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I Am Intelligent: From Heartbreak To Healing--A Mother And Daughter's Journey Through Autism



Synopsis

A gripping look into the lives of a mother obsessed with curing her child of autism and a daughter who retains full awareness of her situation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From Publishers Weekly: This book recounts how Peyton Goddard overcame the physical and mental obstacles of severe autism. Peyton's inability to verbally communicate or control her body led to continual misdiagnoses, pity, and segregation from normal education and society. After suffering 21 years of mistreatment, neglect, and disturbing abuse by those supposed to aid her "extended family, doctors, and teachers" Peyton is finally given the chance to express her intelligence and awareness. Through her use of facilitated communication, by which noncommunicative people speak via computer keyboard, Peyton is finally freed not only from her bodily restraints but also from society's pitiful image projected upon her. The book details the Goddard family's extreme highs and lows in dealing with Peyton's progress through fluid narratives from the perspective of her mother, Dianne, interspersed with Peyton's own poetic reactions. From years of being dismissed by the education system as lacking the ability to learn, to eventually graduating from college as valedictorian, Peyton proves that inclusion of disabled people is necessary for their livelihood and growth, regardless of the challenge it presents to society. This debut memoir allows Peyton Goddard to further achieve her goal of helping others in similar positions by spreading her "voice" by virtue of text, the very thing that saved her. (June) "From the moment I heard Peyton's writings, I have been blessed to experience an

opening and understanding about the world and humans beyond what most people know or express. The journey of this family is a teaching of extraordinary love and all the mountain ranges that it can move. Families like the Goddards and those that support them are the teachers of this kind of beautiful challenging journey beyond normal life into the realm of deep dedication to communication. Most people take communication for granted. For some it is a simple task, mastered in an automatic, unconscious way. For some it is a quest. But for all, it is a basic component for a fulfilling meaningful life. I will always be grateful to Peyton for sharing her thoughts and feelings. She is a master teacher of the heart.

• "Laura San Giacomo, mother, actor, and advocate

• *Am Intelligent* reads like a beautiful, well-crafted novel. A mother and daughter are separated by an abyss of communication challenges, fear and pain and an ocean of misinformation. They journey to a deep connection with love, perseverance and courage.

• This book will change your notion of autism and loving relationships.

• "Dr. Anne M. Donnellan, University of San Diego Autism Institute

• This well written and remarkable work by Peyton and her mother Dianne is essential not only to the field of autism, but to those working with communication disabilities, those treated severely traumatized people with developmental disabilities, and those championing human rights and fighting for self advocacy and equality.

• "Donna Williams, author of *Nobody Nowhere: The Remarkable Autobiography of an Autistic Girl*

• *Am Intelligent* humbles and teaches.

• Dianne's tenacity and determination to reach her daughter and her refusal to give up, for over two decades, is nothing short of miraculous. Equally remarkable is her courage in writing so honestly about her parenting. Peyton's prose is unlike anything you've ever read: lyrical, poetic, cutting right to the heart. You don't read it so much as feel it. Savor it for its beauty, its power, and for its ultimate message of unity, inclusion and universal love.

• "Claire and Mia Fontaine, authors of *Come Back: A Mother and Daughter's Journey Through Hell and Back*

This riveting memoir of extreme loss and unimaginable gain recounts the story of a child who, although unable to express herself, lives fully aware of her limiting circumstances. Robbed of speech and bodily control, and despite her loving parents' best efforts to help her, Peyton Goddard suffered neglect and ongoing abuse by many who dismissed her as autistic and severely mentally retarded. No one could have imagined that she possessed a brilliant mind in her uncooperative body until her first opportunity to communicate electronically at age 22 when she typed

• *am intlgnt*, a breakthrough reminiscent of *The Miracle Worker*. Today Peyton is following through on her vow to be an advocate on behalf of other devalued people. Her inspirational life helps readers

transcend stereotypes and join her in the radical notion that, as she says, "All people are vastly valuable. Treasure all because great is each."

