

## **FOREWORD**

You have picked up one of those rare books that can alter the trajectory of your life. And, if you have a child on the autism spectrum, this book can *certainly* enable you to change the life of that special person.

What you are about to read is a very moving story of a family's journey through autism – but it isn't *only* that. It is a practical and inspirational blueprint for how you can approach a child or adult who has special challenges. There is a lot to take from this book, and I am very excited for you to take it. The messages we receive and the advice we are often given when our children are diagnosed with autism or a related challenge can be incredibly unhelpful, counterproductive, and even unkind. Without question, this was true for Sally.

The difference with her is that, after weathering an incredible array of challenges with her son, with herself, and with the people trying to help her son, Sally breaks free. And, in so doing, she is able to help her son in the most profound way.

I feel a special kinship with Sally, her husband Erik, and Tim, their amazing son. I used to be where Tim was. I crossed the bridge that Tim has crossed.

When I was a young boy, I was diagnosed with severe autism, registering a tested I.Q. below 30. I didn't respond to my name or any other attempts at communication. I made no eye contact with others. I was mute, with no language or any verbal indication of wants whatsoever. I seemed completely shut off to the world, often appearing to be deaf. Although I displayed no interest in other people, I remained fascinated with inanimate objects, such as kitchen plates. In fact, I would often sit on the floor and spin a kitchen plate on its edge for hours and hours on end. Other repetitive behaviors, such as rocking back and forth or flapping my hands in front of my face, would continue throughout each day. I didn't want to be held and would often recoil from human touch.

After receiving the diagnosis, my parents raced from specialist to specialist, trying to find solutions. Instead, they received only the grimmest of prognoses.

I would be as I was for the rest of my life. I would never speak, certainly not in sentences. I would never have the capability to make

friends and form meaningful relationships. I would always prefer objects to people.

And the predictions mounted. I would never go to a regular school, have a girlfriend or a job, a first love or a last day of summer camp. For me, there would be no high school or college graduation, no buying my first car or moving into my first home, no marriage, no career.

I would, always and forever, be encapsulated within my own world. The recommendation: lifelong institutionalization.

The only reason that this future did not become *my* future was because my parents (authors and teachers Barry Neil Kaufman and Samahria Lyte Kaufman) had the guts to venture in an entirely new direction. Discarding the pessimism and behavior-modification focus of traditional autism treatment, my parents developed a program to reach me. They called it The Son-Rise Program®.

Rather than trying to force me to conform to a world that I did not yet understand, they began by joining me in my world. This led to the development of the first signature technique of The Son-Rise Program: joining. When I would spin a plate, my mother would get a plate of her own and spin with me. When I would rock back and forth, my mother would rock with me.

Although many professionals vociferously criticized my parents at the time, my parents proved incredibly prescient. As they joined me, I began to trust them, bond with them, and let them into my world. For the first time, I started looking at them and *smiling* at them. They were valuing my world, my experience, and my interests.

And as I let them in, they encouraged me to come out, inviting me to engage with them, communicate with them, and play with them. They slowly built up my social interaction by designing games and activities centered around interests and motivations that I already had, such as animals and airplanes.

After my parents worked with me every day for three and a half years, I emerged from my autism without any trace of my former condition. All of those futures that I was never supposed to have – friends, girlfriends, first loves and last days of summer camp, sports teams, graduating college (I graduated from the Ivy League's Brown University with a degree in Biomedical Ethics), a fulfilling career, a wonderfully loving marriage – I went on to experience all of them.

After my autism journey, my father recounted our story in the bestselling book *Son-Rise: The Miracle Continues*, which was made

into an award-winning NBC-TV movie called *Son-Rise: A Miracle of Love*. In 1983, my parents founded the Autism Treatment Center of America<sup>®</sup>, part of a charitable non-profit organization in Sheffield, Massachusetts. The ATCA serves as the worldwide teaching center for The Son-Rise Program. Parents and professionals from all over the world attend our training programs so that they can help their children in a loving, respectful, and open-hearted way to grow beyond their original prognoses.

