

## **What is the book about?**

'When I grow up I want to be a cat' is all about surviving the education system with Aspergers Syndrome. Not only does the book give my own unique perspective, of my time from Nursery school to University, it interviews nine other individuals on the spectrum about their experiences too. Many of these individuals work for Open Theatre Company Birmingham and Coventry and have gone on in life to do wonderful and creative work within the arts. The book's title is taken from something I said when I was at school. I was asked by a teacher what I wanted to be when I grew up. All of the other children said "Nurse, Doctor, Lawyer or fireman." Not me, I wanted to be a brown and white cat. My reason for this was I could be fat, lazy, sit by the fire and have plenty of love and attention. I still live by this philosophy today except that being a housecat does not pay the bills and so I have had to go to University to do more advanced training.

The book is written in an accessible way so everyone should be able to read it no matter if they have any diagnosis or not. The book includes a foreword written by Richard Hayhow of Open Theatre Company which includes his thoughts on creating positive environments for young people with learning disabilities to thrive in. He also writes about his first impressions and his experience of working alongside me. The book includes beautiful pictures drawn by Matt Recardo and Sam Kilpatrick who are both on the spectrum and are making this their debut as professional illustrators. The book is split into four big chapters which are about Nursery, Primary school, Secondary school and University. It is special because not many books are written by Autistic people for Autistic people and their carers and families. Many of the books out there are written by individuals who claim that they are Autism experts but who have no experience of having the condition themselves. They have no understanding of what life is like for us or of what it feels like to experience a meltdown.

The book also interviews my parents, teachers and my school support worker. This is because I wish to break away from us and them attitudes in healthcare. I want to have conversations with professionals about how to better support individuals on the spectrum and I want this book to begin a revolution. I wish for individual care planning for all children. I want their strengths and preferences to be taken into account no matter whether they have autism or not. I also want to use this book as a means to uncover experiences of others with Asperger syndrome who are at school right now and may not be as able to articulate their needs and wishes. What this book does not do is speak on behalf of all people with Aspergers. The book is my experience and mine alone. I do not wish to represent or advocate for any group of people unless I am asked to directly by them. This book also cannot explain the experiences of individuals who are on what gets called 'the lower functioning end of the spectrum.' I dislike this term and I explain why in my book but this is the best that language can give us at the moment. The book cannot tell of their experiences because I do not know what it is like to be completely none verbal. I do not know what it is like to need 24 hour support or care. All I can do is use this book to start a conversation about care in England and about what we need to do as professionals moving forward.

## **How the book began**

I began writing this book in 2009 when I was studying my first degree. The book was initially written as a series of blogs on my Universities Mental Health support website. Each blog was about a different topic surrounding Aspergers syndrome and Autism. I was working as a peer mentor at the time. Supporting individuals with learning needs to access university societies, facilities and manage their time and workloads. My boss at the time thought that there was enough material to present it

in book format. Further, my father suggested that I write a book when I was at home and so 'When I grow up I want to be a cat' was born.

### **Why has it taken you so long to publish it?**

I must say it has taken me a while to publish the book because I am a perfectionist. I wanted to be the first Autistic person to write a book of this kind but I was beaten to it in 2019 and several similar books have followed in the last few years. Initially I was saddened by this but actually it is a great achievement for the autism community because now there are several books that they can choose from in order to gain the correct support, all written by Autistic individuals so in my mind that is a wonderful thing. My book includes lots of different research that has been conducted over the past fifteen years and includes all of the most recent facts and knowledge about Aspergers and Autism. The world of research will never stop and so there has to be a point where you say I have included all I can now otherwise the book would never have been finished. It took me a while to figure out where that stopping point was.

### **Why should I buy a copy?**

This book is for you if you have ever wondered about Aspergers and Autism. You might have some behaviours and want to know about an Autistic experience? You might work with Autistic individuals in your setting and want to know how to support them better. You might be an Autistic person looking for some answers and support. You might be a parent or teacher of someone who has Autism. You might be a health professional who works with Autistic individuals. Whatever your reason, if you are looking for a brutally honest account of what it is like to have Asperger syndrome then look no further. Your book is here.

### **How can I buy a copy?**

The book will be available on Amazon via this link <https://www.amazon.co.uk/When-Grow-Want-Cat-Surviving-ebook/dp/B09G23L38G> and will also be available from the Alternative Voices website which is [www.alternative-voices.co.uk](http://www.alternative-voices.co.uk)