



Episode #98:

Filmmaker Tom Ropelewski Talks About His Documentaries About Twice-Exceptional Kids

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Debbie: Welcome to the TiLT Parenting Podcast, a podcast featuring interviews and conversations aimed at inspiring, informing and supporting parents raising differently wired kids. I'm your host, Debbie Reber, and today I'm excited to share with you a conversation I recently had filmmaker Tom Ropelewski.

Tom is the director of the highly acclaimed documentary *2e: Twice Exceptional*, which came out in 2015, and he's currently wrapping up post-production on a follow-up film called *2e2: Teaching the Twice Exceptional*. Tom's films center around Bridges Academy, a school for twice-exceptional kids in Studio City, CA that seems to have figured out the best way to meet the educational needs of these unique learners. In our conversation, Tom shares his story and personal why behind making these films, talks about the educational model at Bridges, describes how his films are helping to bring awareness of 2e kids' to the mainstream, and gives us a sneak peek at his new film, which along with a viewer guide, will be coming in April of this year.

And before I get to our interview, you'll hear Tom refer to my book *Differently Wired* a few times during our conversation. That's because I shared a review copy with Tom and he was kind enough to write a wonderful endorsement for the book. Well, though the book isn't out until June, I'm excited to share that as of this week, you can have access to the first chapter of my book! The chapter is called "An Unmarked Path" and it shares some of my personal story and sets up the rest of the book, which I wrote to spark a revolution in the way differently wired kids, and us as their parents and caregivers, experience everyday life. So, if you want to get a first look at my book, just visit tiltparenting.com and sign up right below the main image on the home page, and I'll send you a PDF of the first chapter, as well as the Table of Contents right away.

And now, here is my conversation with Tom. I hope you enjoy it!

Debbie: Hey Tom, welcome to the podcast.

Tom: Hi Debbie. How are you?

Debbie: I am very good and I'm looking forward to this conversation. I've been wanting to have you on the show for a while, so thanks so much for being here.

Tom: You're welcome.

Debbie: So before we get into the meat of our conversation and learning more about your films that you've made, could you tell us just a little bit about who you are, your backstory, and then your personal why in terms of how you got brought into this particular work with *2e*?

Tom: Sure. Well, my wife and I were both for many years, Hollywood screenwriters, she still is, she wrote *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and *Limitless*, and the new version of *Hairspray*, and *Overboard* which just had its anniversary and it's been celebrated, but she was, we were both comedy screenwriters and I, and I've written and directed for television and for movies, and as movies became more interested in the past decade in superheroes, I became less interested in that. So I was looking around for different ways to be creative and making films because I've always loved films. I was one of those kids, you know, as a teenager who was making films in eight millimeter with my friends in the backyard. And so I always wanted to be a filmmaker of some sort, but lately over the past 15 years or so I've been less enamored with, with the Hollywood industry and my wife and I have made enough gains that I could sort of make other kinds of film.

The first one I did was, was about my wife's family, which is kind of a strange thing to do. Why would you make something about your, your father-in-law's the star, but his parents were two American artists. One was Dorothea Lange, who was a famous American photographer in the depression and her father was a, his father, was a southwestern painter named Maynard Dixon. And during the depression when they couldn't afford a studio for him and a studio for her in a home, they got rid of the home and put the kids in foster care off and on for seven years. And the movie was about not about the, these great artists, which, that you could argue that they are particularly Dorothea Lange, who, who's one of whose photograph migrant mother is probably the most iconic in American history. But what I wanted to make a film about was the family dynamic and the choice between family and art and that film when onto winning a bunch of awards in film festivals and played on PBS.

