



Foreword

THE FRONT COVER OF THIS BOOK PROMISES 1001 GREAT IDEAS, which is an ambitious undertaking by itself. The back cover of this second edition promises 1800. Anyone browsing autism books might question that two authors could amass this many ideas and that all of them would be “great,” but I must say, this book *delivers*. It is crammed full of helpful ideas that parents and teachers can immediately put to use to teach children with autism and Asperger’s.

During my childhood years my mother and teachers utilized many of the methods discussed in this excellent book. They recognized that when it came to teaching a child with autism, creativity, patience, and understanding, as well as an inexhaustible quest for ideas and strategies that made sense *to me*, were the key to helping me become the independent, successful person I am today. However, my journey from childhood to adulthood was not without its obstacles, and I’d like to share some of my experiences to demonstrate what a difference *ideas* can make in a person’s life.

I was lucky to be surrounded by a supportive team of adults from almost the very beginning. Excellent educational intervention, which began at age two-and-a-half, was crucial for my success. The most important aspect of my early intervention was keeping my young brain “connected to the world.” My typical day included speech therapy, three Miss Manners meals (where table manners were *expected*), and hours of turn-taking games with

my nanny. I was allowed to revert to repetitive, autistic behavior for one hour after lunch, but the rest of the day I participated in structured activities.

I was nonverbal until age three-and-a-half, but even after that time, speech therapy was a very important part of my intervention. When adults spoke to me in a speedy, everyday manner, their words sounded like gibberish, so naturally I could not respond appropriately. All I heard were vowel sounds—consonant sounds dropped out. But when people spoke slowly, directly to me, I could understand what they were saying. My speech teacher carefully enunciated the hard consonant sounds in words such as “cup” or “hat” until I learned to listen for and eventually hear those types of sounds.

Playing turn-taking games occupied a major part of my day before I went to kindergarten at age five. Initially, taking turns was a real challenge for me. But daily games and other activities drilled the concept into me. Board games such as Parcheesi and Chinese checkers were a couple of my favorites. To enjoy playing them, I had to learn to wait for my turn.

Turn-taking was also taught with outdoor activities such as building a snowman. I made the bottom ball, then my sister made the middle, and then I made the head. My nanny had a box of “snowman decorations,” which was full of old hats and bottle caps that could be used to make eyes and noses. We had to take turns putting these things on the snowman’s head. I also had to learn to take turns in neighborhood games, such as skipping rope. Two people swung the big rope while one person jumped. I had to learn that I could not be the jumper all of the time. I had to let others jump sometimes when it was my turn to swing the rope. Turn-taking was further emphasized in conversation at the dinner table. I was allowed to talk about things that interested me, but I was taught to allow my sister and others to take turns talking.

Learning those functional life skills concepts early helped me a great deal when it was time to start elementary school. Yet I believe the structure of the classroom itself was particularly conducive to my learning style. It was an old fashioned 1950s classroom with only twelve or thirteen students per class, where everybody worked quietly on the same thing at the same time. If I had been placed in a noisy, chaotic classroom with thirty students, like too many modern classrooms, I may not have done so well.

Many other factors contributed to my success in elementary school, but there were two factors that helped me the most. First, my teachers educated my classmates about my differences. They not only explained the nature of my challenges, but they also taught my peers how to help me. The second key to my success was the close collaboration between mother and my teachers. The rules for behavior and discipline were the same at home and at school. If I had a temper tantrum at school, the penalty when I got home was no TV that night. The rules were very clear and there was no way I could manipulate my mother or the teachers to change the rules or the consequences. Be sure to differentiate between a tantrum (voluntary) and a meltdown (involuntary, usually due to sensory overload or being over-tired). Tantrums warrant consequences, but meltdowns usually indicate that accommodations are needed.

Nowadays, classroom accommodations and modifications are common, and even mandated by law. Therapists and teachers' aides have become integral to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). There weren't any teachers' aides in my school, but if I had been put in a larger classroom, an aide would have been essential.

