

Praise for Jude Morrow's

## WHY DOES DADDY ALWAYS LOOK SO SAD?

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"A powerful book for any parent/father trying to understand their child's struggles living with ASD. The book sends an inspiring message that loving your child conquers challenges, and that parenting is about the journey in discovering each other!"

—**Maisie Soetantyo, M.Ed.**,

RDI® Program Certified Consultant,  
Clinic Director, and co-founder of the CATCH clinic

"Jude Morrow's eye-opening personal story of being a parent with autism is inspiring. It sheds light on the unique challenges experienced by a father on the spectrum, and explores what happens when a kid with autism grows up!"

—**Harold "Hackie" Reitman, M.D.**,

founder of DifferentBrains.org

"In his remarkable first book, Jude Morrow takes us on a unique journey through the trials and triumphs of being both autistic and a single parent. Jude tells us about his childhood as an autistic person with all the challenges that presents and how becoming a social worker and helping others has strengthened him. Beyond that, this book, for the first time, shines a light on a rarely discussed subject: being an autistic adult. I applaud this book and recommend it to everyone. A stunning and original contribution to the broadening field of autism studies."

—**Ian Hale, PhD**, author, speaker, and autism expert

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A MEMOIR



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JUDE MORROW

Foreword by Bernie Siegel, MD  
author of *365 Prescriptions For The Soul* and *A Book of Miracles*



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# FOREWORD

Jude Morrow's book shares a lesson I learned years ago while working with cancer patients: There is always hope. All of us—as parents or children—need to accept that simple statement. When you do learn, desire and intention alter the world and cause things to happen that would not normally occur; and our mind and body become a unit instead of separate entities.

One of the biggest factors in a child's life is whether he or she feels loved or not by their parents. Those who do feel love live longer healthier lives. Parenting is really the most significant health issue there is. Just think about the fact that children become grandchildren to their parent's parents. Not a coincidence how grandparents judge you versus parents. I recommend we all become chosen mothers and fathers and love the children who choose us. We will save lives by doing that.

Jude makes a powerful statement: "Defeat makes a champion." I have run several marathons and once on the streets of New York a woman stood saying, "You're all winners!" over and over again. She was right because when you finish the race of life (or marathon in this case) you will receive your medal and know you made a difference.

Jude Morrow's book is his "journal of life" and I recommend we all write a "book" by keeping a journal of our life's experiences because by bringing forth what is within you, you truly save your life. I can also tell

you that rereading your words years later is very therapeutic, so learn from Jude and start the healing process now.

When you live in your heart, magic happens. Read Jude Morrow's story and learn from his experience and make your life easier through his experience and wisdom.

—Bernie Siegel, MD,  
author of *365 Prescriptions For The Soul*  
and *A Book of Miracles*



# PREFACE

The parenting journey is difficult for any first-time parent. With Asperger's, this brought new challenges: learning to interpret non-verbal cues, living my life according to my baby, and having to let go of my previous coping mechanisms to learn new ones. Ethan's earliest years were full of tears, tantrums, teething problems, sleepless nights, and confusion. Although I have to admit, 99.9 percent of these were from me and not Ethan.

I relied heavily upon my parents to help me build a positive relationship with Ethan and I certainly couldn't have managed without them. I had to go on an entirely different journey to get to where I am now.

I knew that Jupiter has seventy-nine known moons and where the swimming pool was located on the *Titanic*, yet I didn't know how to connect with this beautiful child who called me "Daddy." (For anyone interested, the *Titanic* swimming pool was on F-Deck above boiler room six.)

Trying to forge a connection when I can be naturally distant was exhausting for me, but the fact that Ethan could see my vulnerability in full meant that I had to change. One day I won! I will never free myself of Asperger's but I can learn to adapt to new situations, and this helped me connect with my son in a way I didn't think I was capable of.

When speaking of autism, I deliberately refrain from using the word “disorder.” My reason for this is that I view autism as a gift to be celebrated and cherished, not a burden to be pitied.

I want to demonstrate that those with autism can be successful, be happy, and be good parents. I hope people can take comfort from reading about the journey I have been on, and thank you for bringing me on yours.



# CHAPTER 1

**M**y earliest memory of my quirky behavior is lining up my toy cars on the windowsill in our living room when I was just three years old. I would ensure that all the little door handles were perfectly aligned, facing the same direction on the windowsill overlooking Derry. I remember my mum wanting to dust the windowsill and the look of anguish when she wanted to dust at the expense of moving my toy cars.

We lived in a small apartment in the heart of the city's Bogside. Our home was quite odd in that it was a three-bedroom house although it was on top of another house. It was almost a hybrid between a second-floor apartment and a house. We had a huge living room window that had a spectacular view of the city and I loved to stare out of it and watch the world go by; I think we all did. I loved living there because there was carpet throughout the house (except for the kitchen and bathroom). I love the feeling of carpet on my feet and after we left this house in later years, Mum opted for wooden floors and tiles.

