't get, daily reports in first grade of how he's doing? What will happen when he's in middle school and there's peer pressure, and there might be bullying? With having a child who's autistic, then you have other different fears. I have fears that other parents don't have, and other parents have fears that I don't have. I think for me, like reminding myself like, each child is different. Each parent's experience is different. This now is your experience, and you're allowed to feel sad about it at times. You're allowed to readjust your expectations, and that's okay.

[00:20:26]

You were already entering another question that I was going to ask, and I have two close to each other. I think they are intertwined in a way. One would be, how did your family members react to your child being diagnosed? The other one that you already entered a little bit is how did your family, your closer circle family, you, your husband, life and structure change after diagnose as well. You already touched a little bit. What's going to happen now? You need to learn things. Everything that's new scares, of course, give a feeling of what now?

[00:21:05]

I think for immediate family, it honestly gave me a sense of peace giving the diagnosis because when you have a child that acts outwardly by having meltdowns and tantrums and throwing or thrashing on the floor, people see and judge you as a parent. You're spoiling them. You're not firm enough with them. Your child's out of control. They run the house. Especially being from a Dominican background.

[00:21:43]

That's our [OVERLAPPING]

[00:21:44]

Children, you rule your children. Your children do not rule.

[00:21:48]

The Latino culture doesn't have much patience for that.

[00:21:52]

Your child is supposed to be sitting quietly when it's time to sit quietly.

[00:21:55]

Respect the elders.

[00:21:56]

Respect the elders. We would be in church, and it would be too loud for Andre. We would take him out of the room. That could be a struggle. What do you mean your child is not going to just sit quietly during church until church is over? That is what they're supposed to do. He's, well, he can't. He didn't. Those small ways for we realized his sensory, he didn't like being in a room where he perceived loud noises. Maybe it wasn't loud for us, but that didn't really matter. It was loud for him. When we could, we would remove him out of the room. We had headphones that he would wear. That helped in some situations. There were other situations where only one of us either me or my husband would go and not both of us. I would then stay back with Andre and wouldn't go to that specific church event. Then there were other events that we chose not to go to as a family. It's like, well, this isn't going to work for us. We can't go. I'm so sorry and learning to not feel bad about that.

[00:23:02]

That's another part of that.

[00:23:04]

Because you think of kids, you're like, school parties and parties with other kids and having play dates. Andre really never mentioned any of his friends between the age of until maybe he was like six, maybe five or going on to six, really. He had friends, and they enjoyed playing with them with him in school, and they thought he was really fun and great. But Andre outwardly could have cared less. [LAUGHTER] It sounds strange to say.

[00:23:39]

But he just really was like, oh, yeah, that's someone who is in my class and we have fun in the moment. But outside of that moment, he would be like, whatever. [LAUGHTER]

[00:23:50]

We sometimes wouldn't go to birthday parties of his friends because he would then have a hard time leaving. A lot of times, they're in play areas, all these play spaces, and he wouldn't interact with the other kids because he was in his own little world, playing whatever he wanted to do and he was fine and happy. Until it was time then to leave or to stop, and then he was not so happy anymore, and that transition would trigger a whole meltdown until we would.

[00:24:20]

Because he invested in that moment.

[00:24:20]

He is invested in just doing that, and he could be doing it for five minutes or five hours, to him, it was all the same. We'd have to scoop him up while he kicked and screamed and how we would go. [LAUGHTER] I think as parents, learning, when are we doing things that are supposed to be fun for kids and really tailoring it to him? When are we doing things that are fun for kids, but really we want to have that experience.

[00:24:51]

Yeah.

[00:24:51]

We would go to an amusement park. There was one time we went to amusement park. He was four, our younger son Amauri was two, and Andre just wanted to be in this one area. But when you go to amusement park, you have to go to all of the rides and experience all of the things. For 30 minutes, we kept trying to move on from this one little area. We got him onto a few other things, but he was not happy.

[00:25:21]

He wanted to go back.

[00:25:22]

He wanted to go back to where he was having fun because that was the first part he saw, and he was like, well, I'm happy here. I don't need to go anywhere else.

[00:25:30]

Yes.

[00:25:31]

But for us, as adults, we were like, no, we have to go see all of the other parts. Then it was, lunchtime and he was hungry and cranky, and we didn't let him do the thing that he thought was fun. We were all upset. [LAUGHTER] We were all frustrated.