Some of the most common accommodations necessary for children with autism are those that address sensory challenges, and this book provides a great deal of insight into this topic. Sensory issues in autism are really variable, yet problems in these areas can cause real pain and major meltdowns. They range from a mild nuisance to being extremely debilitating. Children can have auditory, visual, and/or tactile sensitivity—or under-sensitivity in any or all of those areas. Tactile sensitivity was one of my worse problems. For example, I could not tolerate being hugged, and wool clothes felt like sandpaper against my skin.

Like many children, my sensory issues were not limited to one sense. When I was in elementary school, the sound of the school bell hurt like a dentist drill hitting a nerve. There are some individuals who have such severe sound sensitivity they cannot tolerate public places such as malls and supermarkets. Another problem with those types of places is the constant flicker of fluorescent lighting, visible only to people who are visually sensitive. Pale-colored glasses and Irlen-colored lenses have helped many children avoid

sensory overload in over-stimulating places. To my knowledge, the most effective colors are pale pink, lavender, purplish brown, and pale brown.

Visual sensitivity can be equally overwhelming at home and school. To avoid harsh fluorescent lighting, it may be a good idea to move the child's desk over by a window, or put a lamp with a 100-watt light bulb next to his desk. Do not use compact fluorescent bulbs because many also flicker. Certain types of computer screens can flicker as well. LCD screens on laptops do not, so consider letting a child use an old laptop with an external keyboard and mouse instead of the school computers. Even paper can be visually offensive. If a child complains that words wriggle around on their paper, try printing the child's work on pastel-colored paper to reduce contrast. Let the child pick the color.

Throughout this book, the authors address these same areas of challenge—language and communication, behavior, functional skills—and offer countless more sensory ideas and accommodations. I found the “Adaptations at home” and “Adaptations at school” sections on pp. 30-32 to be particularly helpful. You will also find lots of good tips for promoting healthy personal hygiene. Too often these important lessons are overlooked until the child is older and hygiene problems become more noticeable. I appreciate that the authors emphasize an overall healthy lifestyle; it's a consistent theme. Getting plenty of exercise really helped me when I was a child. My mother used to say to me, “Go outside and run the energy out.” Scientific research continues to reveal the numerous neurological benefits of exercise, including the great calming effect it can have on people.

It is important to address children's physical needs first and foremost to create a comfortable environment where they can learn. A child who hurts or has painful gastrointestinal issues is not able to absorb learning and benefit from treatment programs. Once those needs are met, I can't stress enough the importance of helping children develop their individual talents and strengths. My area of strength was drawing, and that became the basis of my livestock facility design business. My caregivers and educators provided me with tools to get started, such as a book on perspective drawing and art supplies, and then helped me expand my abilities through concrete lessons and remaining positive. They had that “can do” attitude reflected all through this book.

Like many other children with autism, I got fixated on certain subjects and sometimes needed prompting to try new things. For example, I loved drawing pictures of horses, but one day, my mother asked me to do a painting of a beach. She rewarded me by framing my painting. The authors of this book share hundreds of similar ways to think creatively in working with a child. To broaden children's fixations, teachers and parents must help children develop their special interests into abilities that others people value. Having a career, or even a job you're good at, can foster confidence, independence, and a lifetime of rewards.

As I was reading through this book, my mind was flooded with pictures from my childhood. So much of the wisdom of this book is timeless; some things just *work* whether it's 1950 or 2010. Simple games such as skipping stones on a pond were some of my favorite activities as a child, and I think they can become part of other children's fond memories as they grow.

In addition to the thousands of concrete ideas and activities, the authors offer genuine, commonsense advice that all parents and educators can quickly and easily use and appreciate, no matter what your level of experience with spectrum children. The advice on how to handle the dreaded trips to the doctor and the dentist is alone worth the price of the book!

1001 Great Ideas will become your go-to book as you support the child with autism in your life. Easy-to-read sections, full of bulleted tips, provide innovative solutions to infinite types of situations. The authors even carry their ideas one step further, offering extra suggestions for customizing the content to your child or student's needs.

If every school and family used even some of the ideas in this book, the possibilities for improving the lives of children with autism and Asperger's would be limitless. And that's what I call *great*.

— TEMPLE GRANDIN, PH.D.