

Segue

online literary journal

SIOBHAN HARVEY



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A Boy Called Cloud (or In Praise of Cloud Zealots, Time-Travelers, Polyglots and Positive Labels Befriended)

In the days when my son began primary school in Auckland, New Zealand, he loved to stare at clouds floating freely above the entrapment of his classroom. At the siren of the three o'clock bell, he led me to Tahuna-Torea Nature Reserve, which was located in the eastern suburbs close to school. There a playground containing a cymbiform climbing frame afforded him expansive views across waters nearby, the Tamaki Estuary. The terns, stilts, godwits and white-faced herons schooled at water's edge; the nautical comings-and-goings of vessels with berths at the local Half Moon Bay marina; the million dollar mansions teetering at precipice along the rocky outcrop of the neighbourhood known as Bucklands Beach; the distant pinch of the Hunua Ranges which encircle the east of Auckland: all this and more my son's alert eyes witnessed. But it was the sky, its mimicries and metamorphoses, which captivated him most. During winter, as we made for his fraught classroom, morning tides rolled in grey fogs, magicians' cloaks, which veiled firmament, inlet and earth. My son aloft the climbing frame disappeared. Echoing and ancient, his voice called through mist, "Mummy, I'm inside the belly of a cloud!" During spring and autumn, gales up and tides choppy, he watched the Estuary dance with cumuli humilis and dozens of Day-Glo sailboards like many excitable butterflies. At weekends, the tide out, my son used the climbing frame to hunt down dragons. The raggedy beast-smoke of altocumuli nearby told him they lived in a cave hollowed into the clay headlands below our cold, rundown in-zone rental. Most afternoons, while an impatience of children, freed from the classroom coop and sticky afternoons of studying geniuses like Van Gogh and Einstein, played tag, swung or slid about us, their parents huddled in jabber closeby, my son and I lay atop the climbing frame, stared up at families of clouds sitting in the stretched canopy of sky, and played his favorite game.

"They're like boats," he began. "No, birds wearing police hats. Or Christmas trees walking. Or Cloudmother holding her Cloudboy's hand."

∴

In New Zealand, 40,000 people have Autism Spectrum Disorder.¹ Combining ailments like Autism, Aspergers and ADHD, people with ASD have differing combinations and differing degrees of severity of these symptoms. For all, ASD is a life-long developmental disability affecting social, communication, concentration and learning skills. Often sufferers, especially those with moderate ASD, are also Gifted and Talented Learners, their superior intelligence masking sociable and attention difficulties. Consequently, for children, growing as they are, it may take some time before a full diagnosis of their condition is reached. This was the case for my son who, aged four, was only classified as Gifted.

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What I failed to perceive in my son's cryptography of clouds was that his fixation turned him (an axiom true of most hobbyists, fans and fixators) into something akin to that which most beguiled him. In the sentient, nephological companionship he found close to the mouth of the Tamaki Estuary, where stratus, cumulus, stratocumulus and nimbostratus formed near to or in the humid air above Auckland's central waterway, the Waitemata Harbour, and were then funnelled down river, my son became a cloud—detached from the conventional and everyday, isolated, peripheral and obscure in others' eyes, even, in that first year of schooling, those of his teacher.

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Fresh from an English education college, she reported that during her doctrinaire hour of mat-time when her small, effervescent charges were expected to sit still, arms and legs crossed, my son was possessed, St. Vitus Dance-like. At other times, she said, he ignored her instructions in favour of drifting off, his body and mind turned towards the window and the sky above.

Cloudboy, my private nickname for him, was born.

When the teacher asked Cloudboy why he didn't listen to her instructions, he said her repetitiveness shaped his boredom. He understood, he explained, what she wanted the first time she mentioned it; everything thereafter carried him into the clouds. Consequently, during mat-time he sat at his desk occupied by a book, and only came to the mat when instructions were re-emphasised for the final time.

Within months, though, my son's teacher was aflutter again. This time, her concern centred upon Cloudboy's self-portrait. Having lectured me about how a 5-year-old's ability to conventionally represent himself was an educational and developmental milestone, she conjured Cloudboy's self-portrait from her bottom drawer as though it was a difficult trick. It bore a white, puffy face and body, wings, black beady eyes, marble wisps for legs and claws instead of toes. He was, he told his teacher, a cloud. In spite of Cloudboy's diagnosis as Gifted, the teacher viewed his explanation and self-representation as willful rejections of rules others had followed and thus potential signs of mental retardation.

