

Dear Christine,

When I read the newsletter that introduced me to you and your Special Kids Photography, I was excited and skeptical. We've spent years trying to get a good, intentional picture of Brendon. School pictures are...a disaster, with photographers who have to work like sheep herders. Family portraits are...a shot in the dark (pun intended), complicated by photographers who have no idea how to interact with a child with special needs. And we may catch a decent candid photo, but inevitably the background is overpowering and we lose the twinkle in his eyes or the light is all wrong and we can't see his smile in all it's charm.

My first contact with you was so pleasant, so encouraging. You have a warm, generous personality even over the phone. I appreciated your openness and your willingness to share with me the hows and whys of your special project. The balance shifted to weigh heavily on excitement. As we drove up to the session location, I found myself thinking I needed to be realistic and not have any expectations for our time together, leaning slightly toward that skepticism. We introduced ourselves and I was struck by how calm and peaceful you are. You can't imagine the reactions we get when people meet Brendon. Too often, it's just plain awkward. There was no awkward with you. There was no awkward the entire session. Even as I watched you watch Brendon and frame your shots, I thought it was just so easy. I still wasn't convinced we were going to get any decent shots, but it felt easy. I appreciated the way you interacted with Brendon, trying to get a "read" on him and working with that, not in spite of it. And you conveyed a sense of relaxation and ease that Brendon responded to well.

I know you weren't surprised about the results of your work, but we were amazed! We were prepared for one or two pictures that only a parent or grandparent would love. Imagine our surprise when there were too many to choose from! Somehow you managed to capture a young teenager, handsome and relaxed. There was no hint that he hasn't spoken in 12 years or has a hard time following multiple step directions or struggles to engage even the closest family. He just looks like a kid, our happy kid.

Thank you for investing so much of your time and energy to a special group of children, so often ignored or, worse, shunned. The world is a scary place for those with special needs like autism, but for a moment in time, you make it seem normal. You capture the heart and soul inside a body that works differently from the majority of the world. I read a quote the other day that said, "Autism is not a processing error; it's a different operating system." Thank you, thank you, for getting that and working with it instead of against it.

Sincerely,
Cindy