I was above average height and weight for a three-year-old. I looked older than my sister, Emily, who is two years my senior. Mum and Dad married and had children very young. They were both the youngest of their large families and wanted to grow up with their children. Mum grew up in the area we lived in at the time and her parents lived on the next street. My grandfather was eleven years my grandmother's senior and he passed away when I was very young. My dad's parents adopted

him when he was a baby. They adopted him quite late in life and my memory of his parents is quite limited and he was raised in part by his much older siblings. His parents developed complex care needs in my early childhood and both passed away in nursing care when I was eleven.

Dad was working as accounts clerk and wasn't at home often during the day, leaving Mum to fend for herself against my quirky yet frustrating behaviors. Mum knew that moving my cars was the end of her day. One slight move of even one car was apocalyptic in my little mind. It was the end of the world. I couldn't verbalize very well and this resulted in many hours of screaming and hitting.

Despite this, Mum's warmth toward me is the same now at twenty-eight years of age as it was when I was three. When I come to visit her I get the same welcoming smile as I always did when she picked me up from playgroups or school. Mum and Dad were always proud of me and have stuck by me and defended me in almost every situation. I knew they were proud of me always, despite my social limitations that have always existed.

I went to two playgroups before I went to primary school. The first was a giant hall near where I lived. It was a huge open space that once operated as a nightclub. It had a high ceiling, a smooth lacquered floor, and not too many bright colors. I really enjoyed this playgroup and they had a box of toy cars for me to play with. Cars were my world and although my vocabulary and verbal skills were minimal, I could name any type of car passing the building. I was a little encyclopedia of contemporary and historic cars. So much so that the few words I could say clearly were car manufacturers.

This playgroup was like a haven for me. I had a whole new box of cars to organize on a step that used to be the stage in its former glory as a nightclub. I forgot that there were other children there. When some-

one approached me to play with the cars it was a different story. There would be a standoff between the other children and me for the cars. I wouldn't hand them over. Due to my size, I generated somewhat of a fear factor, especially with the staff. I was unpredictable and my wrath was something to be feared.

There was a chart of all the toys that were in the room along with our names. It would show the parents what their little treasures got up to in the playgroup. There was a sandbox, a water tray, paint, blocks, crayons, and of course my cars. I only ever played with the cars and nothing else.

The situation came to a head when children kept trying to play with the cars with me. I wouldn't allow this. In my mind the building would collapse if another child dared to play with the cars. One of the staff approached me, told me to hand over the cars and to share. I had no real concept of sharing because in my eyes I was performing a vital function within the playgroup. Nobody could organize those cars, only me. The staff member took the cars from me and I went berserk! I began to scream, punch, scratch, and cry in full view of the playroom.

I was back to square one. Back at home. Mum was told that the playgroup couldn't meet my needs and that I would have to go to one that catered for children with mixed abilities. Even at the age of three I could read and write. I couldn't communicate verbally but could understand everything those around me were saying. I have this image of myself staring out the window at the rain, knowing my cars were still in the playgroup that I couldn't return to.

My maternal grandmother was very present throughout my life. She was my mum's main support in the daunting task of helping me transition from childhood to adulthood. There were many occasions Emily and I stayed with her to allow my mum and dad to have some much-needed rest. I awakened around 4 AM every morning and would

demand Mum come downstairs with me to play with my cars. Despite her tired eyes, she put on her large round glasses, her warm smile, and watched me play with my cars. It must have been agony for her waking at that time every morning and staying with me until very late at night.

When my son was born in 2013, I couldn't imagine not having my parents around to assist and offer me advice. Autism and Asperger's didn't have labels as we know them today when my paternal grandparents were growing up. The institutional care model of wartime UK and Ireland likely would have resulted in full-time institutional care had I been born in the 1930s. Children of differing abilities were viewed as the product of previous sin and wrongdoing in the eyes of the churches. I am glad I was born when I was.

Mum never gave up on me. She took me to some mother and toddler groups and I used to bring my cars from the windowsill with me. They were like comfort blankets for me and I felt complete with them, in the same way a crown completes a king. When I got down to my vital function of car arranging at one mother and toddler meeting, another parent approached Mum and asked her if I had autism. This wasn't something that she had considered before and I imagine there was a sense of denial. I would hate to think that before this lady approached her, she felt my behaviors were a result of being a bad mother or inadequate caregiver. I don't remember Mum ever shouting at me as a child or withholding affection toward me.