"You should get him checked out again," she chided me.

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As if the air emanated the teacher's unsettlement, students' attitudes towards Cloudboy hardened. Play-dates and birthday-party invitations dried up. When his birthday arrived, his invitations were scrunched up in front of him or, later, declined or ignored by parents.

Then, towards the end of the school year, Cloudboy completed a project on New Zealand birds with a discourse upon the extinct, giant ratite, the Moa. These were birds his teacher (from

England) was ignorant of and so dismissed as dinosaurs. When she made him repeat the exercise, derision from his peers ensued. Words like ‘strange’ and ‘weird’ rained from their mouths.

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ASD children are codes waiting to be broken.

Like a cloud interpreted and reinterpreted, Cloudboy was retested a year after his identification as a Gifted and Talented Learner. This time, the Educational Psychologist expanded her diagnosis. Aspergers, ADHD and Overexcitabilities had solidified more evidently in Cloudboy.² In this, he became officially categorised as “Disabled,” enabling him to receive a weekly government allowance. A course of Ritalin was prescribed to help temper his ADHD. During her reassessment of Cloudboy, the Educational Psychologist also noted his self-esteem had plummeted to a point where he believed the labels others applied to him at school. This, the Educational Psychologist worried, might reap irreparable damage if it continued.

∴

Whatever the environment, words are electric. Positive or negative, each word carries a charge, its meaning, which attracts other words and their meanings to it. Abusive labels like “strange” attract others, equally offensive, like “weird,” “freak,” “queer” and so on. In regimented, conformist settings like schools, these stigmatic words are at their most galvanic, the single remark powerful enough to have a lasting impact. That schools’ cohorts are our most vulnerable, impressionable and intense members of society means their uber-orthodox, uber-regulated settings, where words have enduring effect, inevitably—even if not intentionally—molds divisive landscapes in which the vast majority (the conventional) belong and a minority (the unconventional) are outcast. Such divisiveness is normalized through labeling, the use of the word and its power to archetype individuals. Once voiced, once reinforced through repeated utterances, the word—“strange,” “queer,” “freak”—is worn, a piece of clothing, a cloud cap, by their owners for the duration of their time at school.

∴

I wish I could say that the year Cloudboy became an ardent nephologist was the year things started going badly for him at school, because then I could understand why he found conventional education troublesome, and I could originate solutions to liberate him from further ostracism. In truth, however, long before Cloudboy became a zealot of clouds, he found formal learning, self-discipline, and socializing as fraught and damaging as a stormy supercell.

When, aged two, Cloudboy attended Playcentre, there were fitful bursts of clay-making, dough-craft and dress-ups. Always friendless, he found only woodwork, a hammer, nails and searing noise sustained his attention. Those were the years when he short-circuited the electricity

by sticking his fingers into a toaster, broke his clavicle falling from his bed, banged his head against bench-top and matai-floor whenever he didn't get his way, and snatched at and sought to taste everything, including cat feces.

Later, after Cloudboy began Kindergarten, the Principal called me to a meeting about, what she called, his abnormal interaction with other children. She told me stories about how he spent days lost in various personae, including cats called Sergeant Tibbs, Tricksy and Jasper, dogs Copper and Chief, and a prosaically-named Tiger. Throughout he crawled upon all fours and answered his teachers' questions with barks, mews, or growls.

∴

When, where, and why did this all begin?

Did Cloudboy's cognitive differences and social and educational difficulties form hereditarily in me, a child frozen to the edge of the playground each day at primary school because she was unable to use words or movements to reach out to friends? Did they start life in Auckland 2003 at the moment of Cloudboy's conception? Or that warm January night in 2004 when I first dreamt Cloudboy into existence, moisture solidified into mist, a visitation of a boy and his name? Were his troubles birthed during those soulless months of his first year when, tired from four feeds per night and feeling my thirst for knowledge stifled by early motherhood, I talked voraciously to him whether I was changing his nappy or pushing him in a pram around the undulating streets of our deserted neighborhood? Or did they originate the day I took four-year-old Cloudboy to Auckland Museum where an exhibition, *Wonderland: The Mystery of the Orchid*, enticed him to ravenously read about the titular flowers and their importance in shaping Darwin's theory of evolution, then open a notebook and intricately transpose the miracle of each bloom onto white paper?

