**Episode 8: The joys and challenges of being a father with autism**

**HOST**: Welcome to Autism Points of View by Autism Speaks. I’m Felipe Maya. In this episode you’ll hear from Phil Martin, a dad and accomplished photographer who is on the autism spectrum. Phil says being a dad isn’t easy for anyone, but for him, also being autistic presents unique challenges.

**PHIL**: When most people find out that they are going to have a child. I think their first reactions are some is a little fear but I think for the most part its excitement. You start to think about what your child is going to be like, who they’re gonna be, what they’re gonna like, the things they’ll play with, the person they’ll grow up to be, the schools they’ll go to. For me, those moments of excitement were there but I think it was majority fear. Fear about how his future is going to be affect by me being on the autism spectrum. Although I am a high functioning adult on the autism spectrum, I think people fail to realize that I’m still affected by autism regardless. There’s this stigma when you think about someone with autism, you think about a specific type of person. But were all affected. Were all autistic. No matter where you are on the spectrum. For me, my fear is how am I going to be there for him every time he needs me when I’m going through moments where I’m struggling with communication and how can I teach him to eat certain foods when I refuse to eat a lot of foods? What if he asks for his super cool dad to come speak at his career day and it’s a moment where I’m overwhelmed, I can’t deal with other people or I can’t be around other people or look into people’s eye and talk to these children. What if it’s a time where he wants to play but I’m experiencing a sensory overload and he can’t touch me or the thing he wants to do I just can’t physically do at the time. It’s a fear that is constant, it’s always there and you know it goes away sometimes but it remains in the back of your head and you think about what your diagnosis is going to do for him as he grows up and as he becomes his own person. It has to do with relationships and just the relationship with my son isn’t affected by how things went with his mother. So it’s a lot of things that being on the spectrum affected things along the road to being a father.

**HOST**: Phil’s communication challenges have also had an impact on his other relationships.

**PHIL**: On the topic of relationships, I think about how along the road of life being on the spectrum, how I’ve learned to live, deal with, and integrate relationships with the opposite sex and even with friends in general. All my life I’ve had this issue where communication has played a huge role. You know you start off with somebody and you say, “Hey. This is what I have. This is how it affects me,” and they’re always interested. It always starts off with a level of interest and they’re like “oh my god I never would’ve guessed it,” and then they’ll do a couple quick google searches and then the moment that you can’t communicate or you don’t want to communicate. The amount of text messages, e-mails, phone calls that you’re getting, you just have to shut everything off and you have to go into your corner and turn off. 9 out of 10 times you know how to deal with that so it’s like they forget everything you’ve told them, they forget about the horror stories you were faced with in previous relationships and they’re like, “I just want you to communicate. Why won’t you communicate?” And you just get to a point that you have to say to people like, “I am trying,” and that isn’t good enough. So a lot of the time it’s hard to find a relationship that’s going to have longevity because you don’t know if your diagnosis is going to cause the relationship to fail. And it’s been so constant throughout my life that I’m at a point where I don’t believe I am going to be in a long term relationship anymore. I don’t think a relationship is going to last more than a couple years with me because after a while my autism diagnosis will get in the way. Something will happen and I’ll get overloaded in some type of way and they’ll take my anger misdirectedly. They’ll outperceive my emotions to be one thing when they’re not. I have trouble with them expressing their emotions. I won’t be able to express my emotions in a way that I want to or not to their liking or understanding. And it will just cause issues. And now I am at a point where I don’t know what to do next. I don’t know what I am going to do with my next relationship. I’ve tried various things. I’ve tried to talk to people and I get faced with the same thing every time like “well why can’t you communicate with me, or why can’t you do this.” And it’s difficult because you know aside from a full time job where I actually just received a promotion, to you know basically running my own photography business, of having major clients and brands, of having deadlines I need to meet, on top of me being a dad and needing to be there for my son from time to time. It becomes difficult trying to bring in someone new and try to learn someone’s new emotions, the way someone operates, the way someone thinks, it’s very difficult to bring that person in and someone new to your routine, it’s hard. So I’m at a point where I don’t know anymore. I used to preach, when I was in a relationship that, I wanted myself to be a motivation for people on the spectrum and to be a sign of hope for parents and loved ones of people on the spectrum because I was like, “hey I have a relationship that I am maintaining. I have a son and that everything is going to be okay.” But every now and again there are set backs and I think my issues with relationships and being on the spectrum is a setback because all my relationships died because of one thing and that’s communication. But eventually I’ll find someone who understands what it’s like for me and will be willing to be patient and be willing to learn me and do what you can to learn about autism and at the same time learn how autism affects me, how are life will be with autism because it will be a third person in our relationship.

**HOST**: Overall, Phil say he wants people he meets to try to understand him and accept him for who he is, challenges and all.

**PHIL**: The only message that I ever preach and the only message and the outcome I want is for people to communicate with people on the spectrum. You know what’s funny is that were expected to communicate but no one communicates with us as far as learning how they can help us, or we can come to some agreement on how we can both coexist in an effective way for the both of us. That goes everywhere. I’m working more and more in trying to find ways to make sure that I can always be there for my son in every way and that there’s never going to be any roadblocks because of autism in my relationship with him. The relationship thing I’m at a loss for because it’s always some type of communication issue at every corner. And I don’t know how to address that like do you just say to people, “Hey I have autism! This might happen. But it’s not because of anything going on it’s literally because sometimes I just can’t find the communication.” I can’t find the words. I don’t want to speak. Sometimes I’m just silent. Sometimes I just want to stare at trains all days and not be bothered by anyone. “I’m sorry don’t touch me,” it’s hard to relay that. And I just don’t know what to do with that anymore. If you know someone on the autism spectrum that is close to you a loved one, a coworker, try to figure out what you can do to kind of make their interactions with you a little bit easier. I hope that sounds fair but its already hard in this world for all of us, it’s very hard. Especially when you have something like autism that affects your relationships with people. But figure out what you can do to make their lives a little bit better in dealing with you and other than that just keep on loving people because I love you.

**HOST**: If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts to get future episodes as they’re released. Visit our website autismspeaks.org/podcast for resources and other content related to this episode.

A special thank you to Phil Martin for sharing his story. This episode was produced by me, Felipe Maya and edited by Dax Schaffer. If there is a topic you would like us to cover we want to hear from you. Email us at connectwithus@autismspeaks.org and write “podcast” in the subject line.

I’m Felipe Maya, thanks for listening.