

CEREBRAL PALSY MAGAZINE

ORGANIC NUTRITION

**Holistic Nutrition
Improves Brain
Function**

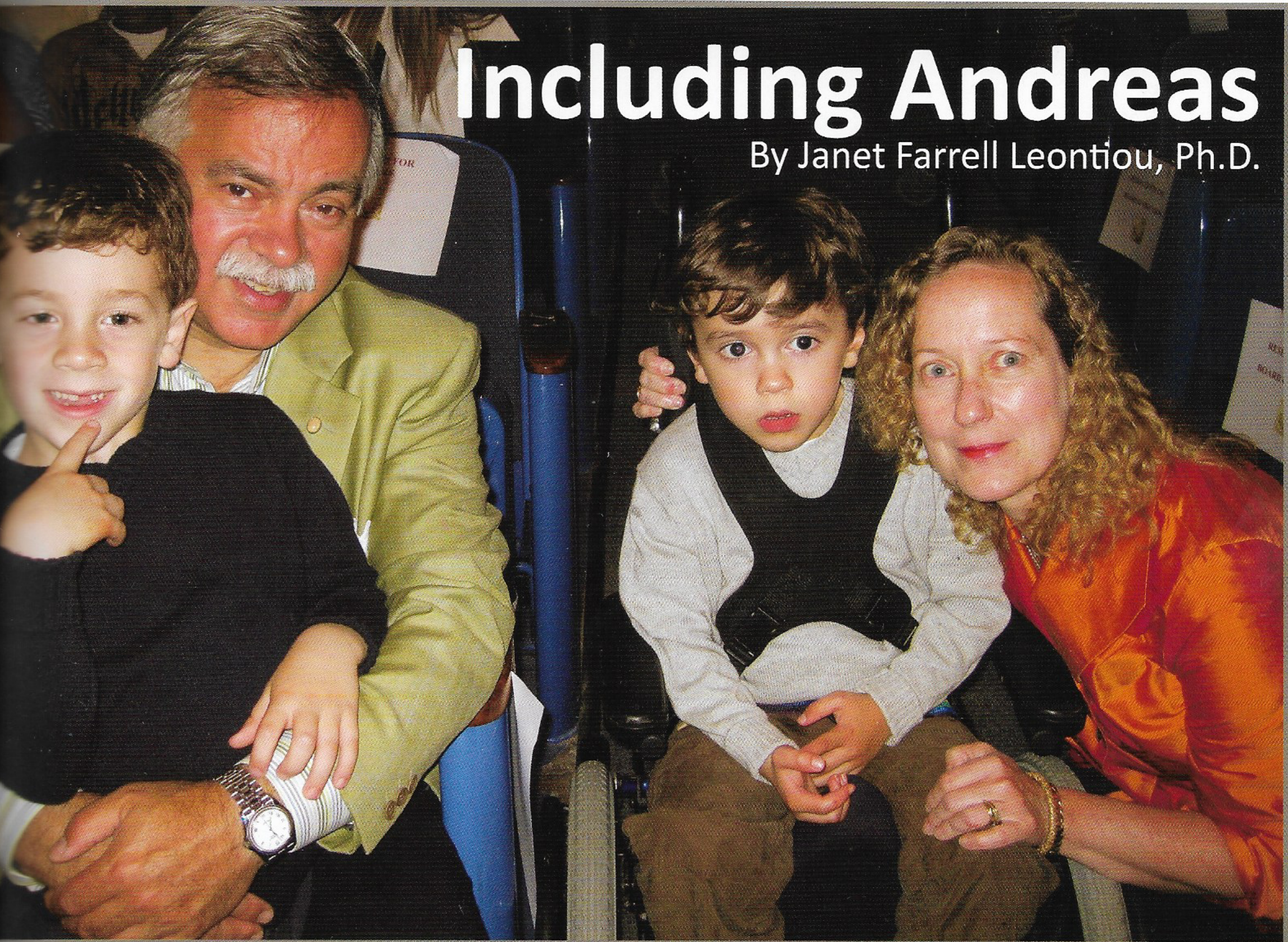
**Handi-capable
Karate**

**Ten Things
You Never Say
to a Person with CP**

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 2 Raw Plum (151g/5.4oz)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 70	Calories from Fat 0
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 19g	6%
Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Sugars 16g	
Protein 1g	
Vitamin A	8%
Vitamin C	10%
Calcium	0%
Iron	2%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.	
	2,000 2,500
Total Fat	65g 80g
Saturated Fat	20g 25g
Cholesterol	300mg 350mg
Sodium	2,400mg 2,800mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g

Including Andreas

By Janet Farrell Leontiou, Ph.D.



