

Outside the Box (part seven)

by c.e.chapple

I recently watched the Netflix series, *Atypical*, and it resonated deeply within me. Watching it was incredibly affirming to me and even though it is a work of fiction, it resounded with truths. So much of what I saw reflected my own experience and made me reflect upon the course of my life.

The parents' struggle in *Atypical*, the anger and denial, the toll parenting of an ASD child places on a relationship, the strain ASD can place on the entire family dynamic; all these I experienced both personally and through observation.

My father was a brilliant man who had been a Valedictorian and outstanding athlete. His manner of parenting was sarcasm, ridicule and the belt. My stepmother was a functionally illiterate farmgirl who thought she could beat my eccentricities out of me. My natural mother, who had left because of emotional abuse from my father and his parents, was denied access to me. There was, quite simply, no one to protect me. This was to have far-reaching consequences.

When I began parenting, that early trauma, a lack of my own disability being properly identified for many years, having four children identified as "special needs" (with erroneous diagnoses in 3 out of 4 cases), ill health on the parts of both myself and my partner, and a lack of adequate community supports, combined to give my children a childhood that fell far short of what they all deserved. I do not know how to ever erase the multiplicity of mistakes I made, while living with chronic pain, mobility issues, and in poverty, a chicken and the egg dilemma of the worst kind.

One of my neighbours had her marriage fall apart because her spouse abused her and her children. I have had friends with children on the spectrum who have had similar experiences. The pain and heartbreak they expressed is beyond words. Why were their children any less deserving of love and understanding than anyone else?

I took parenting group after parenting group in hopes of being a better mom. Sadly, the parenting techniques recommended did not seem to work well. Many parents told me they did not know how I coped with four children and multiple diagnoses. No one seemed to have answers, not even the schools, who just wanted me to give my children pills. Why was it so hard to get help for our families and for ourselves?

One of my male friends, a man in his early 60's, told me that when he was young, his parents would make him stay outside in the yard whenever they had company. This brilliant, sensitive, articulate man was not considered fit to have social interactions. Today he has an engineering degree, is a manager of a company, and owns his own home. His is a story of incredible bravery against great adversity. How much more could my friend have achieved with a supportive family? Ditto for me!

About the Author

I am both a mother and a grandmother, from southwestern Ontario and currently residing in Victoria, B.C I have two degrees, one of which is in Honours English from the University of Western Ontario. I have been writing since I was eight years old, and have had numerous pieces published in anthologies, literary journals, newsletters, newspapers, and online. Writing has kept me sane in a crazy world. I am 65 and was not diagnosed with Asperger's until I was 45, after a lifetime of never fitting in, and suffering from both depression and social anxiety. I am also a multiple survivor of abuse, much of which would not have occurred had I been identified as a child. I am also a status Metis, a member of both BC Metis and the Painted Woodland Metis Tribe of Ontario.