Writing about these times gives me a newfound respect for Mum and Dad that I never had. I almost feel apologetic for being the way I was. I could have been the blue-eyed boy. Instead I was aggressive, regimented, and my verbal skills mostly involved screaming and crying. I was a frightened child and prone to tears. I would lie in bed clutching my cars since I didn't trust anyone downstairs not to touch them while

I slept. Siblings can often play pranks on one another, although Emily never dared steal my cars, as she knew the tsunami of unimaginable terror that would befall her and the rest of the family if she did.

Mum started her own quest to take me to specialists. She wanted to find out if I had autism or other forms of learning disability. It was clear that I functioned higher than the average three-year-old, although only intellectually. I could read, understand prompt cards, and follow the instruction. My biggest setback was that I still couldn't speak. I went to medical appointments knowing that I was to be taken away from the routine of arranging my cars at home. On several occasions, I destroyed the waiting room to the point where Mum and Dad had to admit defeat and take me home.

I was taken to see a geneticist to find if there was a genetic cause for my yet-undiagnosed condition. Before she could tell what little she had to tell, I kicked her in the shin and ripped her blouse off. Mum and Dad laugh about this now but I imagine this was quite embarrassing for them at the time. I have to admit I find this slightly amusing as well.

Following many battles with pediatric teams and many casualties along the way, I was referred to a new playgroup that catered for children with mixed abilities and differing needs. The new playgroup was very different visually. It was attached to a local health center and care home for the elderly. It was a small and unassuming red brick building on the outside. Inside, the playroom bloomed to life as soon as I entered. There were so many bright colors and pictures on the walls. I immediately felt more comfortable as it gave a sense of order the previous playgroup didn't have. It was much more welcoming. The difference in my eyes was going from a dark and dreary hall to the penthouse suite in the Ritz Hotel, Paris. I have never stayed there although I hear it is lovely!

It didn't seem as chaotic to me and was more organized. The previous playgroup had a collective white noise that frightened me, but

the new one sounded as sweet as a metronome. I remember the staff-to-child ratio was much higher, too. There were more opportunities for individual work with the staff and I enjoyed the one-on-one attention. I was used to singular attention at home, although Emily was very much present. She must have understood in her early years that I was a much more complex character than she was.

In this new playgroup, I could play with the cars without distraction and even allowed some of the other children to join—though I was always very much in charge. I didn't feel as different in this environment because some of the other children were like me. They had their own jobs to do and I had mine. Other children could be arranging paintbrushes or counting the floor tiles. We all knew our roles within the group and it was much more structured. We were all experts in our given fields and trusted one another greatly. Due to this, the playgroup ran like clockwork. Almost like a factory assembly line.

In this playgroup I met a new friend. His name was Ben and he had Down syndrome. I allowed him to play with the cars with me and enjoyed his company. We became very close. He wasn't as mobile and had difficulties with walking and movement. Mum informs me that I was very kind and protective of Ben. One Christmas, Santa came to visit our playgroup and parents were invited to come along. Ben took his place on Santa's knee and we were all taking turns to tell him what we wanted for Christmas.

Ben was so enamored by Santa that he wouldn't get off his knee. Mum began to panic as it was approaching my turn to sit on Santa's knee. Ben had behavioral needs very similar to mine and was territorial. As I approached Santa, Mum's heart rate increased, as Ben was in danger if he didn't remove himself from Santa's knee by the time it was my turn. But, that day I allowed Ben to remain with Santa. It was at that moment I displayed some form of empathy and compassion for another

human being. I think Mum realized at this point that perhaps I wasn't so bad! It's nice to know that I allowed this at such a young age.

The playgroup staff was so kind, not just because there were a lot more of them. They were obviously trained and educated on the nature of our conditions. I felt really involved and remember drawing and painting pictures. I remember copying down words from signs onto the paper I had in front of me. The room was very colorful and had signs and pictures to describe what certain objects were. It must have been strange for the staff looking at the group's pictures: drawings of Mummy and Daddy, houses, and then my page, which had "ENSURE DOOR IS CLOSED AT ALL TIMES—THANK YOU."

I remained at the playgroup until June of 1995. I vaguely remember Mum and Dad telling me that I wouldn't be going back and that I would be going somewhere else in September. This was primary 1. I had a false sense of security of school because I thought it would be like the playgroup I was in. I arrived at the playgroup in the morning, did my duty to the best of my ability, and went home. But it was clear that I didn't have a learning disability or a cognitive deficit, so I was assessed as being able to go to a mainstream school. Sadly, some of my little comrades from playgroup did not meet the developmental milestones for mainstream education and went to different schools that could meet their needs.

September came quickly and I remember walking into this giant building—well at least it seemed giant to me at that time. I was going from one playgroup room to an entire school. The school was similar to my playgroup in that it was a short walk from my house, albeit in a different direction. It was an old building and had stood for at least a hundred years before I attended. I remember feeling excited. I had a uniform and felt that I would fit in somewhat if we all dressed the same, at least in appearance.