AS I sat in the meeting with the superintendent, the principal, and the administrator in charge of special education, the superintendent asked what Andreas's program will look like going forward. Diane, who is in charge of Andreas's program, said, "We will let Andreas tell us." I listened to those words and felt immensely grateful. Andreas is a six year old boy with cerebral palsy; he is nonverbal and non-ambulatory. As a sanity measure, I tend not to look too far ahead. My concerns are: "Is Andreas happy?" and "Is Andreas thriving?" My responses to both of those questions are yes.

Andreas has a customized education program that is supported by our school district. I am writing about

this meeting because I am trying to balance the scales for parents who frequently hear horror stories from parents trying to educate their child with special needs. Our school district is trying to meet Andreas where he is and is not asking him to fit into any prescribed box. In other words, they are giving him a chance to be educated.

After the meeting, I had a conversation with Joan, the principal. She said that she is very happy that Andreas is in her school. I told her that I was delighted about the accepting attitudes that she and Diane were demonstrating. The principal told me that she would not be at the school if it were not so. I spoke about the impact of the Kids on the Block, a puppet show that

teaches children about disabilities by using puppets with disabilities, on the kids at the school. Joan remarked that she thought Andreas was changing the people surrounding him.

I wrote an article about my son for his fourth birthday. In it, I wrote that I knew that Andreas would change the world not by what he could do but by who he is. I am now seeing that wish realized.

After our meeting, the superintendent and Diane visited Andreas in his classroom. Andreas arrived at the classroom beaming and was warmly greeted by his friends. His classroom is colorfully decorated and is an inviting place. I am grateful that he is in a place that is aesthetically pleasing. I reflect back to the time when I was shopping around for schools when he was younger. Andreas has a typically developing twin brother so I visited the entire spectrum of preschools. The schools for typically developing children were all adorable but the schools for children with disabilities were not. Because of time constraints, I would visit several schools in one day and then I would sit crying in my car. It was not just the condition of the children that would make me cry, it was also the condition of the schools. It was almost as if the physical plant of the classrooms were communicating two very different messages. If you were a typically developing child, all that was presented to you was beautiful. I do believe that beauty in our external world plays the very essential function of inviting us to see ourselves as beautiful, too. The schools for children with disabilities, from what I saw, were not beautiful. I could not understand this. Shouldn't they be at least as beautiful as classrooms for typically developing kids? I could argue that the classrooms for children with disabilities should be more beautiful. Similarly, I could also argue that classrooms for teenagers should be more beautiful than classrooms for preschoolers because teenagers desperately need to see beauty reflected. In practice we seem to do the opposite, since the older the child gets, the more austere the classroom environment.

Andreas is beautiful and I want him to see that beauty reflected around him. One of my jobs as his mother is to insert as much beauty into his day as possible. Everyone in our house, for example, takes great pains with food preparation. We make nutritious, beautiful meals. We try to take the time to set a beautiful place with eye-appealing dishes, candlelight, and soothing music. Andreas makes it easy because he always shows his appreciation. He smiles, observes the dishes we have prepared, and always eats with tremendous gusto.

As I write this, two experiences come to mind. One experience is of the film *Babette's Feast*, on which I wrote my dissertation many years ago but which never fails to inform and instruct. One of the lasting impressions of the film is that beauty—whether it comes in the form of exteriors, foods, kindnesses, understanding, or love—is curative. The other experience is my recollection of one of my students, Steven, and how he spoke of Andreas. Steven, who also has cerebral palsy, told me, “Your son is attracted to that which vibrates within him. He is attracted to light and life because that is what is inside him. That means he is not sad or depressed.”

I began this article by stating how grateful I was that our son is in a place where people see him for who he is. By that, I do not mean that they see him as the disability. They see him for who he essentially is—a beautiful being housed within a body that has severe restrictions. The other schools that I visited seem to see children only as bodies with severe restrictions. If children are in these kinds of environments, it is very hard for the child to hold on to all the light, life, and beauty within. If that happens, we all lose.

My thanks to Dan Habib and *Including Samuel* for the inspiration.

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