

## ANNIE'S GIFT

Marsha Forest & Jack Pearpoint  
with Ellen Laurence & Bill Gillenwater

Juliana Laurence, known to those who love her as "Annie" is a beautiful child who lives in Greeley, Colorado with a loving family— her mother, Ellen; her Dad, Norm; her brother, Chris and sister Becca.. Annie has a file inches thick describing her with medical labels and long words that mask the reality of who she truly is. The file and the jargon scare people away from getting to know this 9 year old child and her family.

Annie has had an ever changing series of labels from her earliest months on earth. She was first "diagnosed as having cerebral palsy. Her mother Ellen suspected the big "A" - autism. Finally, the experts came to an agreement. "Annie is a person with cerebral palsy, but without any autism."

The second diagnosis given to the Laurences said "severe mental retardation with the possibility of autism". Finally Retts Syndrome was the all agreed upon diagnosis, but in Feb. 1990, that particular label was removed as Annie was "not degenerating fast enough for a typical Retts child." Her mother now says "Annie's back to being called just plain AUTISTIC and frankly by this point we don't care — she is just simply ANNIE."

For the first years of her life, Annie attended segregated schools for severely handicapped youngsters. She was definitely one of "those" kids who everyone said was impossible to integrate into a real school, let alone a regular class. Her behaviour was too inappropriate, too terrible, too challenging for the real world - so said the schools.

However, while not in school, Annie lived with her family who had no training in behaviour management, autism, or mental retardation. They coped. Often they were tired, and needed a night away from all three kids, but they coped. They were a family.

The Laurences lived in an ordinary house, shopped at the neighbourhood grocery stores, ate at regular restaurants, attended the local Methodist

church, and managed to keep Annie with them throughout. But for her school hours, there were different rules. Annie had to "be with her own kind".

### "Butwhatabout" Annie?

Whenever we meet one of the children people have described as "impossible to integrate" or "really challenging", we are always shocked! We have just recently coined a new all-purpose label for "difficult" children. We call it the "butwhatabout" kids. This label is applied by frustrated people who are resistant to integration. When parents like the Laurences want their child to attend a regular school, these people say: "Butwhatabout?????" Annie was labeled a "Butwhatabout" child.

When we finally met Annie in person, we expected to see a raving out-of-control human being. Instead, we met a frail, thin, wiry young girl - a fragile child. She reached out to touch our hands. She presented herself as a portrait not unlike the child character Fantine in the play "Les Miserable." (Perhaps there is a creative job opportunity for Annie as one of the waifs in Les Miz.)

Annie was no monster, just a small child. To those who knew and loved her dearly, she was indeed a puzzle, a mystery, a tangle of unknown knots to be untied. She was fortunate to have a family who would literally do anything to help their daughter reach her full potential, whatever that might be.

In 1988, for job related reasons, Ellen and Norm decided to move to Greeley from the Boulder area. This was difficult, as it uprooted the entire family from a familiar and friendly neighborhood. But like many North American families, they were forced to move. It had nothing to do with Annie.

Ellen started exploring schools for Annie and found four that were a possibility. School #1 presented its strong points as having a "life skills program" complete with dishwasher so the students never even had to appear in the regular cafeteria for lunch. Scratch #1.

School #2 had 18 "high needs" youngsters of all ages in one wing of a building. The kids were labelled SLIC

(severely limited intellectual capacity). Scratch #2.

School #3 had a principal who asked Ellen how fast Annie's condition would degenerate as he "could not justify investing a lot of time or money on a kid who was degenerating". Scratch #3.

And then like in the story of the **3 Bears**, Ellen found the school that was and still is JUST RIGHT!

### Bill Gillenwater

Through luck, often the right people are at the right place at the right time. Bill Gillenwater arrived at Scott Elementary School in 1988. Bill is a true educator, a marvelous and humanistic school principal. He believes in the value and worth of every child.

Ellen Laurence met Bill Gillenwater. Bill decided to drive to Boulder to meet Annie as he doesn't like to talk about a child without meeting him/her in person. He met and was captivated by Annie. The rest is Colorado history.

