

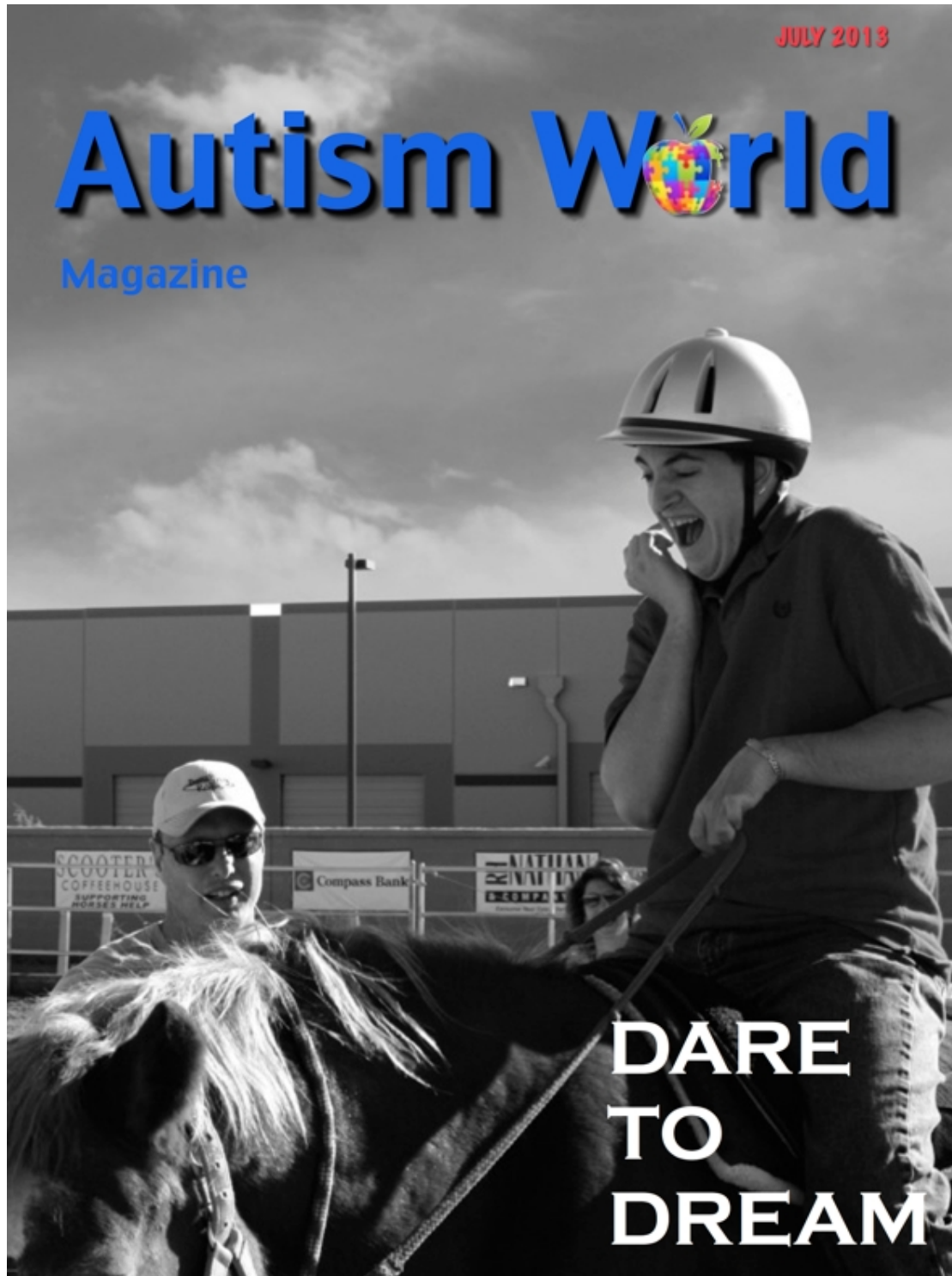
To Separate or Not to Separate

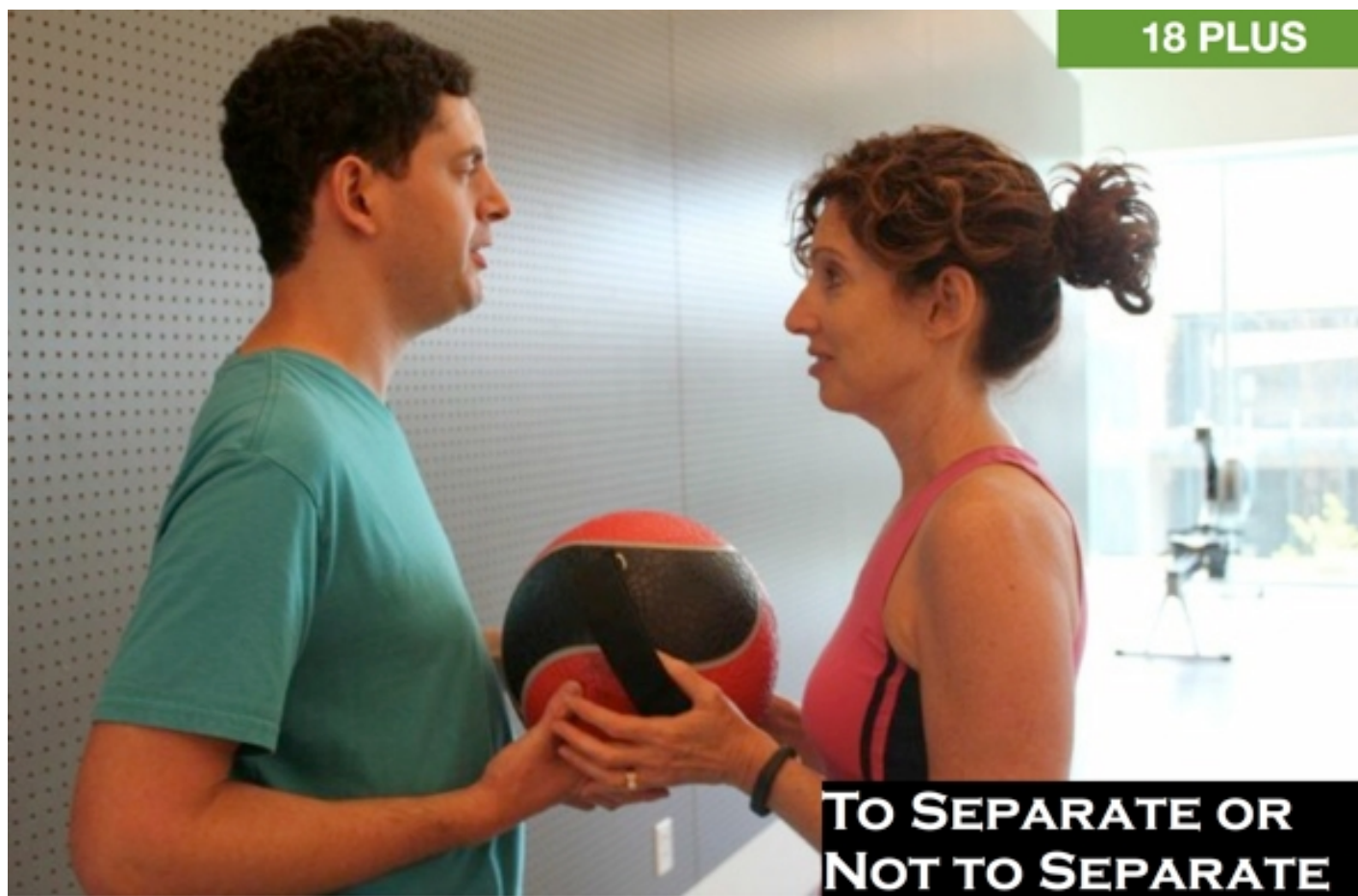
Written by Gayle Nobel

Monday, 08 July 2013 13:26 - Last Updated Tuesday, 09 July 2013 20:18

Autism OZ is now Autism World Magazine and Kyle is on the cover of the July Edition.

Would love to hear your thoughts on my article *"To Separate or Not to Separate"*. (below)





by Gayle Nobel

SHOULD THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS HAVE THEIR OWN SPECIAL GYM? YES SAYS GAYLE NOBEL.

A gold mine exists in Phoenix, Arizona, my hometown. It is called the Virginia G. Piper Sports and Fitness Centre. It's for Persons with Disabilities and is known as SpoFit.

It's website says: "SpoFit's mission is to provide exceptional adaptive sports, recreation, aquatic and fitness programs that promote the independence, health and overall well being of people with disabilities and their family members." Nice. Very very nice.