Now, I am the former CEO and current Director of Global Education at the ATCA, and I've spent the past twenty-five years working to get the techniques of The Son-Rise Program into the hands of families who can use them, whether by helping families individually, working with professionals, or conducting lectures and seminars across the globe (and online). It warms my heart that my book, *Autism Breakthrough: The Groundbreaking Method That Has Helped Families All Over the World*, has changed the autism conversation in the many countries in which it was published and translated.

In fact, it was at a lecture I did in London in January of 2008 where I first met Sally. She took The Son-Rise Program strategies and techniques I outlined in the lecture right home with her to help her son. How incredible that my journey served as the catalyst – and then the roadmap – for Tim's magnificent transformation!

This book you've cracked open is a testament to the power of the parent. I am living proof of the fact that nothing has a bigger impact on any child's growth and flowering than the parent. No one loves their child like a parent. No one has the long-term commitment and dedication that a parent has. And, in truth, no 4-hour evaluation can possibly match the day in, day out experience that a parent has with their own child. It is the leveraging of this – rather than the dismissing of it – that holds the key to the fruition of our children's potential.

One thing I know for sure is that change comes from being willing to do something different. *You've got to do something different to get something different.*

Change doesn't come from wishing for it or begging for it, nor from railing against how things are. And it usually doesn't come from doing what everyone else is doing. It comes from being willing to step outside the box – to *leap* outside the box – and take a route that is

not only different but often *opposite* to what everyone says you're supposed to do.

And that is exactly what Sally did. (And that's what Erik did, too!) Sally had the daring to listen to her own voice...and then follow it. And that redounded directly to the benefit of her son and, ultimately, to her entire family.

Sally's son Tim had a lot of enormous challenges – from his inability to communicate (in a way that others could understand) to his difficulty with just getting through the day to his full-throttle meltdowns. These issues did not just get in Tim's way; they dominated a lot of the whole family's daily experience.

Like any caring mother, Sally searched for ways to help him. Unlike most, when she saw things that didn't work and didn't feel right to her, she didn't just go along. She changed course. She had the courage to value what she saw and felt above what she was told. She put her son's future over the avoidance of being judged by others.

That's what made the difference.

She could have forced Tim to remain in a cookie-cutter educational system that wasn't working for him. She didn't. She could have done as she was told and tried to stamp out Tim's differentness and uniqueness. She didn't. Instead, she took the first step in any successful Son-Rise Program: She prioritized what Tim loved, valued, and needed above adhering to artificial benchmarks. Above what experts preached. And above what the world demanded.

When Sally tried Son-Rise Program techniques, and Tim responded powerfully from within himself, she went with what worked for Tim. She chose something that felt honoring of her son and right for her.

And, wow, did Tim ever blossom. Explosively! Spectacularly! Social, friendly, funny, thoughtful, caring, and incredibly creative, Tim is an exceptional human being. He has unbelievable musical talent, but he doesn't exhibit those talents (writing songs, playing the piano) in a solitary way but rather in a social way. (On YouTube, I recently watched a hilarious and musical take on Robin Hood (all written by Tim) starring Tim and his (neurotypical) friends. It was awesome.)

Read this book, and let it inspire you and guide you. Just as Sally, Erik, and Tim did great things, so can you, and so can your family.

Our kids are capable of more.

We are capable of more.

As Sally and I had dinner together at the restaurant of the London hotel I was staying at while doing a lecture in London several years after that first lecture at which we met, I was bowled over. This woman, who years ago was (understandably) lost and scared, was a beaming powerhouse! Confident, strong, enthusiastic, and justifiably proud of what she and her son had accomplished, she thanked me – tearfully – and told me how excited she was about an idea she had: to write a book about her family’s journey. I said that I thought the idea was absolutely wonderful and could help a lot of other families out there. And she did it!

And I will tell you: Sally’s sincerity, honesty (she doesn’t shy away from discussing her own difficulties and stumbles), and, ultimately, her growth come bursting through the pages. Wherever you are in your own journey, I am 100% certain that the reading of this book in your hands will be a very awakening and transformative experience. I stand with you and celebrate you as you embark upon this most amazing adventure.

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