Ellen was already in a state of advanced shock after schools #1, #2, and #3. She couldn't believe it when Bill casually said, "Of course she's welcome at Scott Elementary School. What do we need to do to make her and you happy here?" When Ellen regained consciousness, she and Norm celebrated their good fortune.

In Feb. 1990, Bill had decided to make some drastic changes in the delivery of special education services at Scott Elementary. He had kids labelled as being in need of something called "special education." He did not believe the traditional self-contained special education rooms were working for them.

From his diary, Bill recalls, "I believed that moving to a fully inclusive school was really a civil rights issue. I didn't feel we could make the needed change by putting this up to a staff vote. In my mind, the rights of children were clearly being violated at the school in which I was principal. We could not wait and study this for an additional 20 years to correct it."

Bill soon met Dr. Jeff Strully, the Executive Director of the Association for Community Living in Colorado, who became the first real professional ally in

Bill's life who helped him get the supports, expertise and help he needed to make his school fully inclusive.

Bill remembers, "Fear was everywhere that spring. The talk in the staff room and in the halls revolved around the concept of including all kids. This issue polarized my staff."

It was a small child named Annie who constantly brought the issue to a head. She made the word "inclusion" real. She challenged all of us to "put our money where our mouth was, i.e. put up or shut-up."

Bill felt both cursed and blessed with this child and her extreme needs and behaviors. She was always walking over the edge of control and was constantly visible to the students, the parents and teachers. Her very presence in the halls challenged everyone to make their values clearly known. Annie's gift was to force an entire staff of adults to face themselves with an honesty that was rare to come by AND OFTEN PAINFUL TO FACE.

Bill wondered what he would have done as Annie's parent? He asked himself how he would have felt having a child like Annie at home day and night? Would he have the guts and courage to stand up for Annie if his job was put on the line? These and other questions gnawed at Bill and challenged him to be the educational leader all his friends and supporters knew he could be.

Excerpts from Bill's education log tell the story in the raw:

*"I told Ellen Laurence my feelings and fears for I truly believed and meant it when I said that ANNIE was the gift that would make our school a welcome place for everyone. Annie's strength and fragility touched my core. To me she was a beautiful, mystical puzzle. Annie Laurence was the very embodiment of what "inclusion for all" really meant at Scott School.*

On August 20, 1990, new and historic class lists were posted on the windows. There were no more self-contained classrooms at Scott Elementary. Special services and individualized attention would of course be given when needed, but not in segregated rooms.

Marsha Forest and Annmarie

Ruttiman of the Centre for Integrated Education and Community in Toronto, Ontario, did a series of inservice programs for the Scott staff on the real meaning of inclusion and on the concept of building Circles of Friends. For many, the Kleenex on the table was necessary and welcome. For others, still faces of stone. For some, the assistance of Marsha and Annmarie was a dream and a hope; for others, they were a nightmare adding more fuel to the fire of inclusive education.

For me, Marsha became another important friend and ally in our move to become an inclusive school.

Sept. 4, 1990 — All kids came to the first day of school as Scott kids with names, individual needs, different learning styles, varied clothes—no “labelling blues” this year. There were 15 kids in regular settings who last year had been in self-contained programs.

You can feel the drama in Bill's entries those first days. “The troops are holding, the kids are all included. Robert doesn't want to be Robert anymore, he wants to be Bob. Angela looks marvelous as a first grader, she sits straighter already. Ashley is the love of our life. As a kindergartner she will only know inclusion and never experience segregation, at least not at this school. We have to make this work for all the Ashley's of the world.

Wesley is exhausted and says now he can't be a clown in first grade, he has to be a regular boy. Shaun is struggling. Steven can't do the regular work but is participating. In music, he was pointed to as a model of perfect behaviour. Our Steven?!

Inclusion had become the hot topic of news in the whole community. Most of the conversations revolved around fear. Bill heard overheard two nasty comments made directly outside his office from parents - “What a shame to have 10% of the kids dumped on the school while taking up 80% of everyone's time.”— “There are places for kids like these—its not in regular classes and it's not in our Scott School.” Bill also received a small pile of unsigned, nasty, pointed and near threatening letters from a parent population of over 620.