And it was completely a personal project and I really enjoyed it and it was very satisfying to do. And uh, I had showed it at my son's school, Bridges, and that kind of led to people saying, if you're looking for a subject there's this class graduating that's filled with interesting kids, you might want to talk with them. So that got me into making the *2e* documentary. But really what got me into making this documentary was having been a parent pulling my hair out. I think with *2e* kids, it's very hard to see who they're going to be. That they're not on a trajectory that you can predict. And so every step of the way, particularly when they're younger, you just don't know what they're going to be like, not nevermind next year, but next week. And my wife and I you know, when our son was 18 months old, he was reading, you know, not he wasn't reading Harry

Potter, but he was reading words and are we thought it was great, you know, it's like a parlor trick or friends would come over and our kid would read the these things and we brought him to our pediatrician who said, just you wait, this is not necessarily going to be a fun road for any of you.

And so indeed it was not when, when our son was in a private school in Los Angeles, which talked the talked, you know, they made us read the Mel Levine book, *One Mind at a Time*. But they really didn't want our child's mind. They were, they could swing a little bit better than the public school system. But when, you know, when a kid is reading at 18 months and he would be in class in kindergarten and he'd walk to the library and said, I'll come back when you're teaching something, I don't know, which for him was a win-win. But for the teachers and administration that didn't, it didn't quite work. So, there was a certain point where, you know, they'd be calling assume for these meetings and like you say in your book, they make you feel you're doing something wrong. They make you think you're not disciplining your son, whatever it is, it's a very archaic thought process of he's not doing what we want, so must be discipline.

And maybe if you just discipline them enough, he'll listen to something boring. And so we would go into these meetings and the teachers would, he'd say, Dad, they're learning word "wall," they're learning "a," "in," "and," and the teachers would say, well, he should review it. My son would say, dad, you review a, in, and and how does, how does someone do that? And they just wouldn't give him more challenging material. On the other hand, there were other things that were challenges to him. If there were three things up on the board and the teacher said, okay, do a, b and c and you've got an hour. He would pick the one that he liked and hyper-focus. He was one of these. He was, he has ADHD, ADHD, but it's the hyper-focused time where he wasn't, you know, happen out of his chair all the time. But if he found something he liked, he didn't understand why he couldn't spend all day doing that.

And at a certain point in first grade that school said, you know, he's the brightest kid in the class, but it would be so nice if he wasn't here. You know the euphemism that they always use is maybe there's a better fit somewhere else, which I know you're familiar with because I've read a book and what we decided to do instead of, because it was of course it breaks your heart because you want your kid to fit in, you want you to be happy. And he was actually a fairly happy guy. I mean, as long as he was allowed to do what he wanted to you know, he could, he could swing with them. Some teachers loved him and some teachers were infuriated by him, but instead of finding another school, we moved to Rome for a year and that really was the eye opening experience where we were both working screenwriters, Hollywood screenwriters.

We both had assignments and we said, well, we could write these in Hollywood or we could write these, looking at the, at the Pantheon. And so we moved to Rome for a year and put them in an international, an English speaking international school. And it was so eye opening because he had a wonderful second grade teacher and Italian teacher, very theatrical, very nurturing, who had kids from all over the world who spoke all different languages whose

mastery of English was at varying degrees and she had to be able to swing with different minds and he loved her and he loved the school and he loved Rome. And we walked down the street and you'd say, dad, we haven't been in that church. So let's see. What's in there? He had, the whole experience was educational and he thrived on it and we realized, okay, it's not us. He loves to learn. He's just sometimes hard to teach, particularly if it's something he knows or something he's not interested in. So when you went back to school, I went back to Los Angeles after a year in Rome, we found a school that kind of worked for him but it didn't have a middle school. And then for the middle school we found Bridges Academy, which completely changed our lives.

Debbie: Yeah. So much synchronicity and our stories there and including the moving abroad and having that kind of shake everything up in the best possible way. So lots of questions for you. I guess maybe even since you've mentioned Bridges Academy a couple times, could you just tell us briefly about the school? I know that your, your son attended that, I think through graduation, just for parents who are listening, who aren't familiar with Bridges,

Tom: Bridges academy is a school in Studio City, California that exclusively handles twice exceptional kids. They're dedicated to understanding them and learning what works for them in an educational environment. When my son was there, the school went from sixth grade. He went there in seventh grade but it went from sixth grade through high school and now it's down to fourth grade through high school. When he was there there was about a hundred and 18 students. Now there's closing in on 200 students. Uh, and now he's 20. He's about to be 22. So he said we were talking over the course of nine or 10 years and it's sort of a petri dish of trying different things that will work for these kids. One of the things that I think as in variably effective, a small class size and there were classes range anywhere from five to 12 kids and there'd be two teachers in the room.

