

Jim Warren and his son Erik

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## Part Two of a Two-Part Article

# One Father's "Field of Dreams"

Bonnie Brady



On the Kansas prairie where Native Americans once searched for herds of buffalo and where wagon trains rolled out of Fort Hays in search of a path through the great Rocky Mountains, there is a piece of land that holds the promise that one man has for his sons. This is the story of his personal "field of dreams".

Jim Warren uses a tongue-in-cheek colloquial expression to describe his determination to provide a secure future for his sons—I *ain't got no give up*. If what he has already done for his sons is any indication, he will manage to bring his "field of dreams" to fruition.

Jim is the father of two adult sons with disabilities. Erik, 37, has autism and Jason, 40, has Williams Syndrome. If you read, "Crafting a Secure Future One Day at a Time", in the spring 2009 issue

of ASQ, you already know that Jim's efforts have enabled both men to be productively self-employed in businesses specifically tailored to their abilities, interests, and needs, despite significant challenges. *Erik's Originals* and *WonderPaper by Jason* were conceived by Jim and became realities under his guidance. However, he would want to add that while he has provided the *inspiration* for these ventures, it is Erik and Jason who have provided the *inspiration* that keeps *him* moving forward!

Several years ago Jim purchased a parcel of land with the idea and hope of creating a place where Erik and Jason—and others with similar needs—could come to pursue their dreams and share their special talents and gifts with one another. There, they could discover new talents and develop interests and skills previously unexplored. To Jim, his 100-acre "field of dreams", nestled in America's heartland, is the perfect setting in which to provide opportunities for others with developmental disabilities to surpass the boundaries of their assumed limitations and to achieve within an environment in which they feel comfortable and safe. Jim reasons that in such a place these individuals would have unlimited opportunities to enhance their social skills, maximize their potential, and improve the quality of their lives.

Over the years, Jim has watched Erik and Jason benefit from exposure to new ideas and experiences, and he feels blessed for having been able to provide them for his sons. He also believes that neither of them

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## *Jim's Mission for His "Field of Dreams"*

- ✦ *To enrich each other's lives each day*
- ✦ *To explore strengths, talents, and abilities*
- ✦ *To gain confidence and a sense of fulfillment*
- ✦ *To learn about, use, and value the gifts of nature*
- ✦ *To enhance the light in which we see others*
- ✦ *To have, to build, to grow, and to enjoy dreams*

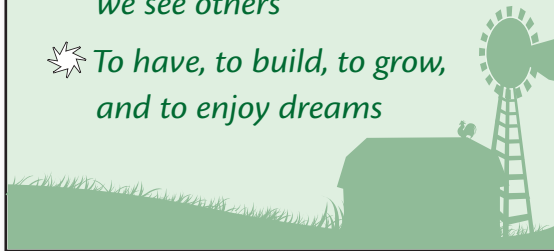


Figure 1

has yet reached his full potential; that many doors remain to be opened for them; and that abilities and talents not yet discovered could bring greater purpose and meaning to their lives. In fact, Jim wants to do everything possible to ensure that none of their individual aptitudes or skills goes undiscovered. And because he would like to be a part of helping others to have the same opportunities, he believes the land he owns could be the conduit through which to reach his goal.

Jim has considered many possibilities for using his farm land to accomplish his purposes. In fact, he has an abundance of ideas, limited only by the necessary funding to make it all happen. He views the land as the perfect setting in which to provide a multitude of experiences that could enrich many lives. It would also be a place where those with similar, as well as different challenges could cultivate their dreams; "till" their interests; and reap the benefits of their efforts. Of course there would be the mundane maintenance tasks, many of which Jim believes his sons are capable of contributing to, since for quite some time, Jason and Erik have helped with mowing and assisted with rototilling and wood chipping. They also enjoy planting, watering, trimming trees, and performing other tasks, such as collecting the trash.

Jim envisions groups of cabins equipped to accommodate different disabilities. There would be community buildings and common areas for all to enjoy, with activities planned around various levels of participation. Some would be educational; others therapeutic. There would also be opportunities to experience

music and the arts. But Jim's vision goes beyond the physical setting—it includes evening campfires, sing-alongs, and the joy of companionship that perhaps some have never known. He thinks of memories being made—positive experiences of working together, and caring and sharing in an environment that fosters acceptance.

After the "basics", Jim has dreams for greater things! Eventually, there might be an indoor/outdoor pool for water activities; horseback riding; and even a few small animals to be cared for and fed. Rounding out Jim's plan would be a greenhouse and vegetable garden to tend that would provide the pleasure and satisfaction of watching things grow.

Jim's practical side knows that seeing all of these things to fruition requires a director; lots of staff; on-site medical personnel; food-service workers; individuals to plan

and supervise activities and teach skills; physical and vocational therapists, and numerous others. Not surprisingly, he's even thought of creative staffing possibilities. Specifically, Jim hopes that since his land is in relatively close proximity to Fort Hays State University, Kansas State University, and the University of Kansas, perhaps students could earn credit in selected fields as a part of work-study programs or independent studies. He sees this as a potential win-win for everyone. The universities could provide their students with on-the-job training; the students would gain valuable hands-on experience in the real world; and there would be an available supply of committed individuals to staff

the programs sponsored and organized by interested groups wishing to use the facilities.

He's even thought of a creative way of keeping costs down while promoting greater understanding of, and interest in his project. Although his primary desire is to make the facilities available to groups that will provide their own staff according to their specific needs,




L-R: Erik, Jim, and Jason display some of Erik's art work.

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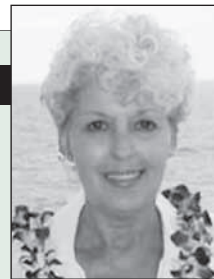
Jim Warren

they could also be made available to groups for conferences, retreats, and seminars on a fee-basis.

Jim has the patience, perseverance, and determination of a man with a mission, and he even has the MISSION STATEMENT to prove it! (See Figure 1) It represents not only his dreams, but also the goals to be met. He wants Erik and Jason to always have a secure place in the world in which to contribute and be productively involved. He sums it all up with conviction and sincerity:

“I have been self-employed since I was 17 years old—How really fortunate I am to have been given these two boys and to have this life style that has provided the freedom and the opportunity for me to customize self-employment to fit their needs. The “dessert” is that the farm holds the potential for other parents to see the results and benefits [that are possible], so that they will dare to dream and be inspired to set and accomplish similar goals for their own children who so desperately need future security.” 

*BIO*



Bonnie is the mother of two daughters, and the grandmother of three boys. She owned and operated her own business for twenty years, but recently “retired” to pursue her first love—writing. Bonnie first met Jim Warren in grade school and has remained in touch with him and his family over the years. She describes Erik and Jason as “dear to her heart”, and has recently been working with Jim to explore ways to promote their talents. She enjoys the time that she is able to spend with the young men noting that, “It’s a privilege to be a small part of their lives.” To reach Bonnie, email her at: [ozlady\\_kc@juno.com](mailto:ozlady_kc@juno.com)

**Editor’s Note:** To order one of *Erik’s Originals*, and to learn more about Jason’s *WonderPaper*, please log onto the following websites: <http://www.erikoriginals.com> <http://www.wonderpaperbyjason.com>

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