

Ginger Biasotto's battle against reading disabilities rages on

By Antonio Prado

Community News

Brandywine Hundred, Del. —

Virginia “Ginger” Biasotto still gets emotional when she recalls the time her young son – the middle child – was tested by the school psychologist because of his inability to read by the sixth grade.

Her son, Andrew, was a bright child who struggled to learn how to read, despite a score of 140 on his I.Q. test before starting school.

Years, later, school psychologist Tom Ackerson asked Andrew to draw a picture of himself. He drew a mutilated person, with his head and arms cut off.

“It makes me choke up to think about it, because this child was a wonderful little boy,” Biasotto says. “Ackerson’s next question was to finish the statement, ‘My brother thinks ...’ His answer was ‘I’m stupid.’”

It was frustrating for Biasotto, a teacher by training, because she had always equated intelligence with ability in reading. When she was teaching, she never understood why there were bright children in the lowest reading group.

Like many children in the system, Andrew, who had dyslexia, had fallen through the cracks and was labeled because his brain was different – right brained, to be exact. As a result, he was not taught how to read properly.

Biasotto and her son’s journey led her to document their experience in the book, “Educating Andrew: A Promise Fulfilled.”

“I learned through seven years of trial and error, looking for the solution for him. The brain is wired differently for different people. He is and remains exceptional in spatial realms,” she says.

Her son was a boy that had questions for everything. As she writes in chapter 1 of her book, “What’s above the sky? What’s under the ground? How many nails did it take to build that building?”

About Biasotto

Age: 71

Home: Brandywine Hundred
Education: Newark High School,
University of Delaware Education
major.

Home: Splits year between
Wilmington and Palm City, Fla.

Biasotto didn't blame his teachers, who were dedicated and worked hard to reach her son. She blamed teaching methods. And helping teachers find the right methods has been her crusade since 1978, because they can't be blamed if they don't know they're doing something wrong, she says.

Biasotto wants more teachers to read her book, a personal account of her son's struggle to learn to read.

Because they were a DuPont Company family, with her husband transferred several times, Andrew started his education in Maryland, and went on to Ohio, California and, finally, Delaware. He had no success in each of his schools and the Biasottos ended up suing the Brandywine School District. They won, and the district paid for his tuition at the Jemicy School in Baltimore for junior high.

It was tough living with friends during the week and with family in Wilmington on the weekends, but it worked. He jumped six years in his reading level and was able to come home.

For Andrew's high school education, Biasotto and her husband chose Salesianum, whose dean of students at the time understand Andrew's problem. He had come from a school in Richmond, Va. that educated children with learning disabilities like Andrew's.

Today, Andrew and his father own the White Glove Car Wash on Philadelphia Pike.

But to this day, Biasotto wonders how many other students schools fail to reach because they simply learn differently. By some estimates, only 60 percent of Delaware's public school students graduate.

"[Some] drop out because they can't function," Biasotto says. "If you went to your job everyday and you couldn't handle the paper on your desk, the assignments, how long would it take you to quit. Not very long."

Biasotto does not know if her book has made a difference. The organization that she founded, Reading Assist, sells copies to teachers it trains. But she is disappointed that the publisher, Publish America, charges \$20 for the 2006 book, because it prices many readers out of the market.

Still, she wants the book to be an educator since things have not changed much.

Every 4-year-old in the state should be tested so they can be on a level playing field when they start school, she says.

“If you don’t catch a child and get him on the right road at the end of the first grade, statistics show that it’s very rare that any of those children ever catch up.”

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