[00:25:51]

No, museum. I'm fine.

[00:25:51]

He got some french fries and some burgers and went to the car. That was the end of that. Thinking back on that day, the following day, I was like, we were there for him to have fun. If he was having fun playing with the house made to look like a pumpkin, why didn't we just let him do that?

[00:26:12]

Isn't that interesting, Melissa? If you stop to think a little bit, how we interpret things, whether we project on something or respect something, our sense of what is right or wrong or what's fun or not is so also very particular, right?

[00:26:35]

Yeah.

[00:26:36]

Now you are saying that, I usually tell people joking that the pandemic was built for people like me. I love to be home. I don't need to go anywhere.

[00:26:51]

I think one of his favorite birthdays was his fifth birthday, which was in 2020, because we did it over Zoom, and he was so happy and calm. He looked at the people on the screen, and they sang happy birthday, and we had a cake, and it was done. All of his previous birthdays, we had a kid's place, mode of people and he had to interact, and we had to take pictures. I think for his second birthday, we did like this toddler place, and by the time we got around to the pictures, he was upset with us because he had to stop playing. I think I have him held upside down, trying to get him to smile. [LAUGHTER]

[00:27:34]

Great teacher.

[00:27:34]

Why did I do anything? But the pandemic was one of his favorite birthdays, I say, because he was just able to just be in his house. Have some cake which he loves, and people sang him happy birthday, but they weren't in his face.

[00:27:54]

It was not too loud. There was not too much movement around.

[00:27:57]

No. It was like 15, 20 minutes.

[00:27:59]

Yeah.

[00:28:00]

Then we shut off the screen.

[00:28:04]

That's exactly how I feel sometimes think, why can't we just be happy in any situation? For example, I hate exercising. People love exercise. Go exercise.

[00:28:17]

Go exercise.

[00:28:18]

Let me sit in here and be on my own doing whatever I want to do. Go do your thing. I'm happy that you love that, what's new things to say.

[00:28:30]

I'll have to love it with you. [LAUGHTER]

[00:28:32]

I love that for you, so go do it. Anyways. Related to friendships and relationships around, did that change as well? Is short in terms of our numbers or how does that work?

[00:28:48]

We made a decision to only tell people who we knew would be supportive.

[00:28:55]

Okay.

[00:28:56]

I really did not want to entertain people's conspiracy theories about why he had autism or why didn't he have.

[00:29:09]

That also came out?

[00:29:10]

Yes. I have some pretty wacky family members who I knew [LAUGHTER] would dabbled in these conspiracies, and I'm like, I don't have time for that.

[00:29:20]

Exactly.

[00:29:21]

I know it's not accurate. I know it's based on lack of knowledge and information and wanting to blame something, and I was like, there's nothing to blame here. This is just how he is and who he has always been from the moment he was.

[00:29:38]

Yes. Almost removing the identity of a person because of whatever you think he was and what would change knowing whatever you think it is true or not?

[00:29:51]

At the time, this was I guess about seven or eight years ago, the conspiracy theories about vaccines had [inaudible 00:30:00]

[00:30:00]

Yeah, it became a big deal.

[00:30:01]

But it was a very big thing, very big deal and I knew it wasn't accurate. It wasn't going to stop me from getting him vaccinated and I believed strongly in vaccinations.

[00:30:12]

Yeah.

[00:30:13]

I wanted to eliminate as much of that negativity as possible. We told our immediate family members in terms of his grandparents and aunts and uncles, my close friends and just left it at that because like I said, I didn't want anyone being like, oh, poor Andre. My favorite is oh, he doesn't look autistic.

[00:30:46]

There's a look for autistic children?

[00:30:47]

There's a look for autistic children. I would be like, yeah, that's fair. But he has his own struggles this is where we're at. But my sisters, my mom or parents really were just great. They were like, great. If there's anything that we need to do differently, let us know. Particularly with any family members who were going to be watching him or babysitting and stuff like that, other than the diagnosis, we wanted them to have any tools that they would need that were helpful for when they were watching Andre. Of like, this is what he likes, this is what he doesn't like. That really is how we approached it with family and we were really lucky that our family was like, what do you need from us? What does that mean with his likes and dislikes and how we should interact with him, things that we might need to avoid and stuff like that.