The focus of the ferment always centered on Annie Laurence. A small group of vocal parents wanted Annie out of the school. Bill remembers, “I felt that I must be truly hearing what school principals in Mississippi heard in the 1960's. We've come so far and yet not moved an inch as a progressive and democratic society. I must not be intimidated by this vocal minority!”

### **Annie Comes to School**

“Annie finally arrived. She is a challenge we haven't been able to get through to yet. Her most challenging behaviour for all of us is that she pulls the hair of the other children in the school. This hair pulling is my biggest nightmare and will be the death of me yet. I spent half an hour with an irate parent on the phone tonight who did not want his daughter “attacked” ever again. The “attack”, as I calmly tried to point out, was a hair pull by a ten year old child trying to communicate the best she can.

I could live a life-time without ever hearing the word “attacked” again and it wouldn't be long enough.

The hair pulling is the single biggest deterrent to Annie's acceptance. Somewhere there has to be an answer. All the behaviour experts come and go with their fancy theories, but nothing works.

All hell broke loose today. The parents of the “attacked” child came and demanded that their child be moved. They arrived at my office filled with all of the loaded emotional words they could think of. As the conversation unfolded, I found the mother herself had been abused as a child and had never dealt with it. Annie's hair tug was a symbol of her own trauma and nothing like that would touch her perfect daughter.

I agreed to move the child to another class but insisted the the family go down the hall to actually see the MONSTER they described. We saw the MONSTER sitting and working on a computer and their daughter doing her work nearby and also sticking out her tongue at another girl in the class. Prejudice is prejudice no matter how you slice it.

Later that week, we had our first parent group meeting. Three parents of

formerly labelled children attended. One of the families was a deaf couple who had never come near the parent association. In the past they never came at all for fear they would "hear" comments they could not face.

The meeting went well and the group decided to include Integration as a topic at a future meeting. The best part of the evening was that I received no nasty phone messages at home that night. The ugly calls always come after 8 PM. Celebrate!!

The weeks are going by. Teachers are coming to me with success stories. We seem to have created a new and vast amount of collegiality, communication and teacher to teacher contact because of inclusion. We are problem solving together over all the kids at our school. We've come a long way in a short time. Marsha told me to stick to my guns and ride out the storm and not let a vocal and nasty minority win over the majority of good will in the school and community. If I had capitulated to those strong negative people on the staff or in the parent group, everything I stood for would have gone down the drain. I must tell Marsha that she is confirmed!

Annie still presents a challenge to the school, but she is accepted in the school community where she belongs. She has a class, but is not forced to attend her particular room. Our educational assistants take turns walking with her and observing where she goes, what she likes to do and who she likes best in the school. Everyone is learning to take the lead from Annie and we see ourselves as explorers on a new path. We talk openly to the other children about Annie. To them, she is no big deal.

The Laurences have had to endure some nastiness in the community, but they are strong and have much support. If we can just ride this out. Marsha keeps telling me that Scott is influencing the country. I have trouble believing that, but I hope its true. If we can do this at Scott, anyone can do it anywhere. Watching Annie and the other children in their new regular classes makes all the aggravation worthwhile.

Ellen commented, "There were so many key players in this on-going drama

- Julie, Kim, June and others. But I know in my heart, that Bill and his sometimes unpopular stands is the reason it is working. Thank god we found a man who loves a challenge!

We've been invited to participate as a sponsor in the next Colorado full inclusion conference as a district. Tim Waters, our Superintendent is taking a strong stand. I think we can truly influence the state and maybe even the country.

### Ellen Laurence

Ellen Laurence also remembers those early days and hopes she doesn't have to relive the pain. She wanted everything to be so perfect for Norm and her other two children in their new community.. When she got the first two anonymous phone calls, she didn't want to tell anyone. When she got the third call, she broke down and told Julie and Bill what was going on. "In my misguided attempt to insulate and protect "the family", I didn't tell Norm and the kids initially. I got my support from Julie and Bill." In total there were 6 calls, which at the time seemed like 60. The tone of the calls were all the same.

"When are you going to get off this integration bandwagon and get your daughter out of OUR school."

