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She looked into my eyes and blinked hers slowly and deliberately, like a stroke victim, to show me that although she couldn't speak, she understood what I was saying to her. I stroked her hair softly. 'I know you're in there, honey, ' I told her. 'We'll get you out.'"

Despite the horror of seeing fifteen-month-old Elizabeth slip away into autism, her mother knew that her bright little girl was still in there. When Elizabeth eventually learned to communicate, first by using a letterboard and later by typing, the poetry she wrote became proof of a glorious, life-affirming victory for this young girl and her family.

"I Am in Here" is the spiritual journey of a mother and daughter who refuse to give up hope, who celebrate their victories, and who keep trying to move forward despite the obstacles. Although she cannot speak, Elizabeth writes poetry that shines a light on the inner world of autism and the world around us. That poetry and her mother's stirring storytelling combine in this inspirational book to proclaim that there is always a reason to take the next step forward--with hope.

I Am in Here: The Journey of a Child with Autism Who Cannot Speak But Finds Her Voice Details

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Angela says

This book was very challenging for me to get through. When I got to the part of the book where the author first mentions that she runs a venture capital fund the book made a lot more sense. The writing has the tone of someone who works in that field. A lot of catch phrases, quick inspirational works, very little substance.

I was expecting more about the actual journey that the family experienced in dealing with Elizabeth's autism. Instead the book is very much focused on the experience of being a mother of a child with autism. Very little is said about how they got to where they are today. From reading the book it seems that overnight Elizabeth went from being completely uncommunicative to writing profound poetry.

Maybe parents of children with autism would find this book more engaging and inspiring but as a professional in the field I would not recommend it.

Dan says

Those that know me know that I am not much of a reader as it seems to take me months to finish reading books. However I found that once I starting reading this book, I couldn't put it down. Thank you, Dr. Ed Sonnenberg of Flanders Pediatric Dentistry LLC, for recommending this book to me.

I highly recommend this book to anyone that has worked with special needs folks as well as those that have or know folks that have autism. In reading this book, I kept thinking of my BFF's nephew JJ as well as one particular Special Olympics Athlete with Autism named Tina. I met Tina in 2008 at the Area 3 Bowling meet. It's been awhile since I've seen Tina, but wherever she is, I hope she knows that I knew she was "in there". Five months after the bowling meet, I received a letter from Newton High School, where Tina went to school. When I opened it, the letter read, "Dear Mrs. Karpf, Thank you for helping me at Special Olympics. love tina". Now I'm not sure if, like Elizabeth, Tina uses a letter board, but regardless, I'd like to think that I touched Tina's life in a way that she has touched mine.

My wish is that one day there will be more research to the causes of autism as well as a medical test that can diagnose autism along with a "cure".

Cresanna Kahrl says

Elizabeth's poems are incredible! Toward the end, the narrative became less interesting to me and I skimmed some of that, but despite that this book is another good source of insight into the autism experience.

MJ (The Book Recluse Review) says

The title and authorship of this book would lead the reader to think that it is written by, and about, an adolescent with autism. The reality is that this book is a melodramatic memoir which includes a main topic of having a daughter with autism. It also includes many trips down memory lanes by the main author of the book Virginia (Elizabeth's mother). Many of these ventures are quite interesting. She graduated from Harvard, seems to travel extensively, and can pick up and fly across the country for healing prayers. On a trip to Tibet she happened to meet someone who worked for PBS creating documentaries. This is not a typical middle or lower class family. None of this takes away from the book in itself.

My main issue with the book is that it is marketed as being written from the perspective of Elizabeth - a nonverbal adolescent with autism. In reality Elizabeth's poems are extensively included followed by small segments of explanation of the poetry. The rest is her mother's story. Her mother is a melodramatic mess. I would love to read the follow up, actually written by Elizabeth, when she is a few years older. She seems like a remarkable young woman.

There should be several warnings before you decided to pick up this novel. The mother comes from a business profession, and this is evident in the writing. She uses analogies from business to attempt some sort of structure of her life in an attempt to make blanket statements. This would be useful if this were a self help book rather than a memoir, and if she had the endorsement, or even more universal experience, to back these ideas up.

The book has a mystical Christian theme to it - the author even described herself as such. Throughout the book you will find a lot of references to God and scriptures. She then seems to mix this around by talking about Tibet a bit.

There are a lot of references to controversial biomedical procedures. If you agree with this approach to autism treatment then I think you will be frustrated by the way she seems to vaguely mention most of them and not really reference their progress or effect, if any. She only partly does this with one treatment - and the response was more an example of an emotion journey on the part of the mother. If you do not agree with this approach then you may be a bit outraged by the fact that this mother seems willing to try anything.

It seems to me that so much emphasis is put on the negative aspects. Elizabeth cannot speak - but she can communicate - and in this day and age there are great compact devices that can be used to give her a voice. Hence, one reason why the iPad is so popular with autistic families. I also wish that more attention was given to the journey of the family as a whole. I would have loved to hear about Elizabeth's brother who is also diagnosed with autism. It is not even until the middle of the book that we are told there is an older sister. The dad is given a brief mention - which makes no sense if he is in fact home with them and as such their primary caregiver.

I would have a lot less criticism if the book was marketed as a mother's perspective, although even then I think that would have only earned it an extra 1/2 star.

As published on The Book Recluse Review

Tosh says

I read this a few years ago so the details are fuzzy, but I remember thinking how revealing this was on the inner person of someone with autism. I loved how she expressed herself through poetry.

Krystal says

"I Am in Here" is a very personal story of one mother's journey with Autism. This book was good and I am glad I got to read it. As a behavioral therapist specializing in autism, I had some worries with this book. It was a great perspective to have the knowledge of now. I have passed the book onto co-worker, but am not singing it's praises.

SweetCheeses And Coffee Dreams says

My mom gave this book to me as a gift, and we read it simultaneously. When I saw the cover and the description, I was pretty excited to read it. I thought it was Elizabeth's story, and although it does have her poems, and some of her thoughts in the book, this is more of a philosophical book told from her mother's viewpoint...and there are many parallels drawn to things I could not relate to at all as a mother. For example, there was an entire chapter comparing capital venture funding and autism. Although we were told that Elizabeth's words would be written in bold print, a few times, they were not, and it was a bit confusing as to whose voice was speaking. I also felt like this did not even reflect the usual experience of a mother with a child with aspergers, since she is very wealthy and is able to fly to multiple states to help her daughter, and take her to the top specialists. Most parents have to deal with whatever specialists are "in network" and if they don't mesh with their children, there's not much they can do. She speaks of being a "How" person, but many people do not have the money and resources she has, and often the letter writing and pleading still does not get the help or respite a parent needs to help their child, no matter how much effort you are putting forth.

I would love to read a book written by Elizabeth, and clearly this was not really it. I think it would have been a better book, albeit, short and sweet, with just the poems and the short descriptions of what Elizabeth meant to reflect in them. The mother included long descriptions of her own spiritual journeys, and could not come to a conclusion about whose journey that was either. Elizabeth, the daughter, seems to be pretty solid about her beliefs, but mom seems almost confused about her own.

My overall opinion is that the title of this book is a misrepresentation of whose story this book actually describes.

Sara Ray says

This is an amazing book from many perspectives. Elizabeth is a non-verbal autistic child who begins to communicate through her original poetry written on a letter board. I was most fascinated by the thoughts and feelings she was able to express. Elizabeth's spiritual depth and maturity seem to be right up there with the theologians and Christian writers highlighted in the book. Our family has been blessed with a non-verbal autistic child. Although she is still quite young, we know that her thoughts are in there and she has her own distinct gifts. Our family does not have the resources that are there for Elizabeth's family. Yet it is helpful to be reminded of the resources we do have . . . faith, hope, and love to name three.

Carol says

Because I have a daughter who works with autistic children, I am often attracted to books about autism, or novels whose main character is autistic. When I saw the title, “I Am in Here,” I knew I had to read this one! I have had the opportunity to spend time with one of these special autistic children, and one of my constant remarks is, “I wonder what is going on in his head.” I SO wish I knew! If I, as an acquaintance, feel this way, I can’t begin to imagine what it must be like as a parent, teacher, or caregiver. They are amazing people!

When I started to read this wonderful book, I was taken aback at how many situations were similar with Virginia and her daughter, as I had observed with the child that I know. However, after a few pages, I was surprised at how much I wanted to say, “You don’t know how lucky you are that Elizabeth is able to express herself on paper.” The fourteen-year-old boy I know can read simple sentences, write some words, and speak a few, but rarely expresses any feelings or thoughts of his own. It is nearly impossible to know what he is thinking. However, “lucky” is a drastic word to use about any child with autism. Breen’s descriptions of their lives is all too-familiar with other books I have read about this challenging condition - the trials of diets, foods, medicines, therapies, strategies, etc. Often a never-ending struggle to find success, in addition to the emotional stress of family and work.

I was also puzzled about why the mother kept referring to Elizabeth as nonverbal, when I have seen video clips of her saying a few words. Granted, they were sometimes difficult to understand, and she was not speaking in sentences, but I got the impression from the book that she could not speak at all. I was surprised that this was not included.

The most fascinating parts of this book were reading Elizabeth’s poems! Wow! I recognized and enjoyed some of her Dr. Seuss-style, and her thoughts were quite advanced, beautiful, and very inspiring! I am ready to copy several for reminders to myself! Whether you like the basic story or not, it is worth picking up this book just to read the poems!

This was almost a five-star book for me. (Is there a 4.75 star up there?) While I realize that it was focused on the relationship between mother and daughter, I felt it would have been helpful to have included more about the rest of the family, especially Ray’s role; and I wonder why Virginia seemed more concentrated on Elizabeth than on her son. I was happy to read about her “Gale Time” with her older daughter. Because of the time-consuming needs of autistic children, it is a huge strain on all family members!

The last few chapters addresses their faith in God and the power of prayer, which I’m thankful that they have, but I felt that the author drifted off to more on religion than I thought was necessary.

I hope Elizabeth keeps writing beautiful poetry and that it will be published for the world to enjoy!

This is a sample of one of my favorites:

HAPPINESS

Why do people say someday?

Why not today?

If you always say someday,

You may never get to do the things that make you happy.

So go out and be happy.

Make it snappy!

Allison says

I found this to be an interesting read about a mother and daughter's struggle with autism. I learned some things I had not realized about autism like that there are biological manifestations which chronic digestive tract problems. It was also fascinating to read the eloquent poetry of from a gifted child that can not speak. However, somewhere in the middle of the book it takes an unexpected turn to religion and spirituality. While I understand that the challenges of raising a disabled child probably do lead to either the strengthening or questioning of one's faith, I felt the extensive discussions of the mother's faith in God took away from the main focus of autism which the book was supposed to be about. I also did not like that the bad side of autism was only briefly touched upon. Yes, the negative and scary behaviors were mentioned, but they did not get as much attention as I would have liked to get a more balanced understanding of the disorder. I also would have liked more information about the author's autistic son who was barely mentioned at all. She talks about how the children's autism has manifested itself very differently, but does not explain how the son is different other than he can speak. It was a good book, but I was left wanting more and less at the same time.

Dawn Patton says

A very inspiring story of a mother's love for her autistic child. Fortunately for this family they have the funds to search for a cure and are able to employ the help they need in the care of their child. I know that the determination they have to find a cure and methods to educate their child will benefit other children with autism. My daughter keeps trying to find the right person through school programs that will be best for my grandson who is extremely high functioning yet has his issues with autism on a very low scale. When you don't have the time due to other children, work, area of residence, and funds it is difficult to fight for what your child needs on a daily basis. I believe there are many many families out there that struggle with these issues also. I am thankful for the hard work Virginia is doing to make headway in finding a cure and methods for education for these special children. I sometimes wondered if Elizabeth wouldn't have preferred to be left alone instead of carted off to yet another doctor, speech therapist, etc. Elizabeth's poetry really tells a lot about herself and what I think even verbal autistic people cannot express. I know my grandson gets so frustrated sometimes and lasses out physically because he can't express what's going on in his mind. I learned a lot from Elizabeth's story that I hope to use when interacting with my grandson.

Thank you to Goodreads for awarding me with this book so close to my heart without even knowing that I have an autistic loved one in my family.

Thank you Goodreads

Abbie Riddle says

Autism - the diagnosis no mother wants to hear for her child. Yet this very diagnosis has been on the rise more over the past years as people are learning more about it. I have been around children with autism,

known parents with autistic children of varying levels. I haven't ever fully understood the dynamics or impact of this diagnosis or the impact on a person's life.

This book is one that moves a person to a deeper understanding and compassion for those suffering from autism. I can not imagine living my life in this type of personal prison. Though Elizabeth has never spoken she has found her voice in the written word - and with that voice she has informed this generation of the struggle of autism in a heroic way just as Helen Keller did for deaf and blind of her age.

I believe that this could be a great resource for those with autism as well as those raising an autistic child or those wishing to learn more about autism.

I found myself troubled in my heart at my misunderstanding of these kids. I believe that this book should find itself on the must read list for public school workers who work with children with special needs. If they understood in depth how these children operate and what they truly feel like I believe compassion would begin to override some of their decisions and directions in the education of such children. Workers might find a little more patience with these children if they understood the frustration they feel is also felt by the children who desperately want a normal life and control over their body and actions.

Absolutely inspiring, mind opening and heartbreaking. A book that will take you to all extremes of emotion as you begin to understand these children.

Thank you Revell for the opportunity to review this book.

Available October 2011 at your favorite bookseller from Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group

Justin Tapp says

I Am in Here: The Journey of a Child with Autism Who Cannot Speak but Finds Her Voice is an interesting book basically co-written by a mother (Breen) and her autistic daughter (Bonker).

The daughter (Elizabeth) cannot speak but learned to communicate externally via a letter board, and now uses a robot to remotely attend high school classes (according to the Facebook page). She writes poetry, and it was through her poetry that her mother and therapists were able to learn how she was feeling and what she was passionate about.

Bonker's autism is very extreme on the scale; she hits herself repeatedly for reasons she explains, cries, feels pain, doesn't sleep normally, etc. Her mother is a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley, which allows her to afford and explore many treatments and therapies that may not have been available otherwise. They've tried just about everything and are actively praying for healing. By the end of the book, Elizabeth is starting to verbalize words. Her mother isn't anti-vaccine, but blames the battery of vaccinations Elizabeth got as an infant for the autism she says immediately followed.

The book is partly about the mom's struggles to parent a "low-functioning" autistic child and thinking about it spiritually. She also highlights the can-do people who have inspired her. It is labeled as a "Christian" book, but the mom draws on sources ranging from Richard Foster to Tibetan Buddhism, which she studied as a college student in Tibet. As such, the spiritual thinking gets a little muddy-- I wouldn't pick the book up for that. (Aside: One child who sees ghosts from a nextdoor cemetery that others can't see is mentioned in the

book. It leads to a hypothesis is that autistic kids may be more sensitive to the spiritual world and warfare than neurotypicals. Elizabeth considers herself more sensitive to the emotional suffering of others.)

The book is a great reminder that people you see as "low-functioning" have abilities that you don't have-- Temple Grandin is mentioned repeatedly in the book and has befriended the family. They are people that God loves and has a purpose for. Elizabeth believes part of her purpose is to bring attention to world peace.

I found it somewhat frustrating. Why does Elizabeth still throw tantrums or have other issues in public and communicating with her mother when she's clearly thinking deeply on subjects and is able to elucidate them clearly through her writing in this book? A lot of apparent contradictions, which the mother illustrates well. (The father and family situation are never mentioned, by the way.)

I give it 3 stars out of 5. Worth adding to your "autism" shelf and to appreciate the ways God uses people with issues we wish they didn't have. One personal question this book raised for me is what sights/sounds/smells are my son sensitive to that I don't know about? What can he hear that I can't?

Christine Daniels says

This mother daughter duo will cheer you on, whatever your battle is in life. Because I have a friend with an autistic son the same age as my daughter, I was drawn to read this book. Much of what I read has application to anyone suffering with a chronic long-term illness or disability. I truly applaud the perseverance and courage of the the mother who has refused to just give in to status quo treatment. You will be amazed and delighted at the depths of this family's love for their autistic children.

Elizabeth's poetry is artistic, succinct, and thought-provoking. Such a gift is meant to be shared. Hopefully we will see more of her poetry in the days ahead.

The mother is open and honest about her faith and struggles therein. My concern lies with her blending of Christianity and mysticism. For those reading from a carefully biblical theological perspective, we have to be sure to acknowledge the core truths of sin and man's desperate need for a Saviour. Adam's fall brought all this misery and suffering. Christ's offer of transforming forgiveness and eternal life gives those who believe eternal hope. In all our struggles, our ongoing redemption is the loving goal of our heavenly Father. "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart." (I Cor. 4:1)

Lucy Dawson says

I started off enjoying this book, for the first few pages. It was about a girl with Autism who used a letter board to speak and write poems. Very inspirational.

Unfortunately, this inspirational message about overcoming the struggles of Autism with strategies does not last long.

The author of this monstrosity, the girls mother, quickly turns to talk about how how she wants to cure her daughter (and son's) autism. She visits lots of quack doctors and puts her daughter through painful medical trials to cure her.

There has never been any successful evidence of anyone curing autism. The brain is wired differently, how will drugs fix that?

Next, as if I weren't already irritated, she takes her daughter to see a pastor who says prayer will heal her and make her speak. There is a massive emphasis on god and religion in the second half. This is fair enough, I have nothing against people having faith. But to think some random bloke will 'heal' your daughters autism by laying his hands on her head is just insulting to people with disabilities.

The mother goes on to say that the healing hasn't worked, but it doesn't always work first time (convenient) but she has faith it will eventually see results.

So many parts of this book severely irritated me that I frequently thought about abandoning it. I really enjoy learning more about autism and those whose lives have been affected by it, as I work with autistic children and have for a few years now. However I felt this book made light of a serious developmental condition and tried to make out it could be 'fixed' if only you have enough money to pay for medical trials and pointless religious pilgrimages like the family in the book clearly had.

I strongly advise against this book.
