

Thorn in My Pocket: Temple Grandin's Mother Tells the Family Story

Eustacia Cutler

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I have known Temple Grandin for over 20 years. I have seen her grow ever more strong and independent. I've been amazed at her intelligence, her accomplishments and her determination to live the best life she can, both personally and professionally, while helping others. I've often thought, "I sure wish I could talk with Temple's mom." I wanted to know what she did, what others did, how was Temple when she was little, to what did she attribute Temple's remarkable accomplishments. One thing I knew for sure, as fellow parent, was that Eustacia probably had an important part in Temple's great strides. This book was almost as good as meeting Eustacia in person. She very honestly gives us a background of her family from the time she met her husband through their marriage, child rearing and beyond. I had no idea that her husband has traits of the spectrum. I had no idea that she had endured divorce and that she had to fight to keep Temple institutionalized. What a remarkable story of courage, a desire to keep her own individuality (something many parents lose along the way), and a belief in Temple... her daughter, a talented child who became an accomplished woman. I am a relatively slow reader. I began reading *A Thorn in My Pocket* on a Friday. I was finished that Monday. I just couldn't put it down. This book is a stand-out because it is very honest and REAL. Eustacia certainly doesn't try to look like a martyr. She just tells it like she lived it. BRAVO!"

- The Maap

In *A Thorn in My Pocket*, Eustacia Cutler shares the challenges and rewards of raising her autistic daughter Temple Grandin in 1950s small town America. The author tells of how, despite the misdiagnosis of "infant schizophrenia," she battled to keep Temple in the mainstream of family, community and school life. She writes honestly and openly about the strains placed upon family life and the emotional rewards that Temple's success gave her; succeeding, as she puts it, "beyond my wildest dreams."

As well as a personal biography, this book also serves as a history of the perception and treatment of autism from the 1950s to the present day. In the book's final chapters Eustacia discusses Temple's current success, her own participation in Temple's lectures about Autism Spectrum Conditions, and her conversations with professionals about current ASD theories and treatments.

A great read, this book will also prove to be a great source of support to people with autism their families and carers.

Thorn in My Pocket: Temple Grandin's Mother Tells the Family Story Details

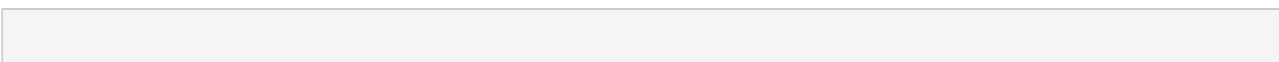
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From Reader Review Thorn in My Pocket: Temple Grandin's Mother Tells the Family Story for online ebook

Kristina Wojtaszek says

“In the rush to hear the bizarre details of autism, the world brushes aside the toll it takes on its caregivers and this indifference contributes to the guilt all parents carry.”

This book is for the parents, written by one herself--written out of compassion and wonderfully so. I've seen some criticism for this book to the effect that it doesn't offer enough specific help to those parenting a child or children on the autism spectrum. If the aid you are looking for is a solution to your child's "condition" then no, this book isn't the answer, and I highly doubt you will find a book that has that answer. There are some wonderful books out there on specific battles within the autistic war-- such as how to help children on the spectrum with reading comprehension, or how to relate emotionally with a partner who is on the spectrum, and those books are of immense value, but this is not of that kind, and yet its value is 10 fold that of the others. Why? Because she's been there, and she's honest, and she's relatable-- maybe not in every way, but as a mother who is fighting the battle for and with her child-- you can count on her words for empathy. She explains her motives perfectly in her prologue:

“I’ve arrived late to this task. Putting the years into words for an audience hasn’t been easy, so I’ve taken my cue from Robert Frost who said, ‘I teach to find kindred spirits, to comfort them and myself.’ In the process of that, I’ve learned how the parents of autistic children suffer from a loss of their own sense of self. We all know that a baby needs a mother to know she’s a baby, but, equally true, a mother needs a baby to know she’s a mother. When those first infant/mother responses can’t grow, a whole family identity is thrown out of kilter. I understand that far better now, from the vantage point of years, than I could when I was young. I understand, too, how much parents long to be good parents. The purpose of my lectures is to find them and comfort them in their never ending battle with autism.”

