

**Introducing Melanie Pedersen & her two daughters Isabel & Sophia**  
**A Glimpse of Life on the Spectrum**

"I knew as soon as I heard that I was pregnant, that I would do anything to make my child's life easier and to keep them safe. I'm not sure anyone realizes at that point the lengths that they will have to go to in order to do so.

From the time Sophia began therapy sessions for autism, she would experience lip swelling, eye swelling, red cheeks, and weird red swirls all over her body. After she was newly diagnosed with autism, I dragged her to an allergist, who told me she was allergic to red dye. As the years moved on, we were at one point, gluten-free, soy-free, dairy-free, red-dye free...I'm not even sure what she could eat at that time. Years passed, her lip-swelling and tongue swelling became worse, Sophia barely attended school. We were given treatment upon treatment, and finally fed up with the next step, which were drugs that would harm her organs, I brought Sophia to Boston Children's hospital. She is now a different kid. When people hear Soph's story, the result is what they focus on. It ended well, or it is headed in that general direction. They comment on the distance driven and are amazed at the lengths that parents go to for their children. Except they don't see the real lengths that parents go to, and how each and every person can help.

Other people can't see the times we take off our sweaters to lay on the dirty bathroom floor so that we can change our children. How we rip our shirts when our child has aggression due to anxiety. How we count our change to afford the parking tickets at the hospital garages because we haven't worked in years, battling an illness we couldn't name. They don't see the back aches, arm aches, that occur because we can't afford a hotel, or our kid has too much anxiety to stay in one, so you drive seven hours and then after the appointment, you drive seven hours back again....and you do it three times. They can't see the tears and emotions that wreak havoc on both your body and your child's body as you try to find anyone to help when you were told that there wasn't help to be had.

The lengths that parents must go to are long, and sometimes the view that others have of the situation is short. I see you, and I know the road is difficult, but I also know that as parents, we will do whatever it takes to see our child happy and healthy, and if no one is cheering you on right now, I am. Also, I'll give you my sweater for that awful bathroom floor."