ForeWord Reviews

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Front of the Class: How Tourette Syndrome Made Me the Teacher I Never Had
Brad Cohen
Lisa Wysocky
VanderWyk and Burnham
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"I can't see you as a teacher," one blunt administrator told the author. Cohen encountered that attitude many times in the summer after college graduation. In spite of sterling recommendations from student teaching assignments, he was turned down by virtually every elementary school in the Greater Atlanta area.

Cohen has Tourette syndrome (TS), a disorder whose outward signs include compulsive throat-clearing and knee knocking, violent muscle twitches, and a piercing bark. School was already in session before a principal decided to take a chance by hiring him as a teacher.

In the 1980s, when Cohen, then a preteen, was diagnosed, TS was virtually unheard of outside the medical profession. Information was hard to come by, and a grim future seemed to be forecast for a young boy in the grip of this incurable syndrome.

From the first, Cohen was determined to live a normal life. He maintained a positive outlook, making it a point to educate others about the reason for his unconventional behavior. He addressed staff and other children at summer camp, then teachers and classmates, turning ridicule and contempt to admiration.

Eventually, he participated in an episode of the *Sally Jesse Raphael Show*, which he credits with pioneering public awareness of TS. (Ironically, Cohen was taken off the discussion panel when the show's producers decided his verbal tics were too distracting.)

As his advocacy grew, Cohen met a number of successful people with TS—including former professional baseball player Jim Eisenreich, who provided an introduction to this book. These people encouraged Cohen to pursue his lifelong dreams. He is now an award-winning teacher, motivational speaker, founder of an overnight Adventure Camp for children with TS, active in the American Cancer Society's "Relay for Life" program, and has received numerous awards for his leadership and community service.

Though this book (written with the help of author and motivational speaker Lisa Wysocky) is presented as autobiography, it's augmented with testimonials from family and

friends attesting to the inspiration they drew from Cohen's determination. The book's tone is upbeat and accessible; while it doesn't downplay the trials of life with TS, the emphasis is always on the positive.

Cohen includes an appendix called "Thoughts on Living With Tourette Syndrome and Other Disabilities," which should make this book invaluable to children and adults facing all kinds of physical or emotional challenges.

"The beauty of Brad's story," Eisenreich observes, "is that it is a story for every underdog, for everyone who has ever stumbled in life, for anyone who thinks life had dealt them a little more than they can handle." This story of how a child with severe obstacles to learning triumphed as Georgia's First Class Teacher of the Year is a testimony to the indestructibility of the human spirit.