SpoFit is owned and operated by ABIL (Arizona Bridge to Independent Living). It's motto is "Empowering People with Disabilities for Over 30 Years: Independent living and advocacy by, and for, people with disabilities." Scholarships are available for eligible veterans. Funding comes from non-profit, charitable organisations. SpoFit relies on donations, large and small, to offset the costs involved in operating the centre. SpoFit memberships are comparably priced to chain gyms.

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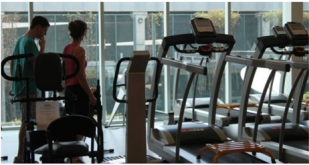
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18 PLUS

SpoFit is a gym especially adapted in a multitude of ways for people with disabilities. I realise the word 'disability' may be considered by some to be politically incorrect, but the gym uses this terminology in their description, which is boldly stated on the front of the building. They have a wide variety of programs, from recreational therapy to various sport clinics and camps for children and adults.

It made it easy for Kyle to stay focused. Most importantly, it was comfortable for both of us to be there. No awkward "wondering" status. No shocked looks at Kyle's vocalisations. I can't verify how Kyle felt but, from my perspective, it was a relief to be some place where it was okay for Kyle to be Kyle. I'm guessing Kyle could feel my relaxed affect. He seemed very happy to be there.



We enjoyed our first workout at SpoFit last Saturday. I smiled inside and out when I saw children of all ages in their wheelchairs playing basketball on one half of the gym, and soccer, on the other. Up above, we walked the customised track, kicking off a tenth of a mile at a time until we reached 2.1 miles. Not bad for our first workout at SpoFit.

The track provided a wonderful structure for Kyle, much different than our summertime walks at the mall before the shops open.

To use this gym you have to have some type of disability or be a family member of a person with a disability. Assistants to members are welcome, free of charge. It's an exclusive place; I suppose one could say it discriminates against the able-bodied or neurotypical. And thank goodness it does. That's what makes it so special. Discriminate simply means to differentiate and it is not necessarily a dirty word.

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There are two very special features to this gym. One is that the equipment is all adapted so that people with varied needs and abilities can use it. A person in a wheelchair can swivel a seat away from a weight machine and park their chair underneath. The stretching mat is raised rather than being on the floor. There are step stools next to the treadmills. They offer adaptive exercise classes. The pool is adapted with handrails, lifts, and even an elevator. The Jacuzzi is not excessively hot. The list goes on and on, all the way to the wonderfully large family restroom. These adaptations are fantastic. It is obvious some very specialised planning and design went into the creation of SpoFit.

The second special feature of this gym is the attitude that permeates the building. This means the world to me. It can be felt in each interaction with staff and volunteers. I felt it when exchanging a smile and a few words with a man in a wheelchair on the track.

Acceptance. It is ok to be different because different is the norm at SpoFit.

There can be obstacles at gyms for some people who may need more accommodation than a special parking place. Should I expect a high level of accommodation at a regular gym? Not necessarily, though a family restroom might be a nice touch. Some gyms are starting to catch on to this.

Should Kyle try to blend rather than be separate? Is separate bad and is blending good? Maybe not. Kyle faces environmental and/or personal obstacles every time he goes out into the community. To find a separate place he can enjoy with a few less obstacles is a gift.

To me, SpoFit is a dream come true. If separate means a place like SpoFit, I'll take separate any day.

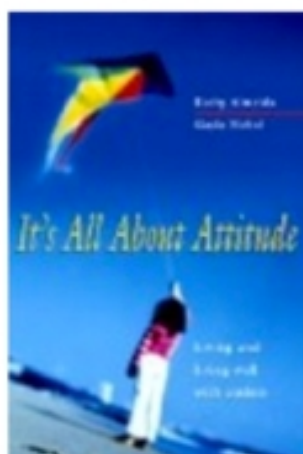


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CLICK ON PICTURE WHEN ONLINE TO VIEW VIDEO



"Okay for Kyle to be Kyle"



It's All About Attitude by Gayle Nobel. Click on Book to purchase via Amazon

Gayle Nobel has a lifelong connection to autism through her brother and her son. She holds a BA in special education, is an inspirational speaker and parent mentor, and is the coauthor of "It's All About Attitude: Loving & Living Well with Autism" (2006) and the author of "Breathe: 52 Oxygen-Rich Tools for Loving & Living Well with Autism" (2010).

Gayle directed an intensive home therapy program for eleven years for her son, Kyle. She resides in Phoenix, Arizona with her family.

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~~[http://www.gaylenobel.com/2013/07/08/to-separate-or-not-to-separate/](#)~~