

People Who Make a Difference



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I am so pleased to submit this wonderful article written by our board member Carole Kalvar about our esteemed advisory board member Dr. Temple Grandin and her mother Eustacia Cutler. Temple was named by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people of the year. She is a role model for all and especially those in the autism community.

Temple Grandin and Eustacia Cutler

We are hard pressed to find two individuals who have contributed more to the autism community than Temple Grandin and her mother, Eustacia Cutler. Dr. Grandin celebrated her 64th birthday this year at the Emmy Awards where the HBO film made about her life, “Temple Grandin”, won 7 top Emmy awards including best film made for television in 2010 . We also congratulate Claire Danes, the extraordinary actress who portrayed Temple in the movie, for receiving the Emmy, Screen Actors Guild and Golden Globe prizes for her leading role . Unperturbed by being on the stage at one of the most prestigious award ceremonies, Dr. Grandin called out to her mother, seated in the audience, to stand up and be recognized for her contribution to the success of the film. It was clear that Temple felt her exemplary accomplishments would not have been possible without her mother’s devotion. And, as if having an award winning film made about your life is not enough of an honor, Dr. Grandin was named by Time Magazine as one of 2010’s most influential people. She is recognized with this honor in the hero category for her dedication to championing the causes of autism advocacy and the humane treatment of animals.

It is hard to believe but it has been 25 years since Dr. Grandin’s revelatory autobiography, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic* was published in 1986 (the book was republished in 1996). As she often does, Dr. Grandin used her own life to illustrate the challenges and gifts of autism. We’ve learned about the mistakes made by lay people and professionals alike in the early years of work with autistic children because Dr. Grandin was courageously open about her own experiences. She had established a career as a noted expert in animal management and behavior but this autobiography lead to a new role as advocate and spokesperson for the autism community. Since then she has authored or co-authored 6 additional acclaimed books about autism including *Thinking in Pictures* the book on which the movie is based. Written in her unique, personal style, but with the authority of an acknowledged expert, these books have pulled back the curtain on the mystery of the autistic mind and its special characteristics and shown us how it works. She has provided the images, examples, and comparisons that enable us to more clearly understand the autistic brain. She has blazed the way for other spectrumite authors to explore their own experiences in the public forum.

In the mid-eighties, Dr. Grandin met Ruth C. Sullivan, one of the founders of the Autism Society of America, at the Society’s annual conference. Ruth invited Dr. Grandin to speak at the following year’s conference. Her talk was greeted with eager anticipation and her presentation was met with an outpouring of curiosity about her journey with autism. Despite her early awkwardness in the public eye she has become a star on the convention circuit. She’s given numerous presentations, and has made scores of appearances on TV and

radio. We at AHA are honored to have had Dr. Grandin on our Advisory Board since 2003. We are grateful to have benefitted by her contributions to our newsletter, and her presentations as keynote speaker at our conferences and at events we have sponsored with local universities and other agencies. All this from a person whose very early life was characterized as seriously impaired with little if any prospect for even average success.

Eustacia Cutler, Temple Grandin's mother, is a champion of the autism community in her own right. As the mother of a child with autism she is the quintessential parent advocate, the model for parents who take on the medical, educational and governmental powers-that-be in the interest of their children. There is a little luck in the story of the mother-daughter team. But there is more creativity, persistence, hard work and courage.

Eustacia came into womanhood and motherhood in the 1940s and 1950s. Luckily, she came equipped with intelligence, financial stability and creativity. She would need these tools and more to tackle the tasks that lay ahead for her. Her first child, Temple, was born in 1947 and very early on Eustacia recognized that her daughter was not like the other children she knew. Her life as an advocate for her child began less than two years after Temple's birth and has continued to the present. Her extraordinary predispositions to look under the surface, to analyze and come to her own conclusions were invaluable in those early years. She faced uncharted territory in a quest for assistance for Temple. Even worse the professional treatment options of the time could and often did lead to a doomed future for children diagnosed with infantile autism, characterized as a profoundly disabling psychotic disorder. For Eustacia the struggle against institutionalization for Temple was an undeniable duty.

Eustacia began a lifelong pursuit of knowledge in the field of developmental disability, using that knowledge to write and lecture on the subject. She has penned two award winning documentaries, "The Innocents," about children with intellectual impairment, and "The Disquieted," about emotionally disturbed children. She has documented her early journey with autism in her bestselling autobiographical account, *A Thorn in My Pocket*.

Eustacia has also enjoyed a career in the performing arts, her other lifelong passion. Julia Ormond, the recipient of an Emmy for her portrayal of Eustacia in the HBO film *Temple Grandin*, gifted the Emmy prize to Eustacia with these words, "I know that as a young woman Eustacia Cutler's dream was to be an actress. She put aside her own dream and sacrificed everything for her children. Knowing Eustacia as I do, I believe she would have been an incredible actress. Instead, she played the most important role a woman can play in life - that of a loving and caring mother. And, for that, I want her to have my Emmy."

Congratulation to Temple, Eustacia and the entire HBO production company of *Temple Grandin* for a remarkable year!

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