

# NEVER GIVE UP

## HOW ONE MAX MUSCLE MOM FOUGHT TO HEAL HER SON'S AUTISM

By Jennifer Cho Salaff • Photos by ©Jim Tetro

**W**atching a child blossom into a happy, healthy individual is every parent's dream. There is nothing more joyful or rewarding. For Kristin Wood, that dream morphed into a nightmare when her son — who seemed completely healthy and normal at birth — started drifting into another world as a result of autism.

The 44-year-old mother-of-two knew something was wrong with Logan when he was an infant. She noticed he was developmentally delayed compared to other babies his age. But it wasn't until kindergarten that his odd behavior played out in everyday social situations.

"There was a fog around his intelligence and he had a hard time connecting with other kids," says Wood, who owns Max Muscle Sports Nutrition stores in Manassas and Fairfax, Virginia. "He couldn't carry on a conversation, he didn't understand humor and he couldn't perform well in school. When I would look him in the eyes, he would just give me this glassy-eyed stare. It's like he wasn't really there."

Thus began a heart-wrenching six-year quest to find out what was wrong with Logan. Wood sought help from countless doctors, therapists, academic counselors, psychologists, social workers and physical and occupational therapists, but with very little results. Some experts even told Wood that her son "just wasn't that smart" and that his troubling behavior was all in her head.

Logan was put on brutal medications that often made him sick. Eight months of intensive antibiotic treatment left him extremely fatigued and nauseous. He was almost failing in school. The family had accumulated some \$30,000

in medical bills. And then everything hit rock bottom one day.

Logan would often fly into fits of rage spurred on by seemingly insignificant things like a slight change in routine or an adjustment to the day's schedule. "I told him we weren't going to the post office because I found a stamp, for example, and he just completely lost control," Wood remembers. "He was rabid. He would spit, throw things,

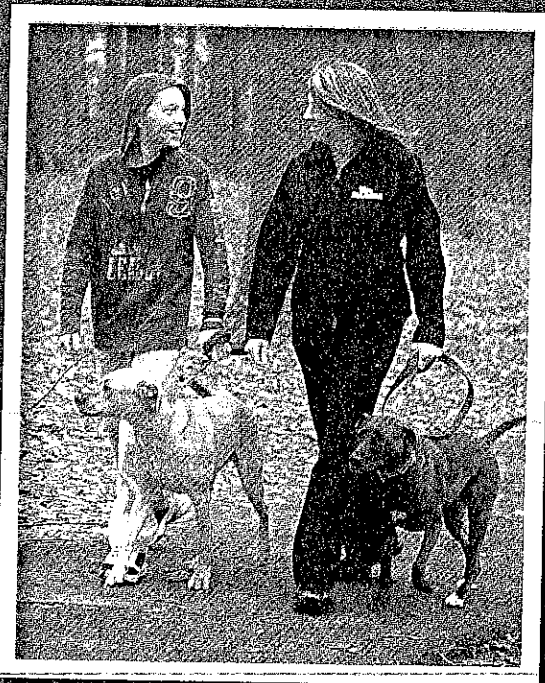
break glass, punch holes in walls and use vile language. It was like he was possessed."

Wood and her husband had to ask themselves, "Can we allow our son to live here?" When someone is that out of control, anything could be a weapon, she thought. "It's so devastating for a parent when a child has these kinds of issues," Wood says.

Then fate intervened. A social development therapist suggested 12-year-old Logan had Asperger's Syndrome, a form of high-functioning autism which experts believe affects 3 out of every 10,000 children in the United States. At first, Wood was skeptical. Then she came across a series of books written by actress Jenny McCarthy, including "Louder Than Words: A Mother's Journey in Healing

Autism." In it, McCarthy chronicles her own odyssey with finding a cure for her son's debilitating autism. She identifies alternative treatments — like a gluten-free, casein-free diet and nutritional supplements — as key factors in his recovery.

"I'm not a doctor and I know it's controversial, but I was willing to try anything," says Wood, who also has a 14-year-old son. There was also the discovery of Dr. Warren M.



Levin, a physician legendary for helping to treat autism – and he lived only a half mile away from Wood's home in Vienna, Virginia. "After years and years of searching for answers, he was here all this time," she says.