The teachers are, the class sizes are getting a bit bigger because I think they've learned different ways to individualize and differentiate their curriculum for kids, but they were trying things that were great. For example, instead of seven classes a day in the middle school, they had four, instead of a five minute break between classes, they had a 12 minute break between classes and a 45 minute lunch break. So they really, cause a lot of these kids have trouble transitioning from one class to another and that 12 minutes really kind of, you know, let them decompress. They got into the yard, they could play with their friends, they could just transition into the next, into the next class. Also the class lengths, we're about 65 minutes long as opposed to 48 or 50 minutes. In most cases, it was built into the, into the daily schedule time for the kids to do their homework with the teacher present.

Now my son was a whiz in biology and he actually tested out of AP biology and went into 11th grade into AP genetics. But in other subjects like math, he was having a real struggle. It just wasn't getting through to him. So he would have extra time on tests. The teacher would be there to help him with his homework so that I at home didn't have to be frustrated with him being frustrated trying to

figure out the kind of advanced math that I realized I'd never needed to use anyway. So they were learning to do different things that I think we're very effective and continue to do so

Debbie: That's fantastic. I mean, you know, my son's twice exceptional, Bridges has been on my radar as, as has been the Lang's School and you know, some other schools. There are so few. And you know, I've had a couple of experts on the podcast including Dr. Michael Postma who is executive director of SENG we just had a great conversation about 2e kids and then a doctor, Devon MacEachron who specializes in diagnosing these kids. And it's something that's come up in both those conversations is how tricky it can be to get that school fit because really that individualized approach is what's most successful because they're so unique. You know, their, their needs are so unique. But it seems like Bridges is really doing things right over there.

Tom: Well, like, the Lang School and Quad Prep in New York there's a school in Minnesota that started earlier. They all started with a committed parent, actually Bridges started in the know in the mid-nineties as an after school tutorial program for high school kids that were gifted, but we're failing high school. And then some of the parents said this needs to be the school and it was in the early part of the century. It was in a two room dentist's office. They rented a two room dentist's office with about 15 kids and so, you know, in 2000, in whatever, 2003, I guess they moved to a former Catholic girls school in Studio City that was owned by a Japanese Osaka University. And, and they were using part of the space as an, an immersion program for their Japanese students. So they had plenty of classrooms. It was an old high school. So they had plenty of classroom size for the or classes available, classrooms available for, for Bridges to rent some of the space. And over the past five years we've bought the building, we bought the property and the school is expanding from that. But I think a lot of these newer schools have, for, at least over the past few years, are now looking to Bridges as the thought leader, as the, as the elder school that's, that's done. I mean, not that people aren't learning all the time how to best educate 2e students. But recently, early on was it I guess it was in October for just sponsored a symposium in which they honored the seven pioneers in the field of education. And we had about a hundred and twenty people from all over the world from Japan, from Australia, from Belgium, from all over.

And it was interesting. I showed some clips from the new movie and I asked had anyone seen the first movie and I would say of that 120, 115 had seen the movie. So one of the things the movie is doing is getting people on the same page and looking to Bridges for some answers.

And it was one of the reasons that I made it. I really made it for parents like myself, who I'm just, wow, everything was fraught with anxiety. You just didn't know whether your kid was going to graduate high school, whether it was gonna have problems transitioning through middle school. And so the reason the film came about is after making my first documentary, suddenly administrators at the school said, well, the class of 2011 was about to graduate

with a school, was a class that started at the dentist office building and they've sort of seen big changes at the school and they're also interesting bunch of kids.

