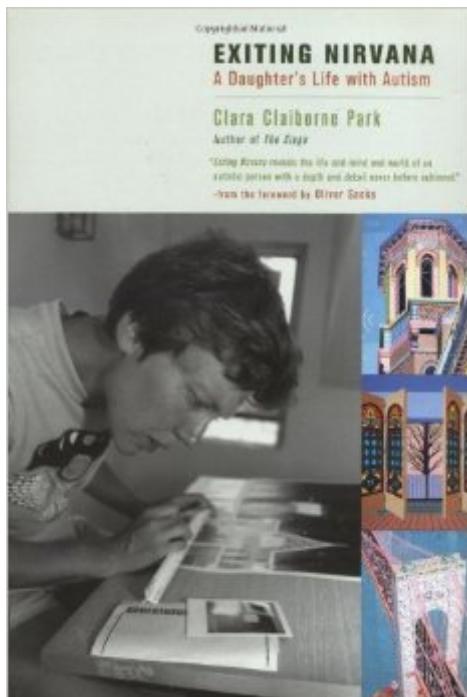


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Exiting Nirvana: A Daughter's Life With Autism



Synopsis

Exiting Nirvana" is a strong and affecting profile of an artist with autism, beautifully written by her mother. . . . Skillfully weaving in theories of autism with the experience of raising an autistic child, Park goes beyond individual history to address the wider question of what it means to be human".--from the National Magazine Awards presentation.

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Back Bay Books (March 28, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0316691240

ISBN-13: 978-0316691246

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

I read an excerpt of this book in Harper's magazine before I found the book itself and was mesmerized by the account of living with an autistic child - written by of the parent of one. It is clear that Clara Claiborne Park, the mother of Jessy Park, has also tried to understand her daughter's perceptions of the world, at least as much as any non-autistic person can, and to reveal that world to "outsiders" (those with no first-hand experience being with an autistic person). She has done an admirable job. I've read quite a bit about autism and autistic children and this book ranks among the best. In addition to her own feelings, Jessy's mother uses Jessy's own quotations and poems to try and help others understand her daughter's world. Like another relatively well-known autistic, Temple Grandin, Jessy is a "high-functioning" autistic. She can hold down a job, she has had art exhibitions of her drawings and she attended school for many years. Still, her world is far from what most of us would call normal and her social interactions with people outside her family are still rather limited. She has trouble with unexpected changes in her usual routine and she has never fallen in love, at least not with another person. She sees the world in minute detail in some areas, creating drawings

that are extremely precise and accurate, and yet fails to grasp the subtle nuances of social give and take, the emotional vocabulary so many of us take for granted. What I found particularly fascinating about this book was the way it changed my perspective about what normalcy is.

Existing Nirvana: a daughter's life with autism, by Clara Claiborne Park, is a book about Jessy, the author's daughter, growing up with autism. Although it would seem to be hard growing up with autism, rather than focusing on the negative, Park shares the story of her daughter focusing on her differences from 'normal' people in society and stressing the remarkable progress Jessy has made despite her abnormalities. This progress has allowed her to mentally and socially move more and more from her own world, 'Nirvana', into the world in which everyone else operates. By giving an account of Jessy's life, the reader becomes more aware of the disability and its characteristics. The book focuses on the way individuals with autism think and even their speech. The speech portion of the story is more focused on Jessy specifically because her speech was worse than most individuals with autism. Park uses journals and pictures Jessy has drawn to looking deeper into her speech, thought process, portraits, and her current living. Through these different aspects, the reader becomes enlightened on the type of characteristics that define autism. One of the many strengths of Existing Nirvana is that readers receive an accurate account of autism by the specific analysis of the way individuals with this disability think and respond to situations. In addition to this, it shows the possible personal growth from childhood to adulthood of someone with autism. One of the weaknesses is that Park does not focus on Jessy's negative qualities. Although they are not totally ignored, the book idealizes autism by continually expressing Jessy's happiness. "She is still happy.

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