

## AUTISM by Mary Romaniec

When we moved to Grafton from Orange County, California almost three years ago it was amazing how many asked us WHY we moved to New England. They were mystified when we honestly told them ‘To raise our family.’ *Why would anyone move from southern California to New England* would be the follow up question. And yet, if you are from Orange County (lovely as it is) you completely understand the need to grab hold of something real; something intangible in explanation but felt daily when I wander the Town of Grafton.

Perhaps it is the fact that I say hello to someone I know each time I go to the Stop N’ Shop, run into the same families on the soccer field and church. Or perhaps the fact I know the owners of many establishments in town by their first name and they know mine. And when I am at Silver Lake in the summer time it is a regular social hour for the parents who are there for swim lessons for their kids. We see many of the same people throughout the summer and so do our children. These connections last all year.

But the best explanation of why living in this area is so wonderful is that I am able to make a difference. Like tossing a pebble into a lake you see the ripple effect of your efforts. But in California I could have tossed a boulder into the ocean and not even made a dent of impact (metaphorically speaking of course). In other words there is a chance to be a part of a larger good more so in this area. It is easier to become involved and want to be a part of the community.

Yes, I am still not jaded by the winters or Massachusetts drivers. I find New Englanders personable, kind and loyal. It did not take long to realize Boston Red Sox was the third religion in the area and I took heed to not hang out any California Angels paraphernalia lest I offend my neighbors (or get holy heck at the bus stop).

So what do I miss? Hmm. . . I miss the beach mostly. We lived three miles from the beaches of Huntington Beach. We were also near by Laguna Beach, Newport Beach and Dana Point. I miss taking my kids to Disneyland at the drop of a hat. And I miss the many fine friends and neighbors. Oh, and I suppose there are times I miss the weather. But what I don’t miss is the traffic on the 405 at 5 p.m. I don’t miss my husband not seeing his children because he spent three hours in traffic every day. I don’t miss the fact that 12 year olds dress as 19 year olds down by the beach and peer pressure dictated this to be the way the locals dressed. The list could go on and on.

The Romaniec family is here to stay, especially now that Cancun’s Mexican Restaurant has come to town (decent Mexican food fellow Californians). And we are humbled to be so embraced by this community.

When Ellen Onorato asked me to write for Blackstone Daily Journal I was thrilled. What she did not know was Blackstone was on my list of “Favorites” for website when we were planning our move to this area. A letter to the Grafton News I wrote recently caught her eye. It was about special education and missed services. Without going into

too much detail Ellen and I formed a bond of understanding that change is needed and it takes courageous individuals to lead the way. So going forward I told Ellen I would write more about education, special needs and anything relevant to the issues of this area.

My role as mentor and advocate followed me from California. Currently I am chair of the Grafton SpedPAC and founder of a support group called Helping Our Children Achieve. Beyond that I am the proud mother of three children ages 9, 7 and 14 months. My son's recovery from autism was featured in the Sunday front page of the Telegram & Gazette, and his story is well known throughout the country.

It is my goal to continue to educate and advocate at all levels. Mostly we are here to appreciate all that this area has to offer. . .AND RAISE OUR FAMILY!