

MIND'S EYE

Art Across the Spectrum

BY DEBRA MUZIKAR

“What I like most to draw are maps,” Jason Cantu says. “That’s what I was first interested in growing up. I like to travel and get the populations of towns. I have a very good memory. For example, the population of Fresno was 461,000 when I went there last.” Shawn, Jason’s mom, says Jason was interested first in trains, and then maps and populations came after that. “He still can recite the population of just about any town,” she says.

Jason has gone from drawing literal maps of places he’s visited to metaphorical maps. His *Heart Map* drawing is a representation of his heart surgery he had last summer. He also created another image of his trip from Los Osos, his home town, to UCLA for his heart surgery titled *What a Long Strange Trip Its Been*. Jason almost lost his life last August because of congestive heart failure. He and his mom give credit for his miraculous recovery to the amazing cardiac team at UCLA and to Jason’s unwavering positive attitude. He’s doing better than he had been for a long time but doctors felt it best to implant a pacemaker/defibrillator and keep his name on the heart transplant wait list.

Jason recently made good use of the associates degree in broadcast communications that he acquired at Cuesta College. He acquired his own weekly, hour-long spot as a disc jockey on a Morro Bay radio station, “97.3FM, The Rock,” which can be heard live-stream online. His moniker



▲ CAPTAIN—caption

is “Captain Retro,” because he plays his favorite music from mostly the 60s, 70s, and 80s, and he loves sharing the many interesting facts he knows about the songs and musicians. Jason is also an actor and is currently involved in a new film production, a sequel to *The Curse of Blue Harbor*.

“Autism doesn’t limit me. In many ways, it has enhanced me. I’ve always been interested in going to new places, having new experiences and expanding the knowledge of what I know,” Jason says.

“He never ceases to amaze me,” says Shawn. “He’s uber-smart and so authentic. He could never be disingenuous. He’s such a good person, and I’m so proud of him. Authentic

and autism seem to go together.”

When asked about his struggles Jason says, “I’ve had speech difficulties, trouble making and keeping friends, recognizing faces and accepting constructive criticism. But just like any challenge, I do my best to handle each one and overcome any obstacle in my way. Muhammed Ali once said, ‘Impossible is nothing.’ And I am inclined to agree. The only limits in the world are the ones in your own mind.”

Jason Cantu has participated in many Art of Autism art exhibits and is part of both of Debra Hosseini’s books “The Art of Autism: Shifting Perceptions,” and “The Art of Autism: Shattering Myths”. ◀