And so I met with them and they became, their stories became the spine of the first movie. So it is about Bridges, but it's more about these kids and their parents and, and trying to find a way to fit into their, into the world. And the fact that they were graduating, they were all about to graduate. They had a story to tell. They'd hit a certain milestone, and there was certain relief in there, in the voices of their parents and a certain excitement in their voices that they had found what they're good at. They of course understood what they weren't good at—everyone had told them what they weren't good at—but most of them had something that they were good at and we're excited to go off into the world and test it.

Debbie: I'm curious to know what the, from your perspective as the director and creator of the film, you know, what kind of impact you have noticed that it's had. I mean you said that you've made it for parents. I know that it's done very well on the festival circuit and it's got a lot of attention. It seems to be under a lot of people's radars and hopefully has just introduced the term twice exceptional into our lexicon because it seems to be a concept that so many people are not familiar with. But from your perspective, what has been the impact of the film in the world?

Tom: Well, that was the other thing that I really wanted to do is to get everyone understanding the, the, the definition which believe me, no psychologist said, only determined a universal or at least a universally accepted definition of 2e, a couple of years ago. I mean, this is, if people weren't sure what, what this was, you know, and so to get everyone at least talking on the same page and part of the same conversation was also one of the goals and also to make, to have parents who were all over this country and all over the world, just feeling alone, feeling isolated, feeling like, am I the only one with a kid like this? And I think one of the biggest things that the film that I'm happiest about the film is that it makes people feel that they're not alone. That there's people out there like them and people out there working to figure, to figure this out.

Debbie: Yeah. Well, I'm wondering, do you get feedback from parents and viewers and, you know, just what kind of information are you hearing from people who've been moved or touched by the film?

Tom: Well, it's interesting. So, I was, I was showing it to film festivals but, and it was strangely winning film festivals because I thought it was sort of a, really inside baseball kind of movie, like only people who had a dog in the hunt who really kind of had a 2e kid or were 2e people or were the parents or themselves would be interested. But I, you know, I used the craft that I have a Hollywood filmmaker. I wanted to have it not be just quote unquote educational. I wanted it to feel like a journey, like an emotional journey. You're on an emotional journey with these kids and you know, it's funny, I was showing it to a film class at one point and there's a lot of laughs in the film. People, you know, intentional laughs. It's not laughing at the kids.

These kids were truly witty and funny and sharp and self aware and in a filmmaking class, one of the students said, why is this film so funny? Is it something you're doing or is it something or is it just the subject matter? And Ninety five percent of the humor comes from these kids. They were just very funny, sharp kids, but on the other hand, as a filmmaker, I knew when to cut for the laugh. I knew when to edit it in such a way that it lead you to the right to the emotional feeling that I, that I was hoping that you'd have. So it is a, I think one of the reasons that it was winning film festivals is that people didn't quite know what to expect and they got a movie experience as well as a deeply educational experience.

The other thing is it's been playing it a lot of educational conferences. And one of the first places to played was the North Carolina Association of Gifted and Talented, a yearly symposium a couple years ago. And that was about 300 educators or so, and at the end is a, it was three days, at the end of the three days a woman got up to the podium who was the head of the gifted program for all the high schools in North Carolina. And she announced she was, she was about to set up a task force to focusing completely on understanding 2e for North Carolina and she bought a 150 copies of the movie to give to every school in her district. So that's the kind of impact that it's having. It's getting people to talking about this stuff. But mainly I think it's getting people to not feel, feel so alone.

Debbie: Yeah, I mean for me that, that was my experience and I mean that's one of the reasons why I started TiLT in the first place too, is because I think so many of us raising these differently wired kids and there are a lot of parents with 2e kids in this community. It is such an isolating experience. And so yeah, I really appreciate that intention behind the film. So well, a couple of things, first I want to hear about your new film, the 2e 2 film, which my understanding is that it's more about teaching twice exceptional kids. So can you tell us a little bit about that film, which I think is coming out this Spring?