She also reminds us that autism is not a disease, it is a part of the identity of the people touched by it, both those with autistic traits, and those family and loved ones that surround them. This is perhaps my favorite line in the entire book, one worth meditating on:

“Autism isn’t an exotic disorder, out there somewhere on its own, the fault of mercury or inoculations, waiting to be ‘cured’ if we throw enough money at it. Autism is an exaggeration of what lies in us all.”

Shomeret says

What most readers who pick up a memoir by the mother of Temple Grandin want to know is: how did she do it? How did she parent Temple so successfully that she realized her potential against such tremendous odds? I wanted to know the answer to that question too, but I also believed that the woman who gave birth to Temple Grandin must also be pretty awesome. I was convinced that Eustacia Cutler’s own life story would be of value, and it turned out that I was right.

First, it’s important to realize that when Temple was born the psychiatric establishment believed that autism was a kind of schizophrenia. We now know that autism is an alternate form of brain organization, but in the

late 1940's children like Temple were just thrown away by their parents, and placed in institutions where they received no education whatsoever because no one believed that they were educable. Eustacia Cutler always believed in her daughter's abilities.

Unfortunately, the research that Cutler did on autism was based on the false premise that autism manifests the same way in all individuals with autism. Over time, we have learned that there are variations in autism. Temple's book, *The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum*, taught me about this diversity among autists. Yet when Eustacia Cutler wrote *Thorn in My Pocket*, she apparently believed that all individuals with autism were like her daughter.

So the value of this book isn't in what it tells us about autism. Its value is historical. It tells us about the social context in which Temple Grandin grew up. We learn about Temple's upbringing, her family and heritage.

I found *Thorn In My Pocket* to be very compelling reading. If you are interested in Temple Grandin and the influences that shaped her life, you may be just as fascinated by it.

For my complete review see <http://www.bookbabe.blogspot.com/2014/...>

Amy says

Although the reason I bought this book was because of the fact that Eustacia Cuttler and I both have a child with Autism, it ended up helping me in many more parts of my life. I appreciate her honesty into her feelings as she grows and matures. Her hindsight into her life is something that every woman can learn from. It is no wonder to me that Eustacia Cuttler was able to help create such an American Hero as Temple Grandin. I am now a fan of both.

Maureen says

Just finished this....on my Autism read-a-thon. A very good book from a parents perspective.

Barbara says

Eustacia Cutler is the mother of Temple Grandin, probably the most well known autistic adult of our time. I

heard both Cutler and Grandin speak at a conference a few years ago and she did an excellent job. The book is not as well put together as the lecture was. Another reviewer at goodreads suggested that she missed an opportunity for better editing by publishing with Future Horizons and I find that an excellent point. The narrative skipped over great portions of her life with Temple and dwelled far too long on Cutler's own efforts in the arts. I did not expect a "how-to" book on raising an autistic child, but I was reading the book because she was Temple Grandin's mother, not because I was interested in her career as a singer and actress. That said, I am still glad I read it. There were just enough tidbits about a fascinating subject to make it worth my time.

Jeannie Colling says

Fascinating story of a young mother trying to raise a child with autism during a time when there was little to no medical understanding or community support--just a mother's instincts, and fortunately enough money in the family to make it work. Eustacia is a rather remarkable woman in her own right. This is a fascinating and helpful book on the subject of autism. Sort of reminded me of my mom, to tell the truth.

Lisa Miller says

This was a beautifully written book. Easy to read, quite enjoyable. The author who is Temple Grandin's mom is very open about their life. Anyone wanting to learn more about Autism/Asperger's Syndrome this is the book to read and own. I recommend this book highly.

Tracy says

A long time reader and fan of Temple Grandin, I am glad I hunted down this book for purchase. I noticed in some of the comments that this book was not as much about raising an autistic child as they had thought it would. Well, certainly it was about raising an autistic child, in the aftermath of World War II and it's limitations on all sorts of people, women, disabled children, anyone with mental difficulties. I thought it was well told, and actually did an excellent job of skirting what must have been tremendous mental abuse of Eustacia by her husband while he pressured her to give up on their daughter. Frankly, she is an inspiration for her own accomplishments as well as her child rearing.

Mom says

I've read so much about Temple Grandin that I was more than curious to read her mother's book. I was not disappointed. Some complain that she is telling her life story and not Temple's but that is exactly what she said she was going to do in the prologue. She is an amazing woman and has a great story to tell. She admits that she doesn't have the answers. She is a mother who followed her heart and her instincts. It was a difficult path but she didn't give up. This was a very interesting book that I just couldn't put down.

