

TITLE: Pretending to Be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome

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Quite a number of years ago, I wrote a review of Liane Holliday-Willey's book, Pretending to Be Normal: Living with Asperger's Syndrome, which was published back in 1999. I am revisiting an old friend as this book has been a mainstay for people wanting to better understand what living with a milder form of autism is all about. After reading this book for a second time, I was just as moved and affected by what Liane had to say as I was back then.

Liane starts out by writing about her life as a child with the whirl of sounds, sights and smells just being too much for her and her feeling as though she was stuck on a ferris wheel that wouldn't stop! This resonated so much with me as I felt that same way too; everything was fascinating, yet too bright and too loud and too smelly. What was especially poignant was her experience in middle school when she had difficulty keeping up with other swimmers on the swim team. Nonetheless, her grades and her high intelligence helped her to get into college and to earn a doctorate in education. She also met a very kind and understanding man who became her husband; they shared a common dislike of large crowds and social gatherings and they married and had twin daughters.

Holliday-Willey pulls no punches about the difficulties she has experienced with sensory processing, understanding social cues and learning how to navigate life's complexities. A monkey wrench fell into the works when she found out that one of her daughters was on the autism spectrum!, Then came another revelation; she discovered ASD traits in herself and discovered that she had ASD as well. This opened up a whole new world for her, a world of anxiety and fear but also of wonder and discovery. She saw how being on the autism spectrum actually enhanced some of her abilities and brought out new capabilities that she never even dreamed of!

This book is an oldie but goodie as we see both the negative and the positive side of being on the autism spectrum. Yet, the truths are the same and the wisdom that she imparts is timeless and valuable-this has to count for so much!