Tom: Yes. You ask about what the feedback I was getting from the film and I was, I was traveling with the film mainly to gather intel to see what various audiences were perceiving, what they had questions about, what they wanted to know more about, if anything was unclear and the general questions I would get from teachers, were what actually does happen in the classroom because even though there's a little of that in the first movie, it's not, it's not so much about that. Like what do teachers, how do these teachers at Bridges actually engage twice exceptional students? And after about a year of, of these screenings, I went back to the headmaster of the school Carl Sabatino under whose guidance this is all happening and he's a brilliant guy. And I said, I think there's, there might be another film that we could make focusing more on the teachers and more about the theme of what are the other thing that's happening at Bridges Academy is strength based education is to help us find and nurture his strengths or talent, helping them identify and understand his challenge, but don't define him by his challenge.

And I think a lot of the mainstream American school system defines the kids by what they can't do and who wants to be defined by what you can't do. Nobody does. But that's the way it's been set up to fund extra school programs for kids that are in to have challenges. These kids have extraordinary strengths and you can't ignore that. And as matter of fact, if you had to ignore one side or the other, probably better to ignore the, the deficit and focus on the, on the strength because that's what they're going to do with their lives in most cases. You know, some of these kids that only, you know, build Legos and then they build something else. And then they build robots, those kids are probably going to be engineers, probably not going to be a French major, so you know, if you're going to err on one side and you shouldn't here on either side, so you should really focus on the challenges and the strengths, but focusing on the strengths is so important in primary.

Debbie: Yeah. We had Dr. Gail Saltz on the show and that was one of my big takeaway. She's the author with a book *The Power of Different* and she threw out the idea of an 80-20 ratio spending eighty percent of your time working in a kids area of strength because of exactly what you said, you know, that is where, where their passions are and that's going to be their career ultimately. And then 20 percent of the time, you know, working on those areas of weakness or their deficits.

Tom: One of the things that Bridges is doing for the high school students now is they gave, initiated. I think it's, this is probably the third year of it, maybe the second or third year. It's called the badge program. And actually a lot of a successful corporations do this for their, for their employees to, which is part of the school day, and it becomes more of the school day as they become go from, I think it starts in sophomore year and go to seniors, is they can design their own curriculum for, you know, an hour a day to pursue something that they're really interested in that the school may not have a course in. And, you know, in most cases it's something that's interdisciplinary. There was a kid who was interested in, in rocketry. And so he talked to people at JPL about rocketry and built his own little rockets there.

Tom: There is, there were kids making video games, there were kids, there was a kid who loved making music and was obsessed with, you know, just he would spend hours and hours on a single track, who, what the teachers helped him make an album. And the point was not to just make the music but then see, then see if he could market it. If he could do something with it, if he could, if he could sell, a track, you know, get people interested in it and it commercially. I mean this is all the, the notion is to have a student pursue something he's really interested in or something of that he is a real strength in that may or may not be covered in the regular school day and to use that to, in a sense of leverage some of his challenges and the move into areas out of his comfort zone and it's been a very successful program so far in the new movie has a section of the movie is about that.

Debbie: Yeah, it's a, you know, as I'm listening to you say that I'm, I homeschool my child and that's kind of how I do everything, you know. But it's, it's really cool to hear

how it can be done in this school because yeah, when you're working in their area of interest, so much learning about, I mean you can really weave any topic, any subject into their area of interest if you're creative.

Tom: And of course they have to justify it. It can't be. I want to read comic books all day. Or like, I wanna, I want to, you know, create the biggest Pokemon Poke Decks that exists, you have to be able to justify what you want to do and you have either one or two teacher mentors and you might have an mentor outside of the school. If you're writing a novel, you may want to try to get someone involved. If you want to write a television pilot, you might want to get, you know, in the school is reaching out to mentors in different areas that kids may want to pick the brains of. And the other thing is it's doing is we know what these kids anyway, it's erasing the difference between school time and after school time because if it's something that you're interested in, you're probably doing it after school for fun anyway. So a lot of the projects that they're doing or some of them are quite complex. They bleed from the school day into the after school day and at the end of which still end up with an artifact or something that not only could, will, look good on their college resumes, but could be helpful in applying for a job.

