Written by Genevieve Austin
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Artie the Autistic Traveling Awareness Bear has been exploring the High Country. Artie comes from a progressive program originating in Missouri, USA. Here is what he wants to share: “I am a bear from the Traveling Awareness Bears located in Missouri USA. My website is: www.travelingawarenessbears.org. To email the Founder of this organization you may reach her at: travelingawarenessbears@gmail.com . Her name is Jennifer Rutherford. The Traveling Awareness Bears were started with Pat and Patricia Bearowitz, the pediatric stroke survivor bears, by Elijah Rutherford at the age of 7 in the summer of 2010. It was later expanded in the summer of 2011 to include all diagnoses that affect children because Pat and Patricia have made such a huge impact on Pediatric Stroke Survivors in 5 countries!

The Traveling Awareness Bears have begun their process to gain recognition as a Not for Profit Organization through the state of Missouri in October 2011. The Traveling Awareness Bears became incorporated in the state of Missouri in January 2012.

All of our bears’ stories are based on the life of a real child, probably one that will be receiving a visit from this bear. You can find more about the Traveling Awareness Bears and Elijah on our website.”

Artie the Autistic Bear is in Boone and enjoying the mountain air. Autism is a neurological disorder, complex in manifestation and exhibiting a spectrum of symptoms and challenges. From http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism the Autism Speaks website there is this information: Autism statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify around 1 in 110 American children as on the autism spectrum–a 600 percent increase in prevalence over the past two decades. Careful research shows that this increase is only partly explained by improved diagnosis and awareness. Studies also show that autism is three to four times more common among boys than girls. An estimated 1 out of 70 boys is diagnosed with autism in the United States.

While information grows, diagnoses increase. Research is ongoing. There are those who believe that Autism is an evolutionary shift in the human species to adapt to rapid change(as noted in the book, The Asperger Plus Child by George T. Lynn and Joanne Barrie Lynn). The strengths of Autism include a specialized focus in specific areas of interest. Celebrating every child’s strengths and gifts enables society to thrive as we grow more complex and diverse. Find out more about the Traveling Awareness Bears and welcome the differences among us. Artie cheers all who have the privilege of meeting him. He’s been enjoying his stay in Boone, North Carolina and moves on to Texas soon. If you see Artie, say “Hello!”