[00:31:56]

You said that you had another child?

[00:31:59]

Yes.

[00:31:59]

After Andre?

[00:32:00]

After Andre.

[00:32:00]

How long separated?

[00:32:03]

Almost a little more than two and a half years, so two years, nine months.

[00:32:07]

Two and a half?

[00:32:07]

Yeah.

[00:32:09]

Now that past few years, do you talk to your youngest about Andre's behavior and how they interact?

[00:32:20]

Yeah, it's interesting. Andre, even though he has had his delay, he never had a diagnosis with a level attached to it. The developmental pediatrician, we have Dr. Hironaka was really mindful and intentional about the level. She told us at least she never really liked assigning levels because a child could change and move through them as it's a spectrum depending on the resources and tools that they had to deal with certain things, I guess.

[00:32:58]

Yeah.

[00:33:00]

For Andre, he is for lack of better words, more on the high functioning side.

[00:33:07]

Yeah.

[00:33:08]

You can't really tell until he's having trouble that maybe something is a off here.

[00:33:18]

He would with his brother, Amauri doesn't know any different. He has always been around with Andre's big meltdowns and small meltdowns and has also been there when we've learned to calm Andre down and tell him, go through breathing exercises with him and help him process transitions. Andre actually would use those same tools with Amari. When he saw whenAmauri was two and would start having a fit about his car wouldn't turn the way he wants it to, [LAUGHTER] Andre will go to him and be like, okay, Amari, let's take a deep breath.

[00:34:07]

My God.

[00:34:07]

Or let's count to 10. Amauri knows no difference. To him, Andre is like any other child. [LAUGHTER]

[00:34:18]

Really?

[00:34:18]

That is really interesting. It's really because of how normalized it has always been in our house.

[00:34:27]

That's beautiful.

[00:34:28]

Thanks, I guess, to the pandemic, Andre had ABA services. Applied Behavioral Analysis is one of the methods for getting resources and tools is how I view it to autistic children, helping and teaching them how to experience the world. We did ABA through first his preschool when he was there, then because of the pandemic, we were lucky enough to be able to have it at home. We would have the same behavior therapist come to our house a few times a week, three or four times a week and so to Amari, that was just normal. It was just like, someone came, played games with Andre. [LAUGHTER] where they would do certain steps or scenarios, and then he would get a little bit of a break and then when Andre was in a five minute break, then Amauri got to play in the break, too.

[00:35:41]

To be there with him.

[00:35:42]

To be there with him. It was a very normalized part of our routine. Amauri thought that everybody went to speech therapy. He's now six. Probably when he was almost five, he was like, when is it going to be my turn to do speech therapy? [LAUGHTER] He's like, Andre gets to go and he gets to do occupational therapy.

[00:36:04]

He wants to do.

[00:36:04]

He gets to go to speech therapy and play these games and do these cool things, I want to do that, too. [LAUGHTER]

[00:36:10]

That's a really cool thing.

[00:36:12]

We actually had to talk more about, you don't need those or you don't need them right now. We don't know if you'll need them in the future. Andre did outside speech therapy and also speech at his school and we would be like, well, we'll see when you start school, when you're in kindergarten, if they think that you need speech. Last year in kindergarten, he's like, do I get to go to speech? [LAUGHTER] We're like, but you don't need it. It's okay. You just have to continue to work on yourself with your words and your letters and your sounds and I'm like, we could do some of that at home, and he'd be like, okay, that's fine. But he really just wanted to. [LAUGHTER]

[00:36:56]

Left out.

[00:36:57]

He felt left out. He wanted to go to occupational therapy.

[00:37:01]

They go to the same school?

[00:37:03]

Yes, they're now at the same school.

[00:37:05]

Andre participate in all activities with the other kids and just have special moments that he needs to have some other preparation to any support.

[00:37:13]

They're both in Quincy Public Schools and the school that they go to has a great special ed team. From the beginning, we would have our IEP meetings with them. Of course, since we had our diagnosis, that really helped in getting any classroom accommodations that Andre needed, and he would do speech twice a week and occupational therapy once a week during the school day. He was part of the general ed class and then would just get pulled out. I think the really helpful thing for both my kids has been that at their particular school, there are also, not a huge amount, but a good percentage of the kids who also get pulled out for different services. There was a social skills group with other kids from other classrooms also joined in. Same with speech. Andre had friends who were also in speech with him. It's a very normalized part of the school and of the kids day to day. It's not something that kids are really singled out on because they get pulled out. They get pulled out for speech, they get pulled out for OT, they get pulled out for social skills groups.

