

Toys + Technology + **TALENT** =



**JONATHAN MURPHY AND JAMES SULLIVAN
MAKING A LIVING DOING WHAT THEY LOVE**

BY JODI MURPHY

As a creative professional, earning a living through art can be a challenge. Actors, for example, must juggle acting gigs, another job (or jobs) with auditions (lots of them!) and attending workshops to keep honing their skills. Creative professionals must devote as much time to networking as they do to their art. You get hit with the double whammy if you are a creative artist—actor, filmmaker, fine artist, musician, writer, etc.—and autistic, for there may be even more challenges. An autistic individual may experience sensory overload, anxiety while managing chaotic and unpredictable schedules, trouble securing and holding down multiple jobs and difficulty self-promoting. Why should someone pursue a creative career, whether autistic or not? My best response is that if you are born to be creative, you must create. It's what you are meant to do.

For Jonathan, my son with Asperger's Syndrome, discovering his talent for acting was transformational. It built his confidence, and he became more open and comfortable in social situations. It was a pathway to higher education, and he was successful in earning his degree in theater arts. Today, Jonathan works as a professional voice actor. He has an agent and has worked on some great client projects, including a release of Electronic Arts SimCity™ and in-park character voices for California's Great America Theme Park.

Aspergian James Sullivan found a route to his college success through his passion for filmmaking. James is part of today's YouTube zeitgeist, making his own video series called, "Jamietud," where he reviews video-games, cartoons, movies and anything else that catches his attention.

Jonathan and James are both extremely talented and hard-working and have the passion and desire to work. Yet, they struggle to consistently find the kind of employment that will allow them to showcase their expertise and get paid for doing it.

An Idea Is Born

I am always looking for an opportunity for Jonathan and other talented autistics, which is why I approached Laura Jienke with an idea. Laura is the CEO of Kayle Concepts and creator of the





Bluetooth®-enabled Bluebee Pals plush toy companions. (The Bluetooth connection inside the plushies allows each Bluebee Pal to move its mouth in sync with a song, app or voice coming through a mobile phone.) “What if Geek Club Books could produce a series of entertaining educational video shorts with the Bluebee Pals about autism and, most importantly, use autistic talent to write, perform, voice, film and edit them? Think a modern-day, quirky Mr. Rogers having a chat with his Bluebee Pal,” I said. Laura, who, while a business woman, also believes strongly in social responsibility, loved the idea and gave me the greenlight by commissioning an initial pro-

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duction of eight videos. The project is a perfect match for James’ and Jonathan’s skill sets and will allow both gentleman to do what they love and earn a pay check while doing it!

Why This Project Is So Important

These types of created opportunities are so important for the autistic community. As James said, “I think that this is a way of reaching out to autistic children and their parents in a way that has never quite been done. Educating by way of something that brings them comfort like a plush toy is a good way to get kids engaged.” James also believes that it will help educate chil-

dren who are not on the spectrum. "When I was growing up, I knew very little about my autism, and neither did my teachers and especially not other children my age. I think it will help them understand some of their peers who they sense might be different."

Jonathan likes the fact that it brings autism out into the open in a way that's approachable. "There shouldn't be any shame about being on the spectrum, so we don't need to hide it. When you are fearful, that's when bullies can take advantage. Let's talk about it."

Starving Artists ... No MORE!

Creating opportunities for our loved ones is not always easy, but it is worth every effort! Every person has the right to meaningful employment and to pursue their dreams. For Jonathan, working on Bluebee TeeVee puts him smack dab in his sweet spot. "Coming up with their personalities and developing character voices for each of the Bluebee Pals? This is what I do best."

Perhaps James summed it up best when I asked him what this opportunity means to him. "I graduated five years ago and have spent five years in limbo doing my own video projects,

and the only jobs that I've done that have paid the bills since then have been the opposite of video. I've gotten work as a handyman, teacher's aide and data input specialist," says James. Bluebee TeeVee has emboldened James to pursue

his dream of working fulltime in video filmmaking while getting PAID to do so. "To me, it's a dream. I am so thankful to have this wonderful opportunity to work in a craft that I am most comfortable in and for Laura at Bluebee Pals for taking a chance on me."

Laura has generously donated a Plush Huggable Bluebee Pal for ZOOM to give away! Make sure to Follow ZOOM on Facebook to learn how to win! To learn more about Bluebee TeeVee and Bluebee Pals, visit their website.



Jodi Murphy is the founder of Geek Club Books, a 501c3 charity with a creative autism education and empowerment mission. She is also co-founder of Zoom Autism Magazine, a lifestyle digital magazine for the autism community. Her focus is on affecting change through storytelling and technology. She dreams of a world where those on the autism spectrum are valued and given every opportunity to shine, using their talents and abilities.

