

Remote is Beautiful

By Jason Oldford

I've often wondered what the expression "The seventh son of a seventh son" meant, so one day I Googled it and found things like "special," "unique," and "one of a kind" as definitions. It's also the opening line of Sheena Easton's 1982 hit "You Could Have Been with Me." To go a bit off-topic and into the humour zone, one of my brothers had this aluminum baseball bat made by a company called Easton, and whenever we asked him what his bat's name was, he'd say, "Sheena."

Anyway, back to our topic: From the perspective of an autistic, I see that expression as more of a feeling of remoteness, as if someone were born to someone who was the seventh son to a couple, and then he had seven sons, the youngest of whom had a child, so you get that feeling of remoteness. Then Sheena (the singer, not my brother's bat) says "Maybe that's why you're such a strange and special one." Now some autistics may be offended if I describe them as "strange." Well, a lot of people do see us that way in the sense of "odd" or "eccentric," but after having just checked my trusty Roget's Thesaurus, one of the synonyms I found for "strange" is "wonderful." So, let's word Sheena's lyrics a bit differently (again, the singer, not the bat). In an autistic context, maybe we could say "You're remote, and that's what makes you so wonderful and special. I admire that quality in you, and I can bring you out of your shell if you'd give me a chance." Sounds to me like someone's trying to get through to someone who's in a class of their own.

Then there's the third line in that song: "You can't even seem to love yourself, and with a few exceptions, not anyone else." If this person—and maybe a lot of others too—thinks we're special and wonderful, then that third line could be interpreted as how some autistics feel about themselves. Sometimes things like rejection (employment, social, whatever) take a toll on them and they come down hard on themselves. Of course, they do have some friends and, of course, their family, so maybe they're the few exceptions.

Folks, sometimes you may think life dealt you a bad hand, and because of that, we may not seem to love ourselves because, well, we don't think anyone loves us, but know this: We may be remote in a lot of cases, but we are special and wonderful.



About the Author

My name is Jason Oldford. I work as a translator for Lionbridge. I have been on the autism spectrum since the 1970s, and back then not much was known about autism. I learned to read by the time I turned three so I guess you could say I got a head start as I entered school. I was a year late doing that, but it was for the better.

Although I am one of your shy, introverted types of autistics, I do have a knack for memorizing things like license plate numbers, dates, facts and figures, and I fell in love with pop music at a young age. I love listening to countdown shows from the 80s, remembering the old songs, and being able to count them down from 20 to 1 with computer-chip accuracy (and remembering the numbers of some memorable tunes further down the charts).”