[00:38:42]

What's OT?

[00:38:44]

Occupational therapy.

[00:38:45]

Okay.

[00:38:46]

With Andre, it was his fine motor skills so holding a pencil and writing, it's the things that they would focus on in school. Going through the emotional regulation part. What do we do when we're upset that something's not going our way, which happens a lot in school. [LAUGHTER] In school, you can't always do what you want. You have to do things in groups. It's time to stop that and go do something else and so those were the moments that were the toughest for Andre. In OT, they really worked on body regulation. Let's walk in a straight line. On this line here, can we get control of our body? Gaining control of our body physically, gaining control of our body mentally and emotionally, are some of the things that they worked on with him. Interestingly, Andre has really great gross motor skills, so like throwing a ball, jumping on 1' or 2', he did really well with that. Athletically wise, so to speak, he was always really well coordinated. But it was some of these other like holding a pencil and writing, writing words, writing in uppercase and lowercase was really a struggle for him because it's like, this is how I want to do it. I don't want to do it any other way. [LAUGHTER]

[00:40:22]

His own way, too.

[00:40:23]

Why would you change? He's like, no. I don't know if it made him feel better. I don't know if it made him have express like, this is what I have control over because I'm writing it, and so this brings me peace. But I'm grateful that they were willing to work with him instead of being like, no, he's doing it. He's only writing in uppercase on purpose. He wasn't only writing in uppercase on purpose, it was just like, that's in the moment, and they gave him the freedom to continue doing that, still teaching and still encouraging lowercase letters. But let him phase out of it on his own and he did. He did?

[00:41:04]

He did.

[00:41:05]

He got tired.

[00:41:06]

He got tired of just doing it.

[00:41:08]

I want to try [inaudible 00:41:09] from now.

[00:41:10]

One small thing. He used to write his name on his papers as www.andre.com. It's a website, always. On the top of all of his kindergarten work at one point for like a few months, it was this website.

[00:41:26]

www.andre.com.

[00:41:27]

That's what he decided that he wanted to put, you could not get him to write just his first and last name.

[00:41:34]

They have an idea why? If he paid attention to something online.

[00:41:39]

Yeah. There was a show he watched called Blippi. A lot of kids now like Blippi. At the end of each episode of Blippi, he would say his website to encourage.

[00:41:52]

My God.

[00:41:53]

He's like, and tell your parents to go to www dot, and he would spell out his name, B-L-I-P-P-I and.com and subscribe to my channel. Andre loved repeating that.

[00:42:05]

He created his own channel.

[00:42:07]

He was like, this is what people do at the end of things. I have a website, too.

[00:42:12]

That's so cute.

[00:42:13]

He already has a website.

[00:42:15]

Tell your parents to contact Andre at www.andre.com. That's really awesome.

[00:42:21]

His teacher again was like, It's not a big deal. 'Cause we were like, do we need to stop this? How do we control this? They were like, it's okay. We'll see how long it lasts. He's writing his name, so that's helpful. Let's just let it pass.

[00:42:38]

I love this acceptance of, instead of, sometimes you follow so much rules and everything has to be boxed and write straight. I love what they are doing.

[00:42:50]

He has had some really amazing teachers that have really worked with him, given him space, but have encourage him to participate in class, participate with friends and his peers, too and he's grown so much in large part because of that support. I think with any child who has any type of learning disability, diagnosis, experiences world in different ways, whether it's just having anxiety or having dyslexia or having ADD, is having a supportive environment that will give you certain tools to help you but give the child the space to use them is so important and can make a huge difference and we definitely see it from Andre. Is there a possibility that he could have come to the point where he's at by himself with no help and support. Sure. But it would have been a lot of struggle along that line. From the moment that we suspected that he was autistic, my goal has been, I want to make sure he has the tools he needs to succeed in life in whatever way success will end up meeting for him.

[00:44:30]

Our lovely conversation with Melissa Minaya will continue on the next episode. Make sure to tune in.