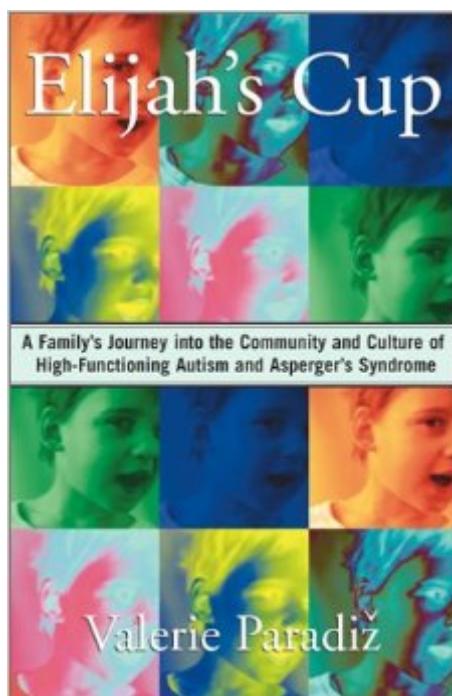


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Elijah's Cup: A Family's Journey Into The Community And Culture Of High-Functioning Autism And Asperger's Syndrome



Synopsis

Faced with her two-year-old toddler's precipitous bout with epilepsy and his puzzling behaviors, Valerie Paradiz took a bold and unusual path, coming to terms with and ultimately embracing the strange beauty of her son Elijah's special neurological disorder, which was diagnosed as Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. In "Elijah's Cup," Paradiz tells the powerful story of her family's struggle with her son's disease, one characterized by social awkwardness, literal-mindedness, and a fixation with particular subjects and interests. Like attention deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexia, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, Asperger's has exploded in diagnosis in the last decade, reconfiguring the known incidence of autism in the population with estimates as high as one in fifty people. Ever since autism was "discovered" by researchers in the 1940s, the disability has been under the strict purview of professionals in medicine, psychiatry, and education. Like the deaf community, autistics themselves have had little voice in expressing their real experience and needs. They were framed as too "sick" to be conscious of their own internal lives, too "mentally ill" to possess an identity. All this has changed. Today there is a blossoming movement of autistic self-advocacy groups and alliances that pose challenging questions to the medical status quo. A fascinating, independent expression of another way of life, full of quirkiness, hardship, and humor, has emerged. "Elijah's Cup" is a provocative and pioneering book that pushes the envelope of what we know about autism. Were Andy Warhol, Albert Einstein, and the comedian Andy Kaufman, whom we usually think of as brilliant eccentrics, autistic? Can these figures serve as role models to this community? "Elijah's Cup" offers a refreshing take on mental disability from the perspective of civil rights, history, and the arts. From encounters with the founders of the first civil rights organizations for autistics, who guide Paradiz and her son toward a sense of community and self-respect, and with visual artists, who share with Elijah their special ability to "think in pictures," Elijah reaches extraordinary heights in his sociability and emotional well-being. In this utterly absorbing and inspiring narrative, Paradiz also reveals her own shadow syndrome, which afflicts many family members of autistics. She is a "cousin," a genetic link to her son's autism. Standing as she does on this cultural borderline, Paradiz is a sensitive translator between two worlds, revealing a groundbreaking insider's view of the beauty of minds hidden in the shadows of autism. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Valerie and Ben are devastated when their then 2-year-old son was diagnosed with autism in addition to epilepsy. Ben has trouble accepting the diagnosis and in time the marriage dissolved. Instead of condemning Elijah to a life of labels and misperceptions about autism, Valerie Paradiz educated her small upstate New York community as well as the world at large in this book about her personal experiences with autism. Her son and father are both on the spectrum and this book is one of many that points out the genetic basis autism has. Elijah was enrolled in special programs from the age of three and his greatest progress is made at home and with a friend he and Valerie meet. Sharron, an independent artist is herself struggling with Asperger's, the spectrum partner to autism. She recognizes in Elijah similar traits and experiences she contends with and finally receives a diagnosis. She bonded immediately with the boy and was his regular sitter for some years. I like the way Valerie worked with Elijah; I like the way she taught him more appropriate ways of responding to peers, such as Trevor in the chess club. Trevor came away with empowered with knowledge and a chance to be more accepting of someone he sees as being "different" and Elijah understands what he can do to regulate his behaviors and move more comfortably in social circles. I like the conversations mother and son had; I also like the outdoor programs for people on the autism/Asperger's (a/A) spectrum that are described in the book. Best of all, having autism is CELEBRATED! I've banged on the different drum for a long time about how being on the a/A spectrum is something to celebrate.

Valerie Paradiz's book Elijah's Cup is a real gem - a must-read. It is heartfelt, lyrical in its imagery, and engaging in its narrative style. But beyond that, it is a milestone in the history of autism literature. It is a parent's narrative - but it is no ordinary parent's narrative. More than any book before it in its genre, it succeeds in understanding and communicating the perspectives of those of us who, like Valerie's son Elijah, are on the autism spectrum. Valerie instinctively sought out and took seriously the input of adults on the spectrum in the course of trying to figure out how best to be

a parent to Elijah. She instinctively sought the meaning and purpose in autistic behavior - in reaction to sensory stimuli, in learning through repetition and pattern-making, in a different yet no less valid set of aesthetic sensibilities. She refused to accept the cavalierness with which the medical model of autism dismisses the relevance and meaning of autistic behavior, sensory preferences, and cognitive style, and instead correctly understood them as the ways in which we attempt to make sense of the world and communicate with it. She refused to accept as adequate the diagnostic definitions of autism that reduce us to a laundry list of negatively stated traits. She understood that Elijah, and the rest of us, are more than that. This is what we adults on the spectrum have been trying to tell the world ourselves for the past decade and more. It is downright radical stuff to be coming from a parent. Yet it is especially important that it is coming from a parent, and from a gifted and lyrical writer to boot.

What can one say about a book written a parent about her child with Asperger Syndrome that isn't like the rest? From the beginning, the reader can tell that he or she has a real gem. The writer, Valerie Paradiz, describes her son, Elijah's early years, including the many seizures he had and the odyssey of doctors and medications. After a few years, the seizures abate, but he is found to have Asperger Syndrome by his babysitter, Sharron Lorree, who has the disorder, also. Sharron becomes a dedicated friend and takes to Elijah like a duck takes to water. In this nifty little book, Paradiz takes an abrupt right turn AWAY from the doom and gloom and the quest for a cure that so many other parent stories about their children focus on. Instead, the author takes her son to Autreat, a retreat in New York State for people with autism and the people who support them. Run by Jim Sinclair, a major figure in the self-advocacy movement and a proponent of "autistic culture," the principle of allowing people with autism to be themselves and to accommodate their needs by what has been derisively called "self-stim," where in fact, it is a way to meet one's sensory needs, to communicate or to better adapt to one's environment, or all of these. While at Autreat and after, Paradiz takes on an increasingly positive attitude toward her son's autism, focusing on the STRENGTHS, instead of deficits. In addition, the author gives the reader insights into the relationship between her and her estranged husband and how they are able to reconcile their relationship.

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