

If the preschool fits: Part 4



In searching for a school for our son Frank, who has developmental delays, we found it difficult to find a warm and safe place where he can play and learn. Here is Part 4 of the four-part series on our visits for the “preschool tour.”

Read Part 1 here.

Read Part 2 here.

Read Part 3 here.

Part 4: The third time’s a charm:

I shared my frustration with some friends about our two failed attempts at finding an appropriate preschool for my developmentally delayed son, Frank. One friend, whose daughter has similar issues to Frank, recommended a program at a church located at the epicenter of where everyone who cares for Frank lives. I pass by it pretty much every day, and the mom who recommended the school said every day is Open House, so I stopped in unannounced.

The kids were being dismissed by a firm, yet friendly teacher who used visual markers to tell the kids where to stop, line up, and wait for their parents. This is the kind of safety that Frank needs. The teacher introduced me to the director, who welcomed me into her office.

I explained my predicament, trying not to burst into tears.

“It’s okay,” she said. “I know where you’re coming from. I had a disabled son who passed away.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” I said.

“It’s okay. He’s with the Lord now,” she said. “Would you like to see the school?”

The bright hallways were lined with religious art the children had made. Some of them were still in the classrooms, playing dress-up, blocks, and receiving one-on-one attention from teachers who were working with them on writing letters. I was greeted with smiles from teachers and students alike everywhere I went. I felt God’s presence everywhere I turned.

“Can I bring Frank back tomorrow?” I asked.

“Absolutely,” she said.

The next day, Frank, Leo, my parents (who were keeping the boys for the rest of the

day), and I took a tour while all of the kids were there. Frank, who is extremely shy, hugged my dad's legs at first, but within a few minutes, he was playing in the toy kitchen. The other preschoolers were interested in Frank. He even smiled at a few of them.

While I walked around the room, I found locks and alarms on the doors to the outside. There was nothing dangerous in sight. Only an abundance of toys, art supplies, and even a piano.

Frank ran into my friend's little girl, who he plays with twice a week at t-ball. They were excited to see each other. It's good to know that they will be classmates on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the fall.

I had a gradual sense that this was the right place for Frank when I first walked in the door and saw the kids waiting patiently for their parents, eager to reveal the details of their day. I ran into a few people I know, and the coincidences and connections were astonishing. When I met the woman who will be Frank's teacher, I told her that in addition to being sweet, curious, and super smart, he's developmentally delayed and a bit of a handful.

She said, "This is the perfect place for him."

And I agreed.