

I Want to Hear Your Voice!
By Pam Millsap
A portrait of autism, an imprisoned voice,
expressed in a letter from a mother to a son...

Dear Son,

Please let me hear your voice!

You came into this world, an angel,
More beautiful than the Gerber baby,
With a sweet, easy temperament...

Your cries were so rare, we thought we were doubly blessed...
We didn't know that we might never hear your voice.

I want to hear your voice!

Those early years...
All the unexpected challenges...
Marked with needles and scalpels and other sharp things...
Like words from people in white coats,
Saying that you would never walk, would never talk...
Well, I guess one out of two ain't bad...

But the memories of the three times in your lifetime when you uttered a single word
--"Mama"--

Before your first year had ended, before your voice fell silent,
Were stored up like treasures in my heart...
I didn't know that was the last time I would hear your voice.

Please let me hear your voice!

The years passed...
We learned to celebrate the smallest victories...victories that in other households
Might seem mundane...
Your first steps when you were 3 and a half years old, when you left your little metal
walker behind and
Made laps around the den...
We celebrated like the fourth of July,
Though only four people were there to cheer.

Still, I had dreams in which you spoke, ordinary words exchanged between a mother and a son, and I would wake up to the alarm clock of reality, and my heart cried out, Let me hear your voice!

But we learned over time to listen with our other senses...
Not for your words, but for their meaning...
And we learned that your beautiful grey-green eyes
Sparkle like the sun when you are happy...
Your hands move faster when you are angry...
And your mouth twists downward when you are scared
(though nothing in life seems to scare you much).

And now the years have passed,
And your laughter is several octaves lower...
Big hands and feet, and the beginnings of a mustache...
Still a joy to your brothers, to your father and me...
Still a mystery living among us...
Because we will never really hear the full expression of your voice...

But one day, when I have gone to live in God's promised land...
I will wait for you.
And when you join me there, I will welcome you with open arms,
I will look you in the eye, and I will say,
"Let me hear your voice!"

And you, standing there,
Healthy and healed...
Your spirit finally freed from your challenged mind and body,
Will utter the one word I waited a lifetime to hear:

"Mama!"

And I will finally hear your voice.

And I will know that I am, indeed, in paradise.