



Dialogue

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In the Spotlight

Judith Allen

Though 69-year-old Judith (Judy) Allen has difficulty communicating, those who know her best are convinced that she's never been happier than she is now, living at Peppermint Ridge in Corona. Formerly a resident of Fairview Developmental Center, Judy moved into the intermediate care facility (ICF) in August of 2016.

Back in the 1940s, the study of autism was in its infancy.

Karlene Allen, Judy's mother, says that since she was a child, Judy has talked about a place called "Shay-Hee High High." No one in the family had ever heard of such a place, but over the years, circumstances led them to believe that when she spoke



Judy enjoyed competing in the Special Olympics when she was younger. This is Karlene's favorite photo of her, taken in 1983 when Judy was 36 years old.

of Shay-Hee High High, Judy was referring to heaven. So, when she moved into Peppermint Ridge and told her mother "This is Shay-Hee High High!" Karlene knew she loved living there.

Now older and needing some assistance herself, Karlene is thrilled to have her daughter living closer to her, and in a place where she is clearly very happy and healthy. It was, however, a long journey getting there.

While she was very young, the Allens were able to cope with Judy's challenges.

Karlene was just 19 years old when Judy was born. Judy was her first baby, and she had no experience with children, but she knew early on that something wasn't right.

"As a newborn baby, she didn't want to be cuddled," Karlene said, noting that Judy doesn't want people touching her, and would push her hand away when she was feeding her. Back in the 1940s, the study of autism was in its infancy, and there were no community resources, no services, and no supports for families like theirs

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Tickets on Sale for 2017 Spotlight Awards Gala

RCOC's 20th Annual Spotlight Awards Gala is scheduled for Friday, March 24 at the Embassy Suites Anaheim South in Garden Grove. Supported by sponsors and organized by Integrity House, the event honors individuals and organizations who improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities in Orange County. This fun event sells out each year, so be sure to get your tickets early!

For information and to purchase tickets, contact Integrity House at (714) 759-1499 or visit RCOC's website at www.rcocdd.com/news-and-events/spotlight-awards to download the ticket order form.

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who were attempting to raise children with special needs at home.

While she was very young, the Allens were able to cope with Judy's challenges. They lived on a large family farm in Norco (Hillside Farm), where Karlene grew up and still resides. It offered lots of space for Judy to expend her boundless energy.



Judy at age two, with her mother Karlene.

Unfortunately, there were few public places her parents could take Judy, who was always moving, throwing things, and was easily agitated. They enjoyed taking her to local parks and nurseries like Roger's Gardens. They also discovered that car rides would often calm her down. Years ago, two circus companies wintered in Norco, and watching the elephants in training was another favorite activity.

"We would sit and watch for hours," said Karlene, who had read about and recognized the symptoms of autism in her daughter long before she received a formal diagnosis at around age 30.

As Judy grew up, it became more and more difficult for the family to manage.

"I had no help," Karlene said. "I went to doctor after doctor, and nobody could handle her."

Even after the local school district finally started a class for children with special needs, the situation didn't work for Judy.

"They pushed her out of that," she said. "They couldn't do anything with her, because she was so active and noisy."

Karlene remembers one day Judy's father was ill and sitting in the living room for the day. He kept track of her movements, and reported that Judy never stood still for longer than 15 seconds the entire day.

Finally, when Judy was 12, she went to live at Fairview Developmental Center. Her parents visited frequently, and it was a shock for them when, eleven years later, Judy was transferred without their knowledge to Camarillo State Hospital. They had no input into the decision, and were notified by mail after the fact.

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"We wore out two cars driving to Camarillo," she said, noting that Judy lived there for 30 years before returning to Fairview in 1997, where she lived until moving into the community this past August.

Karlene and her husband Bob, who passed away three years ago just before their 70th wedding anniversary, were very involved with the Fairview community while Judy was a resident.

In fact, the barn they built at Hillside Farm continues to be the site for an annual holiday craft fair, famous for its ginger cookies, which for more than 30 years has raised thousands of dollars for disability charities such as Special Olympics. Funds from the cookie sales were also used to purchase Christmas gifts and other special items for Fairview and its residents.



Judy as a little girl, pictured here with her younger brother Rick.

"This year we sold over 70,000 cookies," Karlene said. "We could not do this year after year without the help of our wonderful community volunteers and organizations – Norco High ROTC, churches, and over 300 Girl Scouts. We are deeply appreciative."

With Judy now living nearby, in a home with several other older adults with developmental disabilities, Karlene has again opened her heart and home to Judy's peers and caregivers. This past Christmas, when Judy came home for the holiday she brought along ten other residents and ten caregivers from Peppermint Ridge – all of whom received gifts and a delicious Christmas dinner at the farm.