"We don't want our son, who is our most important commodity, exposed to your daughter or anything on the seedier side of life."

"Get off of it. Drop it. Go where your kid belongs — with her own kind."

The family received most of their support at this time from the staff at school. They were new in the community and didn't know many people. Bill, and the majority of the school staff, were infuriated by the attacks and the anonymity of the threats.

There are many important lessons to be learned from these "attack" incidents.

1. Often people will say. "I got millions of calls and letters saying Annie shouldn't be here." The response has to be — "Tell me exactly how many letters, calls, etc." One must be rational in the face of the negative impact of these horrible calls and letters. They repre-

sent a vocal minority.

2. The family and school must remain steadfast through the attack period and have a wide network of supporters from the community and outside to get them through. Ellen and Bill knew they had advocates in Greeley, in the State, and indeed across the U.S.A. and Canada.

The family has to say as the Laurence's did, "We are here to stay!". They were visible at work, in their church, and Chris and Becca took Annie everywhere. They could be seen bike riding, hangin out, at church. They were proud that Annie was their sister—a full and total part of their family.

\* Most of all it was critical to remember that Scott had over 620 students and families. The Laurence's and Bill Gillenwater decided to go after the 600 good guys/gals and ignore the 6 bigots who wrote the nasty letters!!

\* If families hang in, in most cases, they will ride out the storm and the bigots will either move, or as in this case, accept change. Bullies back off when confronted.

\* Negative feedback is very provocative and hurtful. Often we forget how small and puny the voice of the bully and bigot is. As the saying goes, "All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to remain silent." One must invite the voices of the good forces to sound out loud and clear, and steel oneself against the railings of prejudice.

### **ANNIE'S CIRCLE**

The real heroes of this drama are Annie Laurence and her friends. They didn't know about all the adult guilt, pain and fear that Annie was creating. To the children, Annie was simply a kid in their class who acted a bit strange, but so what. So she pulled hair. So others carried bits of blanket or dolls.

The Integration facilitators Kim Wass and Julie Claeys helped the teachers build circles in every class and led many of the classroom meetings to discuss how to support Annie and any at-risk student. Sarah (one of Annie's friends) told us that she and Annie are going to be room-mates when they

"grow-up" because Annie is going to need to live with someone who loves her. It is clear Sarah already loves Annie!

Julie and Marsha had the privilege and honour of talking with Annie's class on Feb.12, 1990. In that short time, Annie has become a comfortable member of June Griswold's third grade class. She has an educational assistant when needed, but is encircled constantly by a group of accepting and loving children.

Annie still pulls hair, but the kids have figured out how to deal with it. When we were in the room Annie went for the beautiful blond locks of one of her friends. Another little girl gently said "no", and took Annie's hand off the blond locks. The little blond girl then moved away while three other students took Annie and began reading to her. Surely a good behaviour management team would weep at this sight. A good cooperative consultant would cheer. Every caring educator would wonder at the beauty and ingenuity of children. Marsha had to grab the nearest Kleenex as she was so touched witnessing the care and gentleness shown by the children. You can imagine how Ellen Laurence felt when she was told this story.

The children, their teacher, Julie and Marsha all got together in one big circle to talk. Annie was there resting comfortably with her three best girl friends. She was quiet and acted perfectly fine for the 45 minute discussion. She never moved from the side of her friends. She did lay her hand on one of their laps. They stroked her head and hands constantly. Perhaps this scene is the answer we adults are seeking. Not gimmicks, gadgets, M&M candy or aversive shock, but good old-fashioned tender loving care, dished out in big spoonfuls from people your own size. It was, as the kids would say, "AWE-SOME!"

Julie and Marsha initiated a conversation with the children and their answers tell the whole story. Annie Laurence will have a different life because her family happened to live in the right place at the right time. They were lucky to live in a State where there were people like: Bill Gillenwater, principal at

their local school; Jeff Strully, Executive Director of ACL Colorado; the Peak Parent Centre; Brian McNulty, State Director of Special Education; and Tim Waters, Superintendent of the Greeley District.