∴

Clouds. Papery orchids.

For Gifted ASD children like Cloudboy, obsessions are persistent, advanced, and, as if genera, take multiple forms. Not for them, the fixations of most children framed by age, peer interest, cultural and gender expectations, and consumer trends. Not them, the two-year-old fascinated by Handy Manny or Mickey Mouse Clubhouse who evolves into the four-year-old devoted to Little Einsteins into the six-year-old interested in Lego into the eight-year-old taken with sports.

No. At two, Cloudboy's expandable preoccupations included Spot the Dog, Blue's Clues, Maisie, Duplo, and books which stretched his imagination towards escapism such as Oliver Jeffers' *Lost and Found*, Eric Carle's "*Slowly, Slowly, Slowly*," *Said the Sloth*, and David McKee's *Elmer's New Friend*.^{3,4,5} At four, he advanced into Egyptology, deciphering hieroglyphics, their translations and meanings, learning a smattering of Sanskrit and Aeolic and Homeric Greek, and, like a character in a Jeffers story, devouring books by Herge, Goscinny, Mazarello and Wick, Tan, Seuss, Allen, and

Dahl. At five, Cloudboy let clouds roll in and with them the greedy consumption of *Gulliver's Travels*, *Moby Dick*, *Black Beauty*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *The Time Machine*.^{6,7,8,9,10} Aged seven, his fixations were companioned by fervors for Einstein, Rutherford, Psychics, Mineralogy, Chess, Super Mario, Heraldry, Poetry, and teen-fiction such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*.¹¹

Though Cloudboy occasionally lost the thread of a passion that began years before as it burned up in his mind like a comet or dissipating cloud, each obsession was extreme, the stuff of conversation, questions, reading, and associated activities like drawing, lexicography, and computer games. Collectively they clamored for his attention, a class of students hungry for knowledge.

∴

Bruises: a few at first; then more and more. Soon a collection of contusions flowered like scud upon Cloudboy's back.

Asked about them, he reluctantly confessed they were inflicted by a group of popular boys in his class. At lunchtime that day, he admitted, he'd been surrounded by his tormentors, his shorts were pulled down, his shirt was lifted over his head, and then he was displayed for entertainment before a group of well-liked girls.

When I gave Cloudboy's second year teacher the names of the culprits and witnesses, she promised an investigation. The following day, however, Cloudboy returned home to tell me he was a liar because the bullying never occurred. Tears floated in his eyes.

"It didn't happen?" I asked, bewildered.

"It did happen." Cloudboy's fists were bunched as he spoke.

"Then why are you saying it didn't?"

"Because my teacher told me that the boys I said are bullies are good boys and that I'm naughty for telling fibs about them."

∴

Naughty; the naughty boy; even, in his second year teacher's misdirected attempt to use her charges' trendy lexicon, Horrid Henry: these were the new labels which beset Cloudboy at school.

At home, an invented language, Xeplos, arrived as if from nowhere. Daily, a world of words and meanings, adjectives, nouns, tenses and verbs tumbled, like stardust, from Cloudboy's tongue.

"*Eno* is 'no'; *ess* is 'yes'; *ans* is 'can'; *Mesas* is 'Mummy'...."

∴

Cloudboy brought it upon himself, his teacher and Deputy Principal suggested. There was no evidence of bullying, they said. The children Cloudboy complained of were good children from good homes; it was, these kids said, Cloudboy who was the aggressor. Two conflicting stories.

“Who knows which one is true?” the teacher ruminated.

I reminded the teacher and Deputy Principal that Cloudboy was disabled and consequently ill-equipped to understand social interaction or take appropriate action to end harm done to him. But they were more concerned by his continued cloud-watching and the recent, noticeable elevation in the extent and intensity of his Overexcitabilities.

“He’s becoming almost unmanageable,” the Deputy Principal concluded.

∴

The intricate tapestry of life-affirming stories spun out across the centuries and space like so many molecules, all duplication, interconnection and twist. The elevenfold metamorphic manifestations. The fragile companionships with outsiders like Susan Foreman, Jamie McCrimmon, Leela, Peri, Rose, and Amy Pond. The intrusions into the lives of creative eccentrics such as Van Gogh, Agatha Christie, Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and Marilyn Monroe.

