

## ERIC

I was standing in the doorway of the school office inquiring of the secretary when the principal would be available, when someone kissed me on the cheek. I turned to find the beaming face of Eric's mother.

I was very excited to see her, "It's so good to see you. I was going to call you. How are you? Where's Eric?" Eric had been on my mind for sometime.

"He's down in the 1st grade room and reading up a storm. I'm doing volunteer work today. I'm on the way to his room. Would you like to see him?" she said.

As I peeked into the classroom, I could see Eric sitting in the back of the room smiling, excited and participating. All the children were counting in unison.

Memories flooded back to the first day that I saw him. His mother and father brought him into the Center where we teach children. While she talked to me, he continued to run around and around her in circles, whining. When he walked, he brought his feet up a little too high—in fact, about six to seven inches too high. His eyes seemed to have a glazed-over look and he never looked directly at anyone.

His mother had visited with me several times prior to bringing him to the Center. Eric had just celebrated his third birthday. He had yet to make a single sound or speak a single word. Whining was his only means of communication.

That first day at the Center his father picked him up and placed him on the stool in front of the computer. As we progressed through the process, I would pick up his finger and place it first on one key and then another. He allowed me to do this but gave no indication of any interaction at all. He was very quiet and stared straight ahead. It was the same as if I were working with someone unconscious. However, after 20 minutes when I asked his father to lift him from the stool, he screamed. As they left the building he continued to scream. "I believe he liked his lesson." I said to one of my teachers. And, indeed he did!

From that day forward, Eric continued to improve. At first a great deal of our lesson centered on tracing the letters, saying the letter and its sound and saying the word. For a long period of time, I continued to pick up his finger and place it first on one key and then another but finally I got him to press it on his own.

I gained as much from Eric as he did from me. He taught me more about how children learn than any college course that I had ever taken. I learned that nothing is impossible. Originally, I surmised that he would never be able to work the mouse, or work mazes, or match articles. But, slowly he did accomplish all of this. Slowly but surely, he began to build communication skills. Interestingly, his eyes seemed to clear up, and he would look at you and smile. Even his walking

took on a more natural gait.

A reporter interviewed his mother once and asked what he could do today that he could not do before she brought him to Be Smart Kids. "He can call my husband Daddy," she replied. Even the reporter got misty-eyed.

We waved at Eric through the window. He waved back. It was a beautiful fall day. His mother beamed with pride and so did I.

I've always been very excited about the fact that we could work with ordinary preschool children for only thirty minutes a week stimulating their brains so that they could go to school "loving to learn rather than struggling to learn;" but it is children like Eric that makes me misty-eyed.

In 2004 Eric won the reading award at his school.