Other Annie's all over the world deserve the same treatment as this Annie. Inclusion should not be dependent on the good will of educators. It must be as Bill Gillenwater so eloquently said, a CIVIL RIGHT. It is Annie's right to get the ABC's — ACCEPTANCE, BELONGING AND COMMUNITY. It is also the right of all the other children in Bill's school to be exposed to life as it exists with all its beauty, pain, diversity and challenge.

The children are the fountain of opportunity we so often miss in our schools. At Scott, the adults allowed and even asked the children to be involved. The children are, and always will be, the secret weapon to solve any problems. If only we would ask them! The children at Scott are no different than the children in any state of the USA or any province in CANADA.

Annie now has a firm foundation upon which to build. Scott Elementary and Bill Gillenwater have given her that chance. Some would cast the Annie's aside. But we believe that "an injury to one is an injury to all". If we leave out Annie, so do we do injury to every child. As we accept ANNIE, violence and hate decrease. As we welcome ANNIE, all children feel better about themselves and learn more. As we welcome ANNIE, literacy increases and honesty abounds.

Annie came to Ellen and Norm Laurence with no packaged instructions. She came as she was and they had to figure out how to love her and keep her in their family, just as they figured it out for their other two children.

Annie is simply another child in the garden of children. She deserves to be nurtured and enjoyed with all the rest. She has found her place at Scott and truly BELONGS.

As we travel across the USA, Canada and Europe we get the same responses from children and teenagers. They are there to help us, to be involved. They are waiting for an invitation. We

must reach out to the most readily accessible resource in our communities and schools. We must give up our desire to find pat and simple solutions to complex problems. Annie will not and cannot be fixed or cured. She simply needs and wants to be fully welcomed. When this happens we can stand back and watch as she and all the others develop into whatever they can and will become.

The building of Annie's CIRCLE of FRIENDS can be seen or called a form of cooperative and collaborative education around the issue of acceptance and diversity. Whatever we want to call it we know it serves as a powerful tool. It needs as much time in teacher staff development as building any aspect of the curriculum.

Talking to children openly and honestly is an art and needs to be discussed and practiced. It is not always an easy task, especially if we as adults are uncomfortable with the topic. Any in-service training on CIRCLE BUILDING must deal with the fears and attitudes we all hold in our hearts around children who are poor, disabled, vulnerable, different and at risk. Teachers will (except in rare cases) rise to this challenge and be reminded of why they went into teaching in the first place.

That is the true gift of ANNIE. She has reminded us all of why we exist as human beings, as teachers, as parents, as friends.

The children of Greeley, Colorado are the magic and the greatest resource for our future.

In April, 1991, Annie, this severely/profoundly retarded child, said her first sentence - with witnesses:

**"Judy my friend!"**

That says it all...

Ellen Laurence gave another reflection of Inclusion: "Annie has a 2 pm intravenous antibiotic. It's done in a classroom on a beanbag, with her friends lying around her - reading, watching movies, etc. It's absolutely no Big Deal! It would make an amazing picture."

**What is Success?**



Ellen Laurence has hung in through endless meetings and conferences about her daughter. She has tried hard to keep her whole family together, supported, and uplifted through a difficult move. She always has a smile on her face and although she does cry (at night and alone) over the rejection of her daughter in the past, today she celebrates the good fortune of being in a welcoming school and community.

Ellen remembers clearly when she first got hooked on a full welcome for her daughter. She attended a small parent meeting in Boulder, Colorado in 1986 where Marsha Forest showed slides and spoke of the integrated settings she worked in particularly in Hamilton and Kitchener Ontario. Ellen loved Marsha and her stories but felt integration certainly wouldn't work for her daughter. It was marvelous for all her friends' kids — kids with cerebral palsy or Down Syndrome, etc., but Annie was far too "handicapped." Ellen shudders as she remembers how she felt. "This is all pie in the sky," she thought. But the images did remain in her mind and for some reason she kept bumping into Marsha everywhere she went in Colorado and at other national conferences.