Another obsession, Doctor Who, landed in Cloudboy’s world. He took to sporting a long, rainbow scarf and floppy, wide-brimmed hat, wore a watch on the underside of his wrist, built an electronic screwdriver from cardboard, and consumed legends about the Doctor’s macrocosm and trickery of time and space.

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As labels replaced Cloudboy’s real personality with their composite illusion of him, sweets secreted in the teacher’s desk, shoes safe in students’ backpacks and stationery kept in a classroom cupboard marked “Private” disappeared.

The teacher immediately interrogated Cloudboy, threatening him with evidence of his pilfering taken from non-existent, closed-circuit cameras. When he didn’t buckle, the teacher’s belief that he was an innate liar was reinforced and her punishment of him escalated. Thereafter, whenever he failed to complete his work, listen, or follow instructions, he was sent to another class where he sat at a desk facing the wall. Though this enabled the labels used against Cloudboy to spread, a contagion, throughout the school, it didn’t remedy his behavior. So the teacher circled a small area of the classroom floor with white rope. She labeled it “The naughty circle,” then ordered him to sit in it during mat-time, morning tea, and lunch.

My complaints to the teacher about this draconian punishment elicited no response. The next day, and the next, Cloudboy remained in rope. By then I was issuing distraught emails and phone-calls to the Principal. Eventually the Deputy Principal replied declaring that the rope was a temporary measure brought about by Cloudboy’s poor choices and inattention. The matter was so trivial I was told to return to the teacher and debate it with her. When I did so, the teacher glared

at me and said, “I don’t have to defend my actions to you. In future, if you want to discuss your son or his behavior speak to the Principal, not me.”

The next morning, the white rope vaporized.

During the last week of the school year, a girl in Cloudboy’s class apologized to classmates for her thieving, her swag discovered by her parents beneath her bed. As punishment, she spent a lunchtime sitting outside the Principal’s office.

Later that week, as Cloudboy and I walked to Tahuna-Torea, one of the teacher’s good boys ran passed us. He thumped Cloudboy’s back. When the boy turned and sneered, he found me staring at him. His face froze. He ran away. The following lunchtime, he sat outside the Principal’s office.

∴

Portals: I see now this is what nephology, Doctor Who, and Xeplos offered Cloudboy. In companioning clouds, Time Lords, and an invented language, his famished imagination was sated with codes, identities and idioms. Wormholes, his obsessions, were gaps in time through which he traveled to the ancient, present, and future as his brain and tongue ordained. So unlike the limited realm of the label where binary opposition (good-bad) prevailed, each fixation reflected back at Cloudboy worlds where inventiveness, vividness and complexity, all those attributes of his mind, were valued and vindicated. The topography of clouds, the Time Lord’s visits to Apalapucia or Raxacoricofallapatoruis, and the dictionary of alien words like *clivvagh* and *saafagh* made him less a constrained audience member of reality than a protagonist in fantastic soap-operas whose plots proposed the possibility of manifold states of being and of alternate dimensions held in perfect, beautiful equilibrium.¹²

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Polyglot. Doublespeak.

At the start of Cloudboy’s third year at school, I turned to New Zealand’s Ministry of Education for help. Their Special Education Team outlined the wide-ranging assistance provided to children with severe ASD, behavioral problems, or learning difficulties.

Was my son harming himself, his teacher, or other children?

No.

Was he damaging school property?

No.

Was his behavior resulting in academic failure?

No.

Then Cloudboy didn’t qualify for assistance. I countered with his disability and his receipt of Disability Allowance. Unmoved, the Special Education Team sent me *Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children: A Parent-Teacher Partnership*.¹³

