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Teen's story about dealing with autism misconceptions on "Inside Edition"



Filed on October 6, 2015 by [Steve Fogarty](#)

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GRAFTON — Midview High School junior and honors student Michael Whary created something of an Internet sensation with a YouTube video with an assist from his parents, fellow students and teachers from Amherst's Children's Development Center.

Released on New Year's Eve 2014, the video, intended to boost awareness of autism, was Michael's Eagle Scout project. It has now racked up about 30,000 views, according to Michael's mom, Judi Whary.

Michael takes up the cause again when he appears on TV's long-running "Inside Edition" (WUAB-TV Channel 43) at 6:30 p.m. today to discuss his story "Autism Is My Superpower," which is among 110 stories in "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Possible," the latest in the long-running nonfiction anthology series of motivational and inspiring books.

While the stories differ in content and detail in relating tales of overcoming disabilities, rebounding from trauma and disasters or simply rebooting personal lives, all are designed to help empower people by illustrating the power of positive thinking and force of will.

Co-authored by long-running "Inside Edition" co-host Deborah Norville, "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Possible" is set to go on sale today, according to Irene Rogers, senior publicist for "Inside Edition."

Just as was the case with his video, featured in [a Chronicle-Telegram story in January](#), Michael and his mother hope that his published story will help people overcome well-intentioned but woefully inaccurate notions about autism and how it does not mean a life of limits for those it affects.

In a copy of Michael's story provided by his mother, the teen discusses the frequently pessimistic outlook parents are given when told their child is autistic.

In Michael's case, his diagnosis followed speech and motor skill problems by age 2½, as well as behaviors that included lining up toys in rows and throwing tantrums.

"My parents believed that if they could get me enough training that I would outgrow or no longer be autistic," Michael said. "It wasn't just about helping their children fit into society. It was also about trying to hide the autism from the world."

Yet Michael's autism led to some unexpected advances, including knowing the alphabet at age 1, and reading at a fourth-grade level at 18 months, which later led him to be the "official storyteller" in his preschool class.

Michael credited his years in scouting with advancing his abilities and self-confidence that eventually saw him acquire all required Eagle Scout badges as well as 45 merit badges, including one for aviation that saw Michael attend flight school and pilot a plane for a short time.

A trumpet player in the Midview Middies Marching Band, Michael runs on the school's track team, and amassed a 3.75 grade-point average his sophomore year.

With an eye toward running his own business someday, Michael hopes to be accepted into the prestigious Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania or to another Ivy League school.

"It's a daily battle," Judi Whary said of grappling with popular misconceptions about autism. "When told he's due to graduate with honors, they assume allowances are made for him. You can see it in their eyes. He's doing the same work as the other kids. He just can't express himself the same way. People shouldn't be so quick to judge."

Seeing himself as no different than anyone else, Michael said, "autism does not make me who I am.



PHOTO PROVIDED
 Michael Whary holds a copy of "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Think Possible," which features a story that he contributed.

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NOTICE

Near the end of his "Chicken Soup" story, Michael writes "God gave everyone a special gift, a

'superpower' if you will. Autism is mine. It has taught me to overcome my physical, mental and social difficulties." RETURN TO TOP OF PAGE COPYRIGHT (C) LORAIN COUNTY PRINTING AND PUBLISHING CO. | TERMS OF USE

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About Steve Fogarty

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