



Johnny Mora

March 23, 1971 - September 25, 2022

Our Journey with Johnny Mora, The Instructor

Instructors are teachers. Instructors teach individuals, groups, and classes of people. Some extraordinary instructors are able to inform entire professions. These instructors do not stand at the front of a classroom to teach. They are non-traditional in their instructional methods. They do not speak to us in a traditional, discernible language. We can only learn from them by watching every detail of their life. Their language, though not expressive, is loud when we are paying attention. This story is about Johnny Mora, an exceptional teacher.

At first glance, Johnny was a man with Down's Syndrome. At age 17, he was physically underdeveloped. He did not have any expressive language, toileting skills, or feeding skills. He could not dress or undress himself. He could not work or earn money. He could not write or read. He could not swallow whole food. Johnny made monotone sounds that really formed no words. He engaged in self-injurious behavior by routinely hitting his head and ears with his fists on a daily basis. As a result, Johnny developed "cauliflower ears", a deformity of the outer ears. He did not sleep throughout the night. He, essentially, needed 24-hour care. It was very easy for the rest of us to see the long list of skills that Johnny did not possess. We did not think, at first glance, that he would learn any daily living skills. He could hear, walk, and see. He

rarely smiled. He could cry.

There are many people with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) who live in a variety of community settings across America. The large majority of those people possess the skill levels to live in congregate settings or in independent settings. The overall goal is to teach people how to achieve their maximum potential. Few people with Johnny's skill level are chosen to live in group settings. People with his skill level live in large or small institutions when they are not kept in their natural family homes. They require access to staff 24 hours per day. That level of care is not easily found in a regular family home.

Our journey with this unusual man began when he was 17 years old. He was placed in foster care with George and Anita Rodriguez. The Rodriguez family became students in Johnny's classes. Eventually, many others, including myself, would join Johnny's classes. Those people included members of the clergy, medical professionals, school teachers, caseworkers, behavior specialists, dietitians, trainers, caretakers, and experienced professionals who had worked in the field of Intellectual Disabilities for decades.

Our initial training expectations were very low. We worked to improve his health, establish dietary routines, improve his sleeping hours, and decrease his self-injurious behaviors. Our goals were very basic.

Johnny's first year in the Rodriguez home was very difficult for him and George and Anita. Routines had to be strictly enforced. George and Anita forfeited any semblance of what would be considered a "normal" life. The Rodriguez kids supported their parents in every way possible. George slept on the floor next to Johnny's bed every night for one year. When Johnny woke up throughout the night, he looked down on the floor to see if George was there. Then, and only then, would Johnny be able to return to sleep. Anita managed all of the planning, record-keeping, specialized food preparation, washing, and

house cleaning. Conversations with Johnny began at his admission. Everyone who entered the Rodriguez household, no matter what your profession, engaged in conversations with Johnny. Laughter was injected into the strict routine. Unmeasurable love abounded and permeated every piece of Johnny's routine. Infinite hope and possibilities lived in Johnny's house. If you were part of the unfortunate few who only believed that Johnny could not make progress, you were banned from the house. If you did not believe in new perspectives, you were not welcomed.

As the decades passed, Johnny went to public school. He graduated from high school. He wore his class ring and his graduation cap and gown. He learned how to follow a daily routine. He learned a couple of words, notably "mama" and "water". He could express these words verbally and through sign language. He learned to fold his clothes. He ate at a few restaurants. He enjoyed rides in the car. He celebrated many holidays. He smiled and giggled. He hugged his family. He recognized non-family members. His concentration improved and he listened to music. He learned how to sleep in a regular bed throughout the night without George sleeping beside him. He was always plagued with upper respiratory problems. He eventually stopped walking. In the last years of his life, he grew taller, and he stopped hitting his head.

It is difficult to describe monumental progress in everyday language. You had to witness these changes in order to fully understand them. While no one thought that Johnny would be a candidate for independent living, we did not know that he would experience all of his original goals and more. With these unexpected changes, Johnny taught us how to be patient, how to listen with our eyes and not our ears, that anyone can persevere in a healthy environment, and that all living environments for people with special needs should be tailored and individualized. Johnny was "loved into good health". Even with limitations, life can be good and fulfilling.

Approximately five months ago, George Rodriguez died. Although Johnny was unable to provide physical assistance to George, he hugged George and he sometimes slept alongside George. One might wonder if Johnny was repaying a favor. Johnny found his way to George's bedroom as if he was looking for him. Johnny's health declined. On the day that Johnny died, he was surrounded by people who genuinely loved him. He resided in the Rodriguez household for 34 years.

Johnny Mora is preceded in death by George Rodriguez, Sr., George Rodriguez, Jr., and Adam Beltran. He is survived by Anita Rodriguez, Rachel Macias, Debbie DeLaLuz, Judy Ramirez, Nancy Aguilar, Jesse Rodriguez, Karen Rodriguez, Brandon Ramirez, and Eric Lozano.

Written with great love by Dr. Barbara P. Campbell, LPC-S, NCC

Visitation will be Thursday, October 6, 2022 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. with a Rosary to be recited at 6:00 p.m. at Mission Park Funeral Chapels South. Funeral procession will depart the funeral home at 10:00 a.m. for a Funeral Mass at 10:30 a.m. at St. Gerard Catholic Church on Friday, October 7, 2022. Interment to follow at Mission Burial Park South.

Cemetery Details

Mission Burial Park South

1700 SE Military Dr.
San Antonio, TX 78214
<http://www.missionparks.com>

Previous Events

Visitation

OCT 6. 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Mission Park Funeral Chapels South, Cemeteries & Crematories
1700 SE Military Dr
San Antonio, TX 78214
(210) 924-4242
<https://www.missionparks.com/>

Rosary

OCT 6. 6:00 PM (CT)

Mission Park Funeral Chapels South, Cemeteries & Crematories
1700 SE Military Dr
San Antonio, TX 78214
(210) 924-4242
<https://www.missionparks.com/>

Funeral Mass

OCT 7. 10:30 AM (CT)

St. Gerard Catholic Church
1523 Iowa St.
San Antonio, TX 78203

Tribute Wall



“ *Mission Park Funeral Chapels & Cemeteries created a Tribute Video in memory of Johnny Mora* ”



Mission Park Funeral Chapels & Cemetery - October 03, 2022 at 07:13 PM