Dr. Levin diagnosed Logan with Lyme Disease (a bacterial illness which left untreated can lead to serious injury to the joints, heart and central nervous system) and Candida (an overgrowth of Candida bacteria in the digestive system can lead to symptoms including severe allergies, chemical sensitivities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder—or ADHD, according to experts). He also identified a myriad of allergies to foods and pinpointed what vitamin deficiencies Logan had in his body. Once they figured out exactly what Logan needed, Wood immediately turned to Max Muscle's nutritional supplements. "I know the quality of the products since I own Max Muscle stores," she says. "So I tried those first."

In addition to adopting a gluten-free and casein-free diet – which meant eliminating everyday foods like pastas, breads and dairy products – Logan's new regimen included taking 48 pills per day, including Max Nutraceutical supplements CoQ10, Vitamin C, Vitamin D, Vitamin E, Max One Daily Multivitamin, Enzymes, Immune Probiotic Quattro, Magnesium, Calcium and Zinc.

They began to see changes. Though small at first, they were immediate. Logan started to sleep better. His animal-like craving for carbs stopped. He didn't wet the bed anymore. Then, in just six months, those little changes became dramatic transformations. Logan's social skills took a 180-degree turn. He was able to carry on a conversation and understand humor. The once shy, isolated and angry young boy started interacting with his peers, even telling jokes and being the "funny guy" in class. He went from being a C and D student to garnering straight A's at his middle school. And the violent rages disappeared. It was nothing short of a miracle.

"It's like he's seeing the sun for the first time," Wood says. "His eyes spark with life and his grin is infectious. I feel

like he's able to live his life the way he was meant to."

But the transformation hasn't come without a price, especially for a 12-year-old kid. Logan's favorite foods, like pizza and pasta, are off limits. His new dairy-free diet also means no ice cream, yogurt or milk. "I can't eat most things kids my age are eating," Logan says. "Even though I want it, I know I'll get real sick, so I'll eat something else like meat or a taco."

Before his road to recovery, Logan was overweight, had little muscle tone and very little endurance. For a boy teetering on the edge of adolescence, this led to self-consciousness and low



self-esteem. But since June, he's been visiting the gym three times a week and works out with a personal trainer. Regular exercise coupled with a strict diet has enabled Logan to shed almost 30 pounds. He's stronger, looks leaner and feels healthier for the first time in his life. "It's a lot better when I look in the mirror," he says. "I like what I see."

Wood credits Logan's transformation to his determination and dogged perseverance. At age 12, he's an extremely informed consumer of health and fitness, she says. He knows how to care for his body, he knows how to read labels on foods, and he's the one who's incorporated all the changes in his life.

"He did this," Wood says. "He's totally accepted it. He didn't complain when he gave up his favorite foods or when the family had something he couldn't eat. He went from being afraid in the gym to being totally confident and doing a workout program appropriate for his age. I can't tell you how proud I am of all the hard work he's put into it."

Wood says she's a believer in circumstances and people intertwining for a reason. She looks back on the past six years and her purpose during those dark times. "One of my greatest purposes and mission in life was to help Logan," she says. It was also a time to rebuild her own life. She spent 18 years working as an officer in the CIA. Wood enjoyed an amazing career, one with endless opportunities that included traveling all over the world. But it was also an all-engrossing job, which left little time for her family and took a toll on her health. She recalls a 6-week span in which she was diagnosed with high cholesterol, thyroid disease and melanoma. And her mother passed away after struggling with poor health for more than a decade. "At some point, I realized I didn't want to live the life I was living," she says. "I needed to be there for my family. Especially Logan."

So Wood hired a personal trainer, who eventually became her business partner and is co-owner of their Max Muscle franchises. They opened their first store in Manassas in September of 2007. A second store opened in Fairfax this past November. "It's a feel-good business and I can be at home with my kids at the end of the day," she says.

Owning a Max Muscle store also means getting involved in her community. Every person who walks through her doors has a story. Every person is a piece of a puzzle, she says. We are all connected to one another.

"What I really want to do is help my customers achieve their health and fitness goals," Wood says. "From the teenage athlete who wants to gain lean muscle mass to the 80-something grandmother who wants something for a healthy heart. It's very rewarding and challenging work. I love it." **M&SF**