Meghan Davis strader says

The book starts out with this:

An image haunts me.

Temple, just turned three, is lying in a hospital bed. A nurse leans over her, gluing wires to her scalp.

Terrified, Temple struggles and screams. I try to soothe her –and myself–telling her it won't hurt, that it's only wires, telling myself to practice distancing as the medics do. Yes, just withdraw into that safe place where everything is reduced to an interesting research study, a laboratory haven unconnected to feeling.

But Temple's haven is dangerous, her brain has trapped her in an icy limbo where she must live each day denied response. I hold onto her hand and vow I won't let her freeze to death in that tempting snowdrift, so I, too, mustn't go there or we'll both freeze.

This passage seems to summarize the entire book. Temple's mother trying to prevent them both from freezing each other out through lack of understanding. After reading this first passage, the tears started flowing and I wasn't sure I would be able to finish the book. Ms. Cutler is very apt though in providing the type of encouragement a mother of a child with special needs craves. Not empty promises, not a ritual to follow, but just a shared experience. She puts it this way:

I offer you my story as a promise of that, an overall insight to carry with you as a talisman. And I promise that in the future, to your surprise, your dreams with have changed, and changed you.

I know that's not what you want.

What you want is a real talisman, a magic something you think I conjured up to coax Temple into joining life as you hope your child will.

There was no magic, there was just doing the best I could. That's the point, that's the talisman.

And never letting go of hope.

Such a fantastic book!

Dave says

I had thought the book would be about a mother's story of raising an autistic child, in this case the well known Temple Grandin, but I found the book to be too much about the mother and her career and marital issues and not enough about what raising an autistic child was really like. A huge missed opportunity, in my mind, especially when considering the fact that autism was thought to be "infant schizophrenia" at this time and the recommended "treatment" was to put the child in a mental home. Little did the family realize that the course of action they took to raise Temple would eventually be determined as spot on, decades later.

Julie says

Ever since I saw the Temple Grandin movie I have been so interested in her story! It is fascinating what the brain can do. I love her mothers persistence, her fight to help her daughter any way she could, her dedication to the research of autism. What a powerful mother she is!

Leslie says

As a mother of a young adult recently diagnosed with High Functioning Autism, this book was a must read! Now I know every person is different, and the saying..now you've met one person with autism-you've met just ONE person with autism--is the mantra, but Cutler's painting of family life-trials tribulations and achievements--made me feel better about the whole crazy diagnosis! A must read for any parent of a child on the spectrum

Kate says

This is the first time since my son was diagnosed with autism that I've seen someone express what I've always believed, that autism is an exaggeration of the normal. Interesting that this statement came from another mother -- Temple Grandin's mother. This was an interesting read, though not terribly pulled together. Still it did hold my attention.

Readyyourselfhealthy says

If you're looking for the secret to Temple Grandin's emergence from autism, you are not going to find it here. In fact, much of the book doesn't focus on autism at all--it is clearly the story of Eustacia Cutler, a fascinating woman in her own right, who just happens to be the mother of the even more fascinating Temple Grandin. Her story of autism, however, is one of determination--at a time when most everyone, including her own husband (but eventual ex-husband)--thought that Temple should be institutionalized. One of the best pieces of advice for parenting autism in this book is the discussion of puberty. Cutler discusses how Temple was in a boarding school at this time and how she was frustrated with what she saw as Temple's lack of progress at this time, both socially and academically. A teacher at the school advised her to leave Temple alone--puberty was enough to deal with at this point--and that when she was ready, she would move forward. And this did prove to be the case. Temple herself, writes about how her anxiety increased a lot at the time of puberty and her mother's view of just letting her deal with that proved to be the right course. The other thing that I loved in this book is the comparison of autistic children to the stories of fairies snatching children and leaving a fairy child in its place. Something about this comparison really resonated with me in describing some of our beautiful children. Uta Frith has seen evidence of autism throughout history in the description of 'blessed fools' and possibly in feral children, but I see the fairy story as the most fitting. Worth reading for anyone trying to understand more about autism or Temple herself, but if you really want pointers on parenting autism, look at some of the other choices on my bookshelf. This one is not likely to give a lot of specifics.

