

There's a Boy in Here
Judy Baron
Sean Baron

Summary

This book is about a family of four. The story is told from the perspective of the mom, Judy, and one of the children, Sean. Sean has autism. The book comes mostly from Judy's perspective. She describes events of Sean's childhood and the hardships that they faced in dealing with his autism. Judy writes about specific events and obsessions that Sean had and how she and the family dealt with it. She also describes the various doctors that the family went to in order to get a diagnosis for Sean. As Sean grows older, he learns about his autism and becomes determined to control it in order to fit in with society. This book is unique in that Sean also offers his perspective of the events that Judy is describing. Sean's perspective is written in italics so the reader knows that there has been a transition from Judy to Sean. This book describes in detail the challenges faced by Sean and his family with his autism.

Diagnostic Process

In this book, Sean's diagnosis of autism took a lot of work from his family. They went to several doctors to determine what was going on with Sean. The first doctor they met with was Dr. Cohen. Dr. Cohen blamed Judy and her husband for being poor parents. The doctor said that Sean was of dull-normal intelligence. He states that Sean is, "not really retarded but he will never be a good student...things will always be hard for him" (p.38). Dr. Cohen also tried asking Sean questions as a method of observation even though Sean was non-verbal at the time. The second doctor that the family went to was Dr. Logan. Dr. Logan was expensive and was a long drive way. His methods were not favorable to the family, however, he was the first one to introduce them to the term, "Autism." Dr. Logan describes it as, "a dysfunction of the brain" and that Sean was, "obviously born with it" (p.52). This is a huge relief for Judy and her husband, Ron, as they had been blaming themselves for years.

Interventions

An intervention that the family tried is to send Sean to a different school, Beechbrook. It is a residential school with staff that is trained to work with "emotionally disturbed" children. The family had weekly meetings with a psychologist, Dr. Borden. Sean was miserable at the school because he felt he was being bullied. He describes feeling most safe when he was in his classes because the other students could not bother him. Judy also describes feeling that the therapy sessions with the staff at Beechbrook felt more like punishment rather than helpful. She describes still feeling like Sean was never going to get help even at this specialized school.

Sean's family eventually brings him home from Beechbrook and he attends regular schooling along with his sister, Megan. I do not believe that this intervention helped Sean. He seemed miserable being away from his family and his familiar surroundings. When Sean gets home, his family continues to search for reasons behind his autism. They try placing him on a specific diet because the family reads that gluten and wheat could be a cause of autism. This is also an unsuccessful intervention as all it was doing was cause Sean discomfort.

The Impact of Sean's Diagnosis on the Family

Sean's diagnosis of autism was a relief to the family. When Sean was younger, the family was frequently told that his behaviors were a result of his parents' incompetence. They were also told that Sean was going through a phase and would grow out of it. Judy vulnerably writes about the guilt she felt when Sean was growing up. She thought that she was a terrible mother. When the family receives the diagnosis of autism they are relieved. The diagnosis of autism does not impact Sean until he was older. When Sean was in high school, his mother explained to him what autism was and told him that he was autistic. This has a profound impact on Sean and he writes that this is one of the points in his life where he decided he wanted to change.

Characteristics of ASD

Sean and Judy write about several characteristics of Sean's autism. Sean loves sameness and consistency. He writes about his love for chains when he was younger. He liked the texture and the fact that every link was the same. As a result, Sean became fixated with the chains on the ceiling of the garage. He would poke at them with a stick to watch them swing back and forth. Sean also loved buses and their consistent schedules when he was younger. He would be anxious and furious if one of the buses was late. In addition, there was a bus that was always last in line and Sean did not like that; bus #24. He was so upset by the tardiness of this bus that he grew to hate the number 24. In fact, he has a teacher later in his life who is twenty-four years old and Sean dislikes her because of that (p. 152). Another characteristic of Sean's autism that impacted his family was his love of dead-end streets. He reasons that his admiration of dead end streets stems from their predictability. He knew that if his parents drove down a dead-end street, they would eventually *always* reach the dead end. Sean loved that predictability. If they were driving by a dead end street and did not turn down it, Sean would get extremely frustrated and would be thrown off. He describes not understanding why his parents would not let him do something he enjoys (p. 90).

Sean experiences a gradual progression to being a typical adult. One particular event he describes is a time when he and his mother watch a video about autism (p.228). It is the first time he makes the connection within himself that he has autism. He asks his mom, "Mom...I'm autistic, too, aren't I?" (p.229). This is one of the first times he connects with his mother. They talk about the behaviors that he displayed when he was younger. Sean recognizes how his behavior impacted his entire family.

While he was growing up, Sean went through phases of wanting to fit in with his peers. He wanted to learn to be funny and wanted to impress girls. However, when he was in college, he established goals for himself. He wanted to be a daycare provider and he wanted to learn to drive. Sean also realized that in order to achieve his goals, he would have to take control over his autism. Judy states,

"There was no sudden 'awakening,' no clap of thunder that changed our son into a "normal" person. It was hard work and took time. Everything had to be named, its function described. Many things still do" (p. 240).

This illustrates the mentality that Sean had as he was coming to this realization that he could control his autism. It almost seemed as though he was starting from the beginning again. He had to learn social skills that his peers had already learned. This caused frustration for him as an adult. Sean talks about triggers and that he fights the thoughts that he had when he was younger such as those about the buses.

Indirect Impact

This book encourages parents to never give up with their children with autism. Sean's parents describe moments of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and frustration with raising him. This provides a perspective on autism that I had not thought about before. I feel that this book would be beneficial for other parents of children with autism. Judy describes moments where she feels like a terrible mother because of Sean's behaviors.

In the fields associated with ASD, this book provides hope. Sean writes about how he broke free from the confines of his autism. He also talks about his triggers and how he has adapted his life to avoid falling back into his rituals of his autism. The one area that I struggled with when reading this book was that I could not help but think that Sean may be an exception. I do not know that the majority of individuals with autism are able to almost "snap out of it" as this book describes. Sean had a lot of support from his family and he had internal motivation to break away from his behaviors. For some individuals with autism, I do not know if this phenomenon is as likely. However, I do feel that every individual with autism is capable of change and progression. I feel that with support, intervention, guidance, and explicit instruction, individuals with autism can make gains and can improve their behaviors.

Direct Impact

I really love how Sean was able to describe his thought processes during incidents simultaneously as Judy describes hers. One point that struck me was when Judy describes an incident where Sean runs out in front of cars in the street and almost gets hit. She writes about how furious she was at Sean that day and how he could have gotten himself seriously injured. Judy wonders if Sean did that to get attention or to make her angry. However, Sean describes that day in a different way. He describes his obsession with speedometers on cars (p. 87). He says that there was a car across the street and he could not see the speedometer so he had to go see it. It was an obsession and he could not overcome the desire to look at the speedometer. In fact, Sean could not understand how his mother did not know that. This type of thought process that Sean describes was eye-opening as an educator and I can see a direct correlation to my future professional career. This book demonstrates how important it is to get to know a student with autism. This requires collaboration with the parents as well.

Work Cited

Barron, J., & Barron, S. (1992). *There's a boy in here*. New York: Simon & Schuster.