Debbie: Yeah, absolutely. I'm also just so excited about the potential for this sequel film because exactly what you said. I mean, I think in general teachers, you know, in the traditional educational model - they want to support these kids, but they just don't have the information or the tools or just the understanding, you know, to even recognize necessarily a 2e kid, but then how to support them. So it's really exciting to see people like you doing this work that's gonna help the many, many, many kids who can, you know, for whatever reason can't afford it or they don't have access to geographically or whatever to schools that would cater to their specific differences.

Tom: There's an old *Peanuts* cartoon, and it's Charlie Brown and Linus talking and Linus says, my teacher says, teaching is like bowling. The best you can hope for as you roll the ball down the middle. And you hit as many pins as you can and Charlie Brown looks at and says she must be a terrible bowler. Because that is the mainstream school system. It's often not the, not the fault of the teachers that every teacher I meet, they want to do the best for all their kids. They don't want to just hit most of them ignore and ignore the rest. And one of the things that's happening at Bridges is it the things that we're learning through strength based education not only apply to 2e kids, the apply to every student, every single kid could benefit from this. Who doesn't want to talk with a focus on your strengths? Who doesn't want to be supportive for your challenge but not defined by your challenge?

Debbie: Absolutely. I mean I feel that way about so much of what we cover here in TiLT. I had Dr. Ross Greene on the podcast recently who wrote many books including *The Explosive Child*, but his recent book *Raising Human Beings*. It's like, this is really good for all kids and I think that's so true for everything that we're doing with our kids. So it would benefit everybody.

So we're going to be playing an excerpt from the upcoming film and I love if you could just, tell us a little bit about it. We'll be playing the 'how brains work expert' that you shared with me. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Tom: I knew the general theme of this movie would be strength based education and kind of on the same wavelength of you. I approached it from everyone is wired differently. Everyone, every single person is, is, you know, there's some people that can play in the mainstream easier than some of the others, but everyone is wired slightly differently. So the first question I asked students as I interviewed them was how does your brain work? And I got some very interesting answers.

How does your brain work?

Well, I think of my brain is a living organism in my head. I know some animals have an inner stomachs or legs that's pretty frequent for us, but I like to think of it metaphorically and psychologically as this sort of thought train and an oil drill, but it's sort of drilling out facts and information that's like a whole world.

My brain runs at a gazillion miles an hour thinking of every possible way that something can work and every possible way that something can go horribly wrong. I've always kind of been curious as to why the brain does what it does, why I get stressed a lot. Why does this happen? Does this happen a lot to normal people? Does this happen to people with asperger's or who are on the autism spectrum? A lot of people always tell me that I'm really, really smart. I mean, like I said for awhile, but I was wondering maybe I always so stupid that I thought I was smart, but apparently I'm not.

Debbie: Yeah, I love that. And I'm really excited about the new film. And do you have information about when it's coming out? Do you have a release date yet?

Tom: I don't know. The thing is we, we're a little behind, my composer had had a family emergency and so he, he's doing the score and a so we're a little, we're several weeks behind, but I think we'll have it, you know, everything will be completed by probably sometime in March and if you're interested you can check out the website 2emovie dot com where you can, where the initially the first film was available and this and the second film, there'll be information about when that's going to be able to be available. You could also there you can sign up for my mailing list which will let you know whenever anything is available and also you'll get little clips and little sneak peaks from the, from the new movie and from other things that I, that I'm shooting over the course of any given year.

Debbie: Well yeah, the website is fantastic and I was watching a bunch of clips in preparation for this conversation and I loved the student updates and like just as again, as a parent of a 2e kid and as you said in the beginning of this conversation, it's really hard to know what this is going to look like down the road because it is such a fluid situation.

Tom: Well, one of the students in the first film had such anxiety, very bright kid, such anxiety. He couldn't sleep at night. His mother when he was three, four, five, six, seven would drive him around in the car at night and he put his feet up on the dashboard and feel the base of the radio and that calmed him down. And as he got older, he got interested in music. He picked up the bass, was a prodigy. A terrific bass player and I'm now last summer, his band opened for John Fogerty at the Hollywood bowl. So, I mean, these kids sometimes they drive in the direction that they're going. And, he's certainly a success story.

There was another girl named Sydney who would do nothing when she was in the early years of middle school, but draw. She just loved to draw. She didn't like to write. She didn't like to do anything. So for a while in the middle school, like if she in chemistry or biology, they would let her do comic strips to illustrate what she knew. Who cares if you're writing an essay or you do comic strips as long as you, you've shown that you're proficient in the, in the material. She graduated from high school. She went to Cal Arts. She immediately after that, got a job on the muppets television show from a couple of years ago, but then that got canceled. But she's pursuing art a commercially now. I'm not exactly, I haven't been in touch with you for a few months, so I'm not sure exactly what she's doing, but it's going to be in the field of art and she now is a good writer, but they, it was because they didn't force writing down her throat at an early age. They let her come at it from her own strength, and then kind of eased her into writing when she needed to write.

Debbie: Yeah. I loved watching that video about her story in particular. That's really exciting and cool and inspiring for me certainly. And I'm, I'm sure it's inspiring for our listeners to hear too. Before we go, you and I before the conversation were talking about your son who is in going to university across the country. So how, how's that all working out?

Tom: Well, here's the interesting thing. He was a kid who always loved biology, always loved animals, memorized every animal. Could tell you one of those. I don't know if he has a photographic memory, but darn close. And he just loved life sciences. And that was his strength. Like I said, he tested out of honors biology and he took genetics instead in 11th grade. He was convinced he was going to go to, he wanted to pursue the life sciences around 11th grade. And I find that this is often, this sometimes happens with twice exceptional students, is he's a big thinker and he's a deep thinker and a far reaching thinker, but he was also in some ways more mature intellectually, more mature physically and emotionally, less mature than most kids his age, not necessarily than most 2e kids, but then the, the, the norm. And as he hit 11th grade, he really began to, to get in, go into a deep funk because he saw the SATs were coming and the SATs meant going into college that meant leaving home. He wasn't sure he wanted to leave home and he just, his grades started to tank and 11th grade he just was morose. He usually was excited to go to school, particularly at Bridges. And I was just feeling a funk. And he said, dad, I don't want to take the SATs. I want to take a gap here. I don't, I, I just want to focus on my academics., You know, graduate from high school, strong and then deal with college and deal with this

stuff. And of course, as a parent, you wonder if, if, if a, if a student steps off that conveyor belt, whether they'll ever get on again. But indeed, it's a conveyor belt and it's going not necessarily going anywhere. So I knew he knew himself well enough that my wife and I trusted him.

Tom: And so he didn't take the SATs is in 11th grade. He didn't take the sats and twelfth grade he graduated from, from Bridges. He then took that next week, at that point, decided that we were, my wife is from the Bay Area, so we, uh, spent a lot of time in Los Angeles and I'd always loved San Francisco. So we moved to San Francisco after he had graduated from Bridges and he got a job, uh, at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, which is, I think the foremost marine mammal hospital in, in the world or close to it. And he got a job as the only intern in the lab. And he was analyzing the blood of Dead Sea lions and there they were trying to figure out why they were having aneurisms and he was working with the CDC. So he said, okay, this is what I, this is, I really want to stay in the life sciences.

So that year he took his SATs, that was the year that we went and visited colleges, but because he knew he wanted to be in biology, he, you know, w we were mainly staying on the coasts. We looked at some schools in the northeast, we looked at the school Eckerd in Florida, which he really had a, he liked, he'd never been to Florida. The campus is like a Club Med spa. It was terrific and he just, you know, I think most of us go to college because they have an emotional feeling when you get there. It's like this place is for me. I had that and he said I wanted to go to Eckerd, which was, he was a kid that if you sent him to summer camp, you'd get a call four hours later. He hates it here, come get him. He's traveled around the world with us, but he never really liked to be, he doesn't like loud noises. He doesn't like kids screaming camp songs. He doesn't like any of that stuff. And it was never successful.

So we were a little concerned that, you know, 3000 miles away. It was a long way, but having had that the gap year, it gave him some time to be sick of us. It gave them some time to be a to say, gee, you know, maybe I, maybe I can do this. It's not like a light switch went off. Like there was a point at which he was concerned about moving away. He was anxious about it and then he couldn't wait to do it. And that was the thing I was most concerned about when he went away was, is he going to hate the distance? And that's the thing that worked perfectly. So anyway, for the first year he was a biology major, but because of math, chemistry has always been his, his Kryptonite.

He just, he has a hard time with chemistry and he was struggling in, in biology to some degree, but he was sticking with it. And last year with the American elections, he became obsessed with it and he began to come up with algorithms and he came up with a system where he predicted 49 of the 50 democratic primaries. And about a month before the general election, he called me, he said, Dad, Trump is gonna win and here's why. And he predicted what he called the rust belt blow out, which is the Minnesota, Wisconsin. These states going for Trump. They didn't normally been blue states and he was doing middling in biology. And in certain point his, uh, his advisor said, are you sure you don't

want to be a poli sci major? And so now he's a pol- sci major. He just decided this was his area of passionate right now. And as far as I'm concerned, whatever makes him happy, whatever he's interested in, he's a very interesting kid. And whatever he's going to do I think is going to be pretty extraordinary. And I can't predict what it's going to be.

Debbie: Well, thank you for sharing that story. It's again, I just love hearing all this and what it could look like and I also just appreciate your attitude, you know, it is really about supporting our kids and finding their own joy, you know, what's going to fulfill them and it's really cool to hear. So thank you.

Well listen, I'm gonna let you go. I'm super excited to be bringing this conversation with our listeners and for this next film to come out. So listeners, I will be including all the links that we talked about including the link to the Zemovie dot com website. So you can just see some trailers and get a sneak peek of what's coming. So check out the show notes page and Tom, good luck with the movie release. And thank you again for stopping by and sharing with us today.

Tom: And thank you, Debbie

Debbie: You've been listening to the TiLT Parenting Podcast. For the show notes for this episode, including links to Tom's website, his films about twice-exceptional kids and the other resources we discussed, visit tiltparenting.com/session98.

And a quick shout out to Hannah Ross, a new supporter of the TiLT Parenting Podcast...thank you so much for helping out! And if you like what you heard and want to join Hannah in helping me cover the costs of producing this weekly podcast as well as making transcripts available, please consider supporting my Patreon campaign. Patreon is an online platform that allows people to make a small monthly contribution - as little as 2 dollars a month -- to support the work of an artist or musician or in my case, a podcaster. It's super easy to sign up... Just visit patreon.com/tiltparenting -- that's PATREON.com/tiltparenting, or you can find a link on the TILT parenting website.

Lastly, this my weekly pitch to head over to iTunes and leave a rating or a review or BOTH if you haven't done so already. There are a LOT of parenting podcasts out there and ratings and reviews help keep our podcast highly visible which in turn makes it easier for me to land bigger guests. Thank you so much.

Thanks again for listening. For more information on TiLT Parenting visit www.tiltparenting.com.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- [2e: Twice Exceptional website](#)
- [Bridges Academy](#)
- [*Differently Wired: Raising an Exceptional Child in a Conventional World*](#)
by Deborah Reber
- [*One Mind at a Time: America's Top Learning Expert Shows How Every Child Can Succeed*](#) by Mel Levine M.D.
- [The Lang School](#)
- [Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted \(SENG\)](#)
- [Quad Prep School](#)
- [Dr. Postma of SENG on the Plight of Gifted and 2e Kids](#) (podcast)
- [Dr. Devon MacEachron on Supporting 2e Learners](#) (podcast)
- [Dr. Gai Saltz Talks About the Power of Different](#) (podcast episode)
- [*The Power of Different: The Link Between Disorder and Genius*](#) by Dr. Gail Saltz
- [*Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child*](#) by Dr. Ross Greene
- [Dr. Ross Greene Talks About Collaborative and Proactive Solutions](#) (podcast)

