

through google eyes: **delsa's endeavor**



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PHOTOS BY JOHN JERNIGAN

*“You’ll see
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—DELSA DARLINE

Delsa Darline has always had a passion for technology. A self-proclaimed “techie,” she’s more in the know about new gadgets than her four sons. Now, thanks to one well-worded Tweet, she’s a Google Glass Explorer and owns one of the highly anticipated Glass devices. She’s using it to show the world how autism looks through her eyes by sharing glimpses of her son, Rory.

“I had seen some signs of autism before, and when I’d watch my son, I noticed he was doing things that didn’t seem right,” Delsa says of her son’s behaviors like his cries that sounded pained. Doctors dismissed her concerns and attributed Rory’s actions to a lack of discipline. Delsa looked to her friend technology for answers.

“I put a video camera in Rory’s room and started recording,” she recalls. Using the footage, Delsa had Rory diagnosed with autism at 14 months old, a remarkable feat. Early diagnoses are difficult to make but are key in helping the child’s development.

Delsa began recording many of Rory’s big moments for memory’s sake, taking videos and snapping pictures. It wasn’t long before Rory was clamming up and scripting himself at the sight of a camera. When she happened upon the Google Glass contest late one night, she saw how Glass could surreptitiously capture raw moments without disrupting or changing them.

It all started with a proposition. Google was searching for bold, creative individuals

to compete for a chance to beta test Glass. The innovative frames that are worn on your head can take pictures, videos, provide navigation and browse the Internet. Winners were chosen based on their Twitter entries describing what they would do with the new device. Others had posted elaborate videos, but noticing the close deadline, Delsa decided a simple tweet would have to suffice.

She gave what she could, and Google gave back.

"I just wrote something from the heart," says Delsa. "I got the notice I was chosen at the end of March. It was like a Willy Wonka ticket." On June 19, Delsa traveled to the New York City Google office, her proverbial chocolate factory, and returned home to begin her adventure.

Delsa's goal is simple: raise awareness and show people how autism really looks by recording and releasing clips of definitive moments in her son's life.

"You'll see the good and the bad, his successes and failures," she says of her project. She's also snapping photos of prominent community members wearing Glass. For every 49 people she photographs, the 50th will be someone with autism.

This photo series highlights the statistic that one in 50 children has autism and will provide profiles of people from across the autism spectrum. The spectrum is not clearly stratified, and the people on it are all unique in their challenges and personalities. One constant across the spectrum, though, is pure emotion, something Delsa admires.

"What they feel is exactly what you get," she says. "Being able to see that has changed me."

She wants everyone else to see it, too. Delsa, who serves as a board member for the Ocala Autism Support Network, hopes that revealing her son's journey will shed light on autism for others.

"Let them see it, let them hear it," she says, hoping that if parents see similarities

between their child and Rory they will seek a medical evaluation.

Because of his successful diagnosis, Rory has had behavioral, occupational and speech therapists visiting him at home for years. His symptoms have diminished as a result.

"The whole goal is to mainstream him," says his mother. Despite nay-saying doctors, Delsa knows he is capable, maintaining a wait-and-see attitude.

Although Rory remains the cornerstone of the initiative, Delsa says "now it's about everyone in Ocala on the spectrum." What does Rory think about all this? "He doesn't realize it's all revolving around him. He just thinks Mom got a new toy."

"Autism is not the end all be all," Delsa replied, when asked what she wants people to take away from her project. "First, we had to prove he has autism. Now, we have to prove he can overcome it." Autism is the answer to her questions, not a definition of

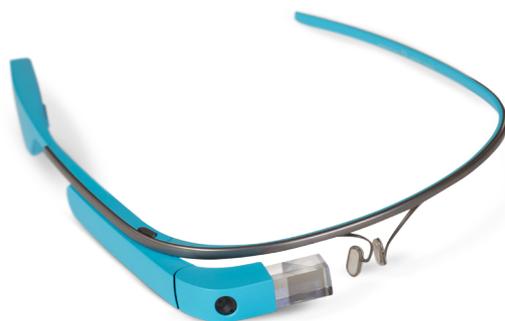
her family or her son. As Delsa put it, "Rory has autism; autism doesn't have Rory."

"Autism swallows you whole sometimes," she states, citing the importance

of having a support network within the community like the OASN.

Like any other rising fourth-grader, Rory loves video games, Skylanders toys and the color blue. His mom hopes that seeing him engage with so-called normal activities will prove that you can't tell a child with autism from one without just by appearance.

"There's no 'look' to autism," she says. "I'm hoping these glasses will transcend that."



delsa's winning tweet

#ifihadglass I would show the world what Autism looks like...give parents hope. Let them see my lil guy...and let them be inspired. **#ifihadglass** Autism would be plain to see. Maybe...just maybe...they will see the joy...the laughs...the love. See past the meltdowns...the worry...and the diagnosis... **#ifihadglass** Maybe people will be able to truly see the better side of Autism, because there are many...you just have to be quick enough to capture them and quiet enough to not break them... **#ifihadglass**

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Find autism support resources at ocalaautismsupportnetwork.com, and follow Delsa's moments at ispywithmyGOOGLEeye.com.