Rich in photographs depicting smiling children, parents, and educators problem-solving, this 168-page document offered a Ministerial introduction which declared “*we can help our most talented students to maximise their potential by providing appropriate support and guidance,*” outlined the multiple learning and support options available to Gifted and Talented Learners, and highlighted the importance of the National Administrative Guidelines (NAG)1 (iii) c (2005) in requiring teachers to identify Gifted students so that their needs could be provided for.¹⁴ Additionally, it cited numerous publications, online resources, and policy directives issued by the Ministry in the last fifteen years, including *Te Whariki* which advised educators to give children an “*opportunity to create and act on their own ideas, to develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them*”¹⁵ and *Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools* which discussed how to “*support schools and teachers in assisting Gifted and Talented students to reach their full potential academically, emotionally, and socially... in response to the growing awareness that many of our Gifted and Talented students go unrecognised, and that those who are identified often do not take part in an educational programme appropriate to their needs.*”¹⁶ Meanwhile, *Initiatives for Gifted and Talented Learners* listed a raft of support workers available to assist Gifted and Talented Learners, including Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTL), and teacher aides. Finally I discovered *Te Kete Ipurangi, The Ministry’s Online Learning Centre*, a website of resources for Gifted and Talented Learners.

The more I read, the more concerned I became. All these statements of intent. All these documents and directives issued across two decades of space and time. Yet the only concrete policy I encountered was one the Ministry called ‘Differentiation’:

“Differentiation involves providing learning experiences to suit the needs of each individual student within an environment that accepts diversity. Differentiation does not just apply to developing cognitive abilities but also to the development of qualities, culturally valued abilities, skills, learning dispositions, self-esteem, perseverance, creativity and risk taking.

In practice, differentiation affects:

- * content;*
- * processes;*
- * products of learning;*
- * environment;*

Differentiation can occur in the centre of classroom, in the wider school environment, or in the community.

Teaching gifted students using this approach might involve enrichment (depth and breadth) or acceleration (a faster pace of presenting the material, or covering content in less time than normal, or introducing advanced concepts earlier)”¹⁷.

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When I read this out to the Deputy Principal, she said the school already embraced diversity, enrichment and acceleration through such initiatives as student-led units of inquiry. I pointed out that ‘Differentiation’ targeted Gifted and Talented students like Cloudboy, especially those with ASD whose focus would be helped by varying the pattern of their learning, At this the Deputy Principal scoffed that such a policy was impractical for my son because he lacked the

maturity to self-direct his learning and so would require extra monitoring by his teacher, which would draw her attention away from the other 30 students in her class.

“Could he have a teacher aide or RTLB worker?” I enquired.

“No,” she responded. “Funding for both is restricted to those with dyslexia, dyspraxia and severe learning difficulties.”

“But what about all the directives outlined in this document?” I asked.

“Just recommendations,” the Deputy Principal smiled. “There’s no obligation for schools to introduce these policies.”

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If words, positively or negatively used, are acts of association, entities forming relationships in the same way an outcast child befriends the clouds, the policies of discipline forced upon Cloudboy (white rope, a desk in another class) were secretly joined by another. Devised by the Deputy Principal, this new policy involved the issuing of a red-card every time my son cloud-watched, disrupted class or was complained of by another child. A red-card resulted in instant expulsion from the classroom. Soon Cloudboy was being expelled seven times a day. Sent to the Deputy Principal’s office, he was made to write 100 times: *I will not be naughty again*. As an ASD child with ADHD and poor motor-skills, his slow, untidy handwriting meant he always failed to complete this punishment within the allotted time, and so was made to finish it during lunchtime. Failure to complete 100 lines by the end of lunch led to an additional 100 lines.

I will not be naughty again.

I will not be naughty again.

I will not be naughty again.

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I will not be naughty again.

When I castigated the Principal, Deputy Principal and Cloudboy’s third year teacher for the secretive, arbitrary introduction of the red-card and 100 lines, the headmistress summonsed me to a meeting. There, her deputy besides her, the Principal lectured me about how such policies were introduced to stop Cloudboy from disrupting others’ education and to force him to conform. Of course, she added, school was aware of Cloudboy’s issues and had spent three years devising solutions to correct these. But, she declared, school’s solutions had failed because, through his willfulness, unwillingness to listen or learn, and cloud-watching, Cloudboy had deliberately obstructed them. The matter at hand was one of choice: his choice to be the way he was; his choice to disturb others. If only he chose to behave, then everything would be alright. Of course, she continued, there was another problem, and that problem was me. My son, she scolded, was willful and inattentive because I indulged him. If I supported instead of disagreed with school’s disciplining of him, school would be able to end his disruptive behavior once and for all.

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My son was the problem.