One day it all just snapped into place. Since Annie was a full member of the family, why, in heavens name, should she attend a segregated school? "These days I'm embarrassed to say that Annie attended a segregated preschool. It is so totally polar to everything I now believe. I did what I thought was best and what everyone was telling me was best. I felt Annie needed kids who would not tease her and that she needed speech therapy and occupational therapy. I thought maybe all the therapies could "fix her". Now I wouldn't have anything but full inclusion and neither would Norm.

Norm's been the quiet supportive one. We both realized a few years ago that we or our insurance could purchase anything Annie needs except the one thing money could never buy and insurance can't provide — that is real friends.

It has all been worth it because of what's happened this year. Four parents who may have been among the

negative ones have openly apologized to the Laurences, and have asked that their daughters be in the same class as Annie next year. One parent told Ellen: "Whatever class Annie is in, that's where I want my daughter. My child is a nicer person because of Annie."

It is difficult, if not impossible, to mend the brokenness, isolation and stripping of dignity for a person who has experienced segregation all their lives. Why not start with the little children and build something new. Being together with real kids in regular schools and classrooms are the first and foremost criteria for anything that follows. All else is simply worthless and built on a foundation of sand if the social relationships are not intact.

When the foundation is built, when the welcome is made, when the child is circled then, and only then, can reading, writing, arithmetic, history, etc be taught with meaning and dignity.

For Annie communication is starting, behaviour is changing and it is because of the successful welcome of her original second grade teacher Chris Neilsen whose attitude we would like to clone. Chris said, "I don't have a clue what to do. I never took a course in special education but I'd like to have Annie as part of my class and together we can figure it out."

### **Outcome: Success!**

On January 26, 1991 the Laurence's decided to have a party for Annie. It was to be an ice skating and pizza party. They invited the whole class of 26 children. Ellen and Norm thought if 6-8 kids attended, they would call it a success. To their shock, surprise and delight, 35 people showed up. ALL but two kids (one was sick the other out of town) plus brothers and sisters, parents and teachers. Norm happily had to run to the local pizza shop to purchase more food as he only ordered enough for the 6 guests he expected. "Never in our wildest dreams did we think so many people would come to the party."

On Feb. 22-23, 1991 at the Second Annual Conference on Inclusive Education in Denver, Co, (sponsored by the

Colorado Association for Community Living, the Peak Parent Centre, and District 6 - Greeley) over 1100 people registered and 100 were turned away. (up from 400 attendees the year before). Bill Gillenwater and Ellen Laurence (plus several teachers from Bill's staff) told their story. They have moved from simply supporting Annie to assisting in developing State and national policy.

### **The Last Words**

The last words go to the people on the front line. We can only surmise, but I think Annie's words have already been chosen - her first spoken sentence:

**"Judy my friend!"**

Annie's teacher, June Griswold wrote a letter to Ellen and Norm. It is entitled:

*Annie's Gift to us!*

*Annie's gift to the students in her third grade class is, very simply, LOVE. She has taught everyone to love in a manner that some have never experienced — UNCONDITIONALLY!*

*The students love her without reservation, because that is the way that she loves them. Daily the students celebrate her very presence in the classroom. Those little caterpillars that started the school year in Room 16 spent a minimal time in their cocoons. They then emerged as butterflies, free to flit through life's garden, sipping nectar from the flowers of all their experiences, including those new and different experiences with Annie. Each taste of that sweet juice has allowed them to reach greater heights academically and socially. And the little bug who has allowed them to feel so free around anyone, regardless of aptitude or ability, is Annie. What greater gift can anyone receive?*

Annie's teacher wants everyone, but especially educators to recognize the fact that she is an ordinary person.

*There was no "special training" to get ready for Annie in the classroom.*

Annie's inclusion in the classroom was not a monumental effort nor did it occur after many hours of intense preparation. Annie was accepted just as all students in the class were accepted. Yes, there were adjustments to make. Yes, things are different than they would have been without Annie. But what educator can honestly say that she has been "specially trained" to meet the needs of every single student and situation in her classroom? While Annie was teaching her friends to love her unconditionally, she was teaching her teacher to do the same. And, when her teacher is being perfectly honest, she does admit that she doesn't feel as ordinary as she did at the beginning of the school year. She feels enriched and fortunate, because she is also the recipient of Annie's unique gift.

Last but not least, a letter from Ellen...