All I can say about this powerful book is Wow, Wow, Wow! This memoir by a mother and daughter team will leave you stunned and mesmerized. The daughter has severe developmental disabilities. In the 1980s autism was not well known or understood but I think that would be the current diagnosis. Her determined mother pushed for all the help she could get both from the medical and educational communities. She got many different diagnoses and much frustration. She just KNEW her daughter Peyton understood but the professionals mostly disagreed and told her she had no intelligence at all. When young she seemed to be responding to treatment and could speak a bit but it suddenly all stopped and she withdrew and even became violent. This went on for many years as she grew up and became a big physically powerful woman. The parents had to keep everything locked - slept with her in double bolted doors, kept her wrapped up so she wouldn't spread her feces everywhere - walls, curtains, beds, her own hair and mouth. The perseverance and devotion of the parents is mind boggling. These are really heroic people, though they would be the first to deny it. The father, completely devoted to his daughter, gives up a good job to try to run his own business so she will have a place to work when she grows up. He works 80 hour weeks and it doesn't make it, but his devotion to her never waivers. He has a special bond with her and is so relaxed that he can get her to do things like ride a bike, swim, ski. The mother is the opposite personality - anxious, a worry wart and an absolutely committed fighter for her daughter. They refuse to institutionalize her. Finally comes a breakthrough - but I won't spoil it by telling you anymore. Read it! I read it on my Kindle but have already ordered a hard copy to send to someone.

An amazing story of an autistic girl and her faithful mother who would not give up in getting her daughter the ability to communicate with the rest of the world when the odds were stacked against them. Peyton, although her speech was not intelligible, was intelligent and aware of everything happening around her. She was finally given a voice--and is able to tell what is happening to her, and what happened in the past. Her life was opened to us. We admire her greatly for sharing her life. We weep for the hard things that happened to her. We rejoice over the good that happened and will continue to happen. This book gives us hope.

Simply outstanding... this book has it all- bitter misunderstanding, love, segregation, acceptance, everyday struggles, inspiration- and an awesome sense of humor. What a much needed

perspective for those struggling to seek or provide inclusion in any walk of life- from those familiar with autism to those who just enjoy well-written, worth-while, and meaningful stories. You don't need to have any knowledge of the condition of autism to understand the struggles Peyton and her family endured, not to mention the moments of profound love you can't help but be moved by. Peyton and Dianne's stories are woven together perfectly in a style that is not only fun to read, but often painful and touching at the same time. Peyton's words will make you re-think how the world ought to be, how we can all be better at providing acceptance and love. This book is a treasure.

If you've ever wanted an inside look at child development, autism, and the educational system's response to such individuals, this is it. Written retrospectively, from the mother's viewpoint, an innocent child, whose childhood is derailed by expressive illness and abuse, makes countless dead-end forays into treatment before arriving at the means to unlock the protagonist's inner life by the use of typewritten access, called Facilitated Communication (FC). Spiced throughout this biography is the child's FC comments, written in high prose, which resonate deeply, as one speaking from the heart of mankind as a precocious sage. To survive, and indeed thrive by learning to "talk", and then become a Valedictorian college grad is phenomenal, if not miraculous.

Furthermore, this same person is a motivational "speaker", a proponent for the rights of those marginalized by autism and other disabilities. The clear message here is that we all have gifts, though latent and often never discovered. The renewal of a "less than" life is a testament to spiritual development, a going beyond the strait-jacket definitions of diagnoses and intelligent quotas. In a world that increasingly devalues life that is less than perfect or unwanted, this book beams brightly promoting childhood, womanhood, and recovery. Nicely, it reads as a face-paced novel. One knows things will turn out all right, but the surprises and tragedies along the way make it a compelling venture, drawing the reader into the rich inner life of one not known to have one. Read it, buy it for a friend, pass it on, and you'll be adding your vote to a world that craves understanding where it so lacks it.

If you have a child who doesn't speak, please read Peyton's book. If you teach children who can't talk, please read Peyton's book. It will tear your heart up, but then perhaps you can understand the principle of the least dangerous assumption (LDA): That when people can't tell us, we must assume they are intelligent. We must integrate everyone. We must end segregation and the use of seclusion in public schools across this country. See also, *Restraint and Seclusion: Hear Our Stories*.

Having attended a school district intent on inclusion from an early age, autism and other similar developmentally-challenged situations are not unfamiliar to me. But to read Peyton, Dianne, & Pat's story with all curtains withdrawn was a real challenge and inspiration. I cried, got pissed, and ultimately finished inspired. Would love to read more about Peyton's thoughts on peace & justice, a pleasant surprise topic at the end. For while the story begins as a struggle for a family with autism, then inclusion, and ultimately faith, it wraps up well beyond any specific "struggle" and the overall crux of all problems: the lack of justice.

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