I was the problem.

Again I searched for solutions. I turned to the New Zealand Association of Gifted Children's online forum "Parenting" where parents of Gifted and Talented Learners, ASD or otherwise, shared stories with and sought advice from each other. Here I expected to find innumerable, inspirational, tear-jerking examples of the ways in which the education system was meeting the needs of such kids, all of which would illustrate where I'd gone wrong.

What I found was tear-jerking indeed.

"We hold our breath for the start of the new school year," authored by Dinglemouse, for example, told of the deep anxiety, frustration, and perplexity the author, a mother of a Gifted ASD thirteen-year-old felt after her son's teacher labeled him a failure, and how in spite of his diagnosis by an Education Psychologist and the recommendation that "Differentiation" be introduced to meet his needs, the school sidelined this qualified report as "*only one piece of the data*" and chose instead to institute policies which removed him from class whenever he was deemed disruptive.¹⁸ When Dinglemouse's son was bullied and the teacher used the label 'Gifted' to belittle him, his parents' advocacy of him was met with teacherly gibes that they were being "*pushy*."¹⁹ There were over twenty responses to this story, all narrating similar experiences.

In "the right thing to do" by Meand3, a school branded a Gifted ASD child's behavior a "*problem*" and drew up solutions which sought "*exclusion from school*."²⁰ Meanwhile, the widespread negative labeling of and consequent disengagement from learning by Gifted ASD children and schools' oppressive responses were voiced in posts like "5 year old disruptive in class" by Char, "11 year old behaviour issues" by Joanna, and "Daughter Lost Motivation" by Ruby.^{21, 22, 23}

Huge, icy tears fell like hailstones as I read and reread these and other stories. Throughout, a deeper glassiness sat in my heart, making me both mother of a Gifted ASD child and refracted other, the parent present in all these stinging tales.

In total, there were 5,000 parallel narratives. They composed a pattern, a weather system, climactic, ongoing and inescapable, of Gifted ASD children stigmatized and isolated by schools across New Zealand.

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That summer, I became a nephologist, Cloudmother to Cloudboy.

My transformation occurred a few days after I enrolled Cloudboy in a new school. He and I bathed and fossicked at Karaka Bay at the mouth of the Tamaki Estuary close to Tahuna-Torea. In the blue sky above us, two cumuli nestled next to each other. Seeing them, their proximity and isolation in the firmament, I was visited by an inner certainty that they were looking down at us. Previously, whenever I had cloud-watched with Cloudboy, I had viewed his behavior as a game, unique like his persona, but childish and invented nevertheless. But that warm day at Karaka Bay, I realized the two clouds observing my child and I were living evidence of what Cloudboy saw each

time he peered up at the heavens in search of meaning, symbol, and cipher. Looking at the sky and everything in and below it afresh, I knew Cloudboy would be alright because he had me at his side to watch over and protect him, and I had him at my side to teach me the special insights and perspectives he carried inside him. I knew then, too, that, freed from white rope and 100 lines, Cloudboy would attend his new school and, there, he'd resurrect himself—time-traveler, cloud-drifter—and find welcome and belonging; and the years ahead, though far from conventional, would offer a far more peaceful advance than those which had gone before.

NOTES

1. Number provided by Autism New Zealand: http://www.autismnz.org.nz/about_autism
2. Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Dabrowski first diagnosed the concept of Overexcitabilities in Gifted individuals. He observed that overexcitabilities appear in five forms – a surplus of energy; a heightened sensory awareness; advanced learning problem solving; vivid imagination; creative and inventive imagination. Piechowski, who worked with Dabrowski, explains Overexcitabilities as an abundance of physical, sensual, creative, intellectual, and emotional energy. Overexcitabilities are believed to be an innate predisposition to respond more intensely to life's stimuli;
3. Oliver Jeffers' *Lost and Found*, HarperCollins, 2006;
4. Eric Carle's "Slowly, Slowly, Slowly," *said the Sloth*, Puffin, 2002;
5. David McKee's *Elmer's New Friend*, Andersen, 2002;
6. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, CRW Publishing, 2004;
7. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, Hinkler Books, 2007;
8. Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty*, Children's Classics, 1994;
9. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Vintage Children's Classics, 2012;
10. H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, Dalmatian Press, 2001;
11. Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Vintage, 2004;
12. Xeplos dictionary translations: *clivvagh* trans.: cloud; *saafagh* trans.: boy;
13. *Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children: A Parent-Teacher Partnership*, Ministry of Education – Learning Media, Wellington, 2008;
14. *Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children: A Parent-Teacher Partnership*, Ministry of Education – Learning Media, Wellington, 2008, page 5;
15. *Te Whariki*, Ministry of Education - Learning Media, Wellington, 1996, page 40;
16. Howard Fancy, Secretary of Education, in "Foreword" to *Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting Their Needs in New Zealand Schools*, Ministry of Education – Learning Media, Wellington, 2000 (reprinted 2009), page 3;
17. *Nurturing Gifted and Talented Children: A Parent-Teacher Partnership*, Ministry of Education – Learning Media, Wellington, 2008, page 97-8;
18. Dinglemouse "We hold our breaths for the start of the new school year" <http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/forum/read.php?f=7&i=5482&t=5482>
19. *ibid*;

