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Awakening Ashley: Mozart Knocks Autism on Its Ear

Sharon Ruben
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“I can remember the frustration of not being able to talk. I knew what I wanted to say, but I could not get the words out, so I would just scream.”-Temple Grandin

Dr. Temple Grandin, a PHD in animal science and named in *TIME Magazine*‘s 2010 list of the100 most influential people in the world was diagnosed as being autistic as a toddler. Experts at the time of her diagnoses suggested that she be institutionalized. Her mother refused their advice and pursued other avenues of education, including creating her own school. Grandin is a world famous spokesperson for people with autism and a role model to legions of people with and without developmental disabilities. Sharon Ruben, author and mother of an autistic daughter named Ashley, attended a Grandin conference in 2002 to seek answers about her daughter’s disability. She writes, “Having been told by specialists that one day Ashley may be a “Temple Grandin” fueled me to learn all I could about what Ashley could become through this famous person—Ashley already had visual gifts….I read she [Grandin] thinks in terms of pictures, a video recorder constantly playing in her mind. She struggled with socializing and reading people’s emotions and lacked understanding of human relationships.”

Like any parent who receives such detrimental news about the health and welfare of their child, the author had to go through a kind of grief process that included stages of denial and anger. Luckily, an “acceptance” that Ashley’s disability was irreversible was not part of that process. Instead, she approached autism as a problem with a solution. She researched online and read hundreds of books on neurology, autism and other developmental disabilities. She had consultations with a variety of doctors and specialists and sought out alternate forms of treatments, like testing Ashley for food allergies and exploring a gluten and casein free diet. More importantly, she found the Tomatis Method, a treatment that retrains the ear muscles to listen better and increase the brain’s comprehension of its surroundings by exposing the patient to high frequency music such as Mozart. After the first “loop” of Tomatis, Ashley began showing signs of vast improvement and miraculous results. Ruben writes, “…Ashley had more energy…she now sang songs instead of merely humming them. Her social play was blossoming…she had more awareness of her surroundings…she was interacting with all of us so much more and was really awakening and coming alive!”

Awakening Ashley is a life-changing book not only for parents with children with disabilities but also an inspiration for all parents. The author’s writing is easily accessible and informative. She gives the reader the full account of her ordeal. Not holding anything back, she isn’t afraid to show the reader her own faults, vulnerabilities and fears which all parents experience but are afraid to admit. Within this gem of hope, Ruben includes an appendix of the books, specialists, and websites which assisted her during a very humane journey of heartache, perseverance, celebration, and triumph of awakening her daughter to a fulfilling life.

LEE GOODEN (June 23, 2011)

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