*Dear Marsha & Jack,*

*Just Some Thoughts*

*Annie is back on round-the-clock intravenous antibiotics, so maybe my fatigue makes me a little bit more introspective.*

*One of the biggest blessings for me in the last year and a half - due to Bill and his troops - is the measure of tranquility that I'm feeling for the first time in 9 years.*

*I know that Annie now has adults AND KIDS in her life who truly love her and will keep her safe (besides her family).*

*I know I have always tried to do my best, and more for her. I can look back without a whole lot of regrets.*

*I'm fighting "the good fight" with a lot of help from my friends!*

*Why is it Working?*

*1. Mutual Respect/Friendship*

*I'm not dealt with as some unpleasant by-product of Annie. I'm a respected member of the TEAM.*



2. It isn't ASSUMED that because I'm a parent, my emotions will get in the way of my judgement.

3. Like me, the staff wants the very best that life has to offer for Annie. We tend to be "partners in dreaming", so I'm never LABELED: "Rejecting of her Limitations".

4. We're all acutely aware of her vulnerability, so I'm not LABELED OVER PROTECTIVE or POSSESSIVE when I ask for a measure of safety.

5. Because of the above, I'm not set up to fail, or then posture myself as "one of those aggressive mothers".

Marsha & Jack - I cried when I read the draft of this article. It is wonderful! And as a parent who's kid is always receiving something, it's really healing to think of "her giftedness" as Judith Snow would say.

Love  
Ellen.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM ANNIE'S CLASSMATES

### HOW HAS ANNIE BEING HERE HELPED YOU?

- \* Annie makes us all feel happy. Without her we wouldn't be the best class.
- \* I feel good playing with Annie.
- \* Knowing Annie has helped me learn to control my little sisters at home.
- \* If I ever decide to work with people like Annie when I get older, I'll know what to do to help.
- \* I got a new friend.
- \* Having Annie here made me feel different inside, like positive.
- \* It's fun having Annie here with us.

### HOW DO YOU THINK IT HAS HELPED ANNIE TO BE HERE IN THIS CLASS?

- \* She talks a lot more here with us.
- \* She says a lot more words.
- \* She has more friends here.
- \* She learns a lot from us.
- \* She doesn't pull hair as much anymore.
- \* She's in a good mood more with us.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS ABOUT HAVING ALL STUDENTS IN REGULAR CLASSES?

- \* Put only one kid with a special need in each classroom.
- \* Tell the teachers that kids will be and act more normal if they are in regular classes.
- \* Treat all kids like regular kids.

### WHY DO YOU THINK ANNIE PULLS PEOPLE'S HAIR?

- \* She likes blond hair.
- \* She pulls hair when she's in a bad mood.
- \* She is trying to say "hi".

- \* She is trying to get your attention in the best way she can.
- \* She pulls hair when her ears hurt.
- \* She is trying to pull us close to her. Trying to pull us back to her.

### WHAT IF SOMEONE CAME TO YOUR SCHOOL AND TOLD YOU THAT ANNIE HAD TO GO TO A SPECIAL SCHOOL OR SEPARATE CLASS.

- (There was a loud chorus of NO's)
- \* She is learning so much here with us than she's ever learned before. Why would she go away?
  - \* No way! She really likes us and is attached to us.
  - \* No! She's a regular person here just like we all are.
  - \* She learns more here and she's happier here than anywhere else.
  - \* No! She has her friends here.

### BEFORE I GO, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK MAKES A GOOD TEACHER SO I CAN TELL ALL THE TEACHERS I WORK WITH WHAT YOU THINK.

- \* A really good teacher gives you love but doesn't baby you.
- \* Someone who is nice to you.
- \* A good teacher has a good sense of humour.
- \* A good teacher teaches you lots of new things every day.
- \* Someone who knows when you feel bad and takes the time to talk to you.
- \* A good teacher is 'cool' and 'awesome'.
- \* A good teacher is never too busy to stop and give you a hug.
- \* They joke around with you.
- \* They accept everyone as they are.

**There is great wisdom in this childhood common sense. We too could relearn what we have forgotten — if we would listen.**