20. Meand3 “the right thing to do”

<http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/forum/read.php?f=7&i=5409&t=5409>

21. “5 year old disruptive in class” by Char

<http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/forum/read.php?f=7&i=5278&t=5278>

22. “11 year old behaviour issues” by Joanna

<http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/forum/read.php?f=7&i=5300&t=5300>

23. “Daughter Lost Motivation” by Ruby

<http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/forum/read.php?f=7&i=5233&t=5233>

Author Notes

Siobhan Harvey is a poet and nonfiction author whose works include the poetry collection, Lost Relatives (Steele Roberts, 2011), the work of literary criticism, Words Chosen Carefully: New Zealand Writers In Conversation (Cape Catley, 2010) and the anthology, Our Own Kind: 100 New Zealand Poems about Animals (Random House NZ, 2009). Her creative non-fiction has been published in Landfall, was Highly Commended in the 2013 Landfall Essay Prize and runner up in the 2011 Landfall Essay Competition. Recently, her poetry manuscript, Nephology for Beginners, won 2013 Kathleen Grattan Poetry Award (and will be published in 2014 by Otago University Press). Recently also, her Poet's Page was launched on The Poetry Archive (UK), co-directed by Sir Andrew Motion.

About the Work

To parent a child with autism, Aspergers or autism spectrum disorder is a journey through an often frightening, perplexing yet miraculous hinterland. My son was eight years old before he received a clear diagnosis. Until then, his fixations with the esoteric such as with Nephology and his inability to conventionally assimilate amongst his peers were treated as willfulness and/or weirdness, even by some of his school teachers, even in the supposed enlightened times in which we live. As his parents, my partner and I have felt (continue to feel) infinitely protective of our son and frustrated by the paucity of assistance and recognition for children like him.

“A Boy Called Cloud” began, partly, because of this medley of the emotional, social, reactionary and insightful. Of the many other influences and inspiration, these are charted in this piece of creative non-fiction. The easiest part of developing the work was writing it out. The manner in which children with Autism, Aspergers or ASD are treated is a subject I remain passionate about. And, as an author, my modus operandi for examining issues which motivate me is to explore them through my writings. I am a staunch proponent of the notion that writers should be motivated by a political *raison d’etre*.

Thereafter, the hardest part of developing “A Boy Called Cloud” was to maintain authorial impartiality—to write about Autism Spectrum Disorder objectively by utilizing the experiences of a protagonist, my son, for whom I have a long history of advocating. It would have been all too easy for me to compose a piece of work about my boy which was overtly saccharine in content and tone. But, as an author, I’ve long understood I need to write with detachment; and so I had to work from a dispassionate standpoint when approaching even this most subjective of subjects.

I find the craft of creative nonfiction thoroughly liberating. I lecture and tutor creative writing, and have introduced the subject of creative nonfiction to my Third Year students. Always, I tell them that, unlike fiction or poetry, creative nonfiction leaves the author with nowhere to hide. When writing creative nonfiction, you are saying to the world, this happened to me! To expose yourself in this manner can be frightening. Yet, I argue, it can also be invigorating, because you can write about topics which reach deeply into your readers’ hearts and souls, generating empathy and raising awareness of matters which might otherwise have remained unspoken, overlooked, or ignored.

Siobhan Harvey on the Web

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