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Autobiography & Memoir

Autism All-Stars: How We Use Our Autism and Asperger Traits to Shine in Life
978-1-84310-188-8
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For any newly-diagnosed autistic person, the silver lining is in your hands. Accentuating the positive aspects of the traits experienced by various individuals, *Autism All-Stars* emerges as one of few books for readers of all ages to examine the benefits of being neurologically "atypical." Editor Josie Santomauro created the book she sought years ago when her son, Damian, was diagnosed—and in Damian's own contribution, he describes the way that his childhood fascination with the behavior of others (a coping mechanism for his sense of being "abnormal") developed into a career in psychology. In a straightforward and uncensored way, the contributors relate deeply personal experiences in detail, inviting readers to see parts of themselves in the story.

Hailing predominantly from the UK and Australia, the writers vary greatly: some were diagnosed with autism or Asperger's syndrome early in life, while others reached retirement only to discover that this label might fit; some, like well-known author Temple Grandin, offer direct advice about workplace etiquette ("I had to learn diplomacy"); other individuals write about putting traits to work in useful, satisfying pursuits. Central to the book is the assertion that being true to oneself, by self-investigation and self-evaluation, is the key to success. "Now, if only we could persuade the rest of the world … to engage in some self-understanding," writes music composer Dr. Colin Webber, "we just might get somewhere!"

Chapters with themes such as education, careers, relationships, creativity, and special interests allow the reader to enter the text at will, either to find evidence of successes or guidance to make the most of one's strengths. It's helpful to have contrasting voices within each section, as attitudes toward social expectations or the opinions of others vary widely. Some writers explain their talents as coping-mechanisms-gone-professional (and "of course, if you are a musician … people "allow" you to be a bit different and eccentric"), while others simply point out how emphasizing individual skills has helped them to carve out an enjoyable life.

The book is an excellent resource for parents, librarians, teachers, guidance counselors, and anyone else who would like to hear more from real people who have lived under the autism

umbrella. Santomauro's chapter introductions might have benefited from a co-author, as the intercutting of a non-Aspie voice with the others has a slight distancing effect. Overall, *Autism All-Stars* is an accessible, encouraging, and well-rounded book.

Patty Comeau