

TITLE: Living in Two Worlds: On Being a Social Chameleon with Asperger's

AUTHOR: Emmons, Dylan

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When I started reading this new book, I figured that it would be yet another account by a young man on the autism spectrum about being socially awkward and not being able to find his way in the world. It seemed like almost every other book of its kind. Dylan started out by describing his childhood and he went from there all the way to getting into college. As I progressed through the book, I found myself charmed by his likeability and his sense of humor as he interspersed his accounts of growing up with descriptions of presentations that he gave to schools and conferences.

The further I got into the book, the more caught up I became in Dylan's life. As a boy, he struggled to make sense of the world and as an adolescent he tried desperately to fit in and be "cool" like the rest of the crowd. It wasn't easy and I was once again sucked into a time-travel vortex, going back to my days as a teenager at Friends School in Detroit on a day when my glass thermos full of yummy Campbell's Pepper Pot soup shattered so I couldn't eat it. This sent me into a full-blown meltdown. Dylan made everything seem so real, which had a powerful effect.

Despite his difficulties, Dylan managed to get through high school, date one girl named Raven and go through the typical teenage breakup and learned so much in the process. He did things that so-called "normal" teens did but experienced much more difficulty in the process and the reader can see that. I was impressed with the chronological nature of the book so that the reader can see the developmental stages, however delayed, unfold over time and the ways that he compensated for his difficulties. As a brilliant and creative young man, he managed to get through all this in one piece yet not write in such a heavy-handed manner about it.

The book is infused with humor and warmth, making his journey less of a depressing read and more of an entertaining and enlightening one. Dylan leaves no stone unturned, either. One can just feel the teenage angst, the desire to have a girlfriend, to get a job and be out there participating in society. I was utterly charmed by this book and I felt so immersed in those heady, yet anxious days of adolescence with the promise of the future ahead, yet the extra roadblocks of having an autism spectrum disorder getting in the way. We also see Dylan's gifts, too-his love of and talent for writing, his fascination with heavy metal music and his desire to really grow, change and have a place in society. This was a delight and I recommend it for all teens with ASD who feel like a square peg in a round hole because we may all be that, in one way or another.