

## It's Just Algorithms

By Elise Davis - Unpaid Carer.

As I sit in the waiting room at the hospital, I watch my son Torrin kneeling with his hands folded up at his shoulders, perfectly mimicking the meerkats. As he moves his head quickly from side to side, I think about how many diagnoses have been thrust upon us in this place. First epilepsy, and then ADHD and autism. The "disastrous" one was a memory impairment from brain damage during a seizure which would make learning "possible but very difficult." Over the years however, diagnoses which once dominated our lives, became faint in the background and a source of pride for Torrin.

I remember one day I was singing along to Kate Bush's song "Running up that Hill" when I sang the line to Torrin "and if I only could, I'd make a deal with God and I'd get him to swap our places." I told Torrin that I love him so much that I would trade places with him, so he didn't have to face so many challenges. As Torrin replied "No thanks - I don't want to be an old woman who just reads and writes and walks. I love being me" my grandiose statement of love was reduced to reveal my judgemental, ableist view of his life.

Torrin cackles with laughter at the actions of the meerkats and other younger children around him follow his lead and join in the with mimicking. Finally, the neurologist calls us in for our appointment. As we head into the examination room, Torrin buries through my handbag and pulls out his Rubik's cubes. He brings out the 4 x4 and the 5x5 versions and sits on the floor with them. I start talking to the doctor about his seizures over the last 6 months. The doctor starts writing notes and abruptly stops to watch Torrin with the cubes.

"Does he just play around with those?" he asks me.

"No, he can solve it, that is his 4x4 and he can even solve a 9x9" I reply proudly.

"How is he doing that?" the doctor asks, staring intently at him.

"It's just algorithms" Torrin replies.

"Wow" the doctor says, shaking his head "I really can't explain that. I don't know how he can remember all those steps."

As we leave the appointment, I have the sudden realisation that even the smartest neurologist can't tell me what Torrin can or can't do. All these years I've trusted doctors and believed their worst-case scenarios were inevitable. I've neglected my gut and I've let their comments shape my opinions and expectations of Torrin. I grab Torrin's hand and turn to him.

"Torrin, the doctor can't explain why you can do that Rubik's cube. He knows everything about the brain, but he can't understand how you can do it. But I know why. You can do whatever you want to do...I see you."

Torrin looks at me, slightly sucking his cheeks in to hide his smile, full of pride and knowing that I'm finally on his team.

