Book reviews

**A Guide to Psychological Understanding of People with Learning Disabilities**

Jenny Webb

*Routledge*

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**Welcome to my world**

‘MRS JOHNSON how do you feel?’ I blink, hardly seeing the head teacher and psychologist sitting in front of me.

It is 1994 and we are meeting to hear the results of my daughter Rachael’s assessments. I hear phrases such as ‘mild learning disability’, ‘autism’ ‘Asperger syndrome’ and ‘oppositional defiance disorder’, and I try to reconcile them with the impish child I cuddled last night as I tried to summon up the enthusiasm to read Charlotte’s Web for what seemed like the thousandth time.

How do I feel? Relieved that I am not the bookies’ favourite for ‘worst parent of the year’ award? Fearful for the future? Grieving that the story book of both our lives has been altered forever? Nothing has changed, everything has changed.

The psychologist touches my arm and I re-focus. He is fidgeting and looking at his watch, and I wonder whether in my role as a nurse I ever display such impatience or lack of compassion when delivering important news.

I hear more unfamiliar phrases: ‘statement of educational needs’, ‘support workers’, ‘institutional care’. ‘Sorry?’ I say, ‘institutional care?’ I actually laugh. This is absurd. Nothing has changed, everything has changed.

After the meeting I go to Rachael’s school to pick her up and find her in unfamiliar clothes. I am told that at lunchtime she had been found in the library, naked, reading Charlotte’s Web. ‘Rachael, what on earth are you doing?’ the teacher had said. ‘Reading a book. What does it look like?’ she had replied. Rachael’s clothes never materialised.

Then I hear her other misdemeanours: hit child on head with hymnbook, told teacher she was fat (‘but she is Mum’), sat under desk for most of a geography lesson, refused to read for the teacher (‘it wasn’t Charlotte’s Web’ Mum!).

Welcome to Planet Rachael. Fasten your seatbelt, you are in for a bumpy ride.

Wendy Johnson is the mother of Rachael and a matron in a general hospital
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