

Kicking ASSpergers: One Melt Down at a Time

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FriesenPress

(146pp)

978-1-03-912891-0

Kicking ASSpergers is an encouraging memoir by an autistic man who decided not to let the diagnosis control his life.

Jeremy Tolmie's illuminating memoir *Kicking ASSpergers* documents his experiences with autism to offer perspective on the challenges and stigma associated with the diagnosis.

There were early signs of Tolmie's autism: he had difficulty adhering to structures in kindergarten, for example, suggesting that he was a bit different. He was not officially diagnosed until twelfth grade, though, at a time when little was known about the disorder. In the years that followed, he moved in and out of the medical system and struggled to find stability in school and at work. Through a home-share opportunity, he began to experience some breakthroughs in handling his condition.

With candid descriptions of Tolmie's emotions—he recalls feeling resentful when he was placed in a special education class, and lonely around other children—this is an intimate and compelling book that highlights the struggles of people with ASD. But it also includes evidence of joy: Tolmie remembers buying his parents dinner for the first time while he was living in the home-share arrangement; he is loving in describing time spent with his grandmother. Tolmie celebrates those who helped him, too, with special emphasis on his parents, who stood up for him to teachers and who helped him seek medical help. Thus, the book achieves a strong balance between its poignant scenes and its cheerful ones.

The work is immersive throughout due to its brevity and straightforward approach: it focuses on standout events and experiences most. It is helpful in naming Tolmie's early ASD symptoms, as well as the different treatment options that he was presented with. Reflective in tone, the book also meditates on the long-term impacts of events on individuals with ASD. Early bullying is shown to have impacted Tolmie far past its occurrence; he attributes his withdrawal and anxiety to such hurdles. A disappointing sense of the medical system is also conveyed; Tolmie learned to question the system's ability to help him. Still, the book works toward uplifting messages about living with autism, despite the related challenges and frustrations. It gives advice for managing and overcoming negative thinking, and for not letting an autism diagnosis consume one's life.

Written with the earnest wish that all who struggle with ASD will find their own sources of hope, *Kicking ASSpergers* is an encouraging memoir by an autistic man who decided not to let the diagnosis control his life.

EDITH